Introductory Lectures on the Epistles of Paul

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Romans

The circumstances under which the epistle to the Romans was written gave occasion to the most thorough and comprehensive unfolding, not of the church, but of Christianity. No apostle had ever yet visited Rome. There was somewhat as yet lacking to the saints there; but even this was ordered of God to call forth from the Holy Ghost an epistle which more than any other approaches a complete treatise on the fundamentals of Christian doctrine, and especially as to righteousness.

Would we follow up the heights of heavenly truth, would we sound the depths of Christian experience, would we survey the workings of the Spirit of God in the Church, would we bow before the glories of the person of Christ, or learn His manifold offices, we must look elsewhere — in the writings of the New Testament no doubt, but elsewhere rather than here.

The condition of the Roman saints called for a setting forth of the gospel of God; but this object, in order to be rightly understood and appreciated, leads the apostle into a display of the condition of man. We have God and man in presence, so to speak. Nothing can be more simple and essential. Although there is undoubtedly that profoundness which must accompany every revelation of God, and especially in connection with Christ as now manifested, still we have God adapting Himself to the very first wants of a renewed soul — nay, even to the wretchedness of souls without God, without any real knowledge either of themselves or of Him. Not, of course, that the Roman saints were in this condition; but that God, writing by the apostle to them, seizes the

opportunity to lay bare man's state as well as His own grace.

Romans 1. From the very first we have these characteristics of the epistle disclosing themselves. The apostle writes with the full assertion of his own apostolic dignity, but as a servant also. "Paul, a bondman of Jesus Christ" — an apostle "called," not born, still less as educated or appointed of man, but an apostle "called," as he says — "separated unto the gospel of God, which he had promised afore by his prophets." The connection is fully owned with that which had been from God of old. No fresh revelations from God can nullify those which preceded them; but as the prophets looked onward to what was coming, so is the gospel already come, supported by the past. There is mutual confirmation. Nevertheless, what is in nowise the same as what was or what will be. The past prepared the way, as it is said here, "which God had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures, concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, [here we have the great central object of God's gospel, even the person of Christ, God's Son,] which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh" (ver. 3). This last relation was the direct subject of the prophetic testimony, and Jesus had come accordingly. He was the promised Messiah, born King of the Jews.

But there was far more in Jesus. He was "declared," says the apostle, "to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (ἐξ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν, ver. 4). It was the Son of God not merely as dealing with the powers of the earth, Jehovah's King on the holy hill of Zion, but after a far deeper manner. For, essentially associated as He is with the glory of God the Father, the full deliverance of souls

from the realm of death was His also. In this too we have the blessed connection of the Spirit (here peculiarly designated, for special reasons, “the Spirit of holiness”). That same energy of the Holy Ghost which had displayed itself in Jesus, when He walked in holiness here below, was demonstrated in resurrection; and not merely in His own rising from the dead, but in raising such at any time no doubt, though most signally and triumphantly displayed in His own resurrection.

The bearing of this on the contents and main doctrine of the epistle will appear abundantly by-and-by. Let me refer in passing to a few points more in the introduction, in order to link them together with that which the Spirit was furnishing to the Roman saints, as well as to show the admirable perfectness of every word that inspiration has given us. I do not mean by this its truth merely, but its exquisite suitability; so that the opening address commences the theme in hand, and insinuates that particular line of truth which the Holy Spirit sees fit to pursue throughout. To this then the apostle comes, after having spoken of the divine favour shown himself, both when a sinner, and now in his own special place of serving the Lord Jesus. “By whom we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith.” This was no question of legal obedience, although the law came from Jehovah. Paul’s joy and boast were in the gospel of God. So therefore it addressed itself to the obedience of faith; not by this meaning practice, still less according to the measure of a man’s duty, but that which is at the root of all practice — faith-obedience — obedience of heart and will, renewed by divine grace, which accepts the truth of God. To man this is the hardest of all obedience; but when once secured, it leads

peacefully into the obedience of every day. If slurred over, as it too often is in souls, it invariably leaves practical obedience lame, and halt, and blind.

It was for this then that Paul describes himself as apostle. And as it is for obedience of faith, it was not in anywise restricted to the Jewish people — “among all nations, for his (Christ’s) name: among whom are ye also the called of Jesus Christ” (verses 5, 6). He loved even here at the threshold to show the breadth of God’s grace. If he was called, so were they — he an apostle, they not apostles but saints; but still, for them as for him, all flowed out of the same mighty love, of God. “To all that be at Rome, beloved of God, called saints” (ver. 7). To these then he wishes, as was his wont, the fresh flow of that source and stream of divine blessing which Christ has made to be household bread to us: “Grace and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ” (ver. 7). Then, from ver. 8, after thanking God through Jesus for their faith spoken of everywhere, and telling them of his prayers for them, he briefly discloses the desire of his heart about them — his long-cherished hope according to the grace of the gospel to reach Rome — his confidence in the love of God that through him some spiritual gift would be imparted to them, that they might be established, and, according to the spirit of grace which filled his own heart, that he too might be comforted together with them “by the mutual faith both of you and me” (vv. 11, 12). There is nothing like the grace of God for producing the truest humility, the humility that not only descends to the lowest level of sinners to do them good, but which is itself the fruit of deliverance from that self-love which puffs itself or lowers others. Witness the common joy that grace gives

an apostle with saints be had never seen, so that even he should be comforted as well as they by their mutual faith. He would not therefore have them ignorant how they had lain on his heart for a visit (ver. 13). He was debtor both to the Greeks and the barbarians, both to the wise and to the unwise; he was ready, as far as he was concerned, to preach the gospel to those that were at Rome also (ver. 14, 15). Even the saints there would have been all the better for the gospel. It was not merely "to those at Rome," but "to you that be at Rome." Thus it is a mistake to suppose that saints may not be benefited by a better understanding of the gospel, at least as Paul preached it. Accordingly he tells them now what reason he had to speak thus strongly, not of the more advanced truths, but of the good news. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (ver. 16).

Observe, the gospel is not simply remission of sins, nor is it only peace with God, but "the power of God unto salvation." Now I take this opportunity of pressing on all that are here to beware of contracted views of "salvation." Beware that you do not confound it with souls being quickened, or even brought into joy. Salvation supposes not this only, but a great deal more. There is hardly any phraseology that tends to more injury of souls in these matters than a loose way of talking of salvation. "At any rate he is a saved soul," we hear. "The man has not got anything like settled peace with God; perhaps he hardly knows his sins forgiven; but at least he is a saved soul." Here is an instance of what is so reprehensible. This is precisely what salvation does not mean; and I would strongly press it on all that hear

me, more particularly on those that have to do with the work of the Lord, and of course ardently desire to labour intelligently; and this not alone for the conversion, but for the establishment and deliverance of souls. Nothing less, I am persuaded, than this full blessing is the line that God has given to those who have followed Christ without the camp, and who, having been set free from the contracted ways of men, desire to enter into the largeness and at the same time the profound wisdom of every word of God. Let us not stumble at the starting-point, but leave room for the due extent and depth of "salvation" in the gospel.

There is no need of dwelling now on "salvation" as employed in the Old Testament, and in some parts of the New, as the gospels and Revelation particularly, where it is used for deliverance in power or even providence and present things. I confine myself to its doctrinal import, and the full Christian sense of the word; and I maintain that salvation signifies that deliverance for the believer which is the full consequence of the mighty work of Christ, apprehended not, of course, necessarily according to all its depth in God's eyes, but at any rate applied to the soul in the power of the Holy Ghost. It is not the awakening of conscience, however real; neither is it the attraction of heart by the grace of Christ, however blessed this may be. We ought therefore to bear in mind, that if a soul be not brought into conscious deliverance as the fruit of divine teaching, and founded on the work of Christ, we are very far from presenting the gospel as the apostle Paul glories in it, and delights that it should go forth. "I am not ashamed," etc.

And he gives his reason: "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith; as it is

written, The just shall live by faith." That is, it is the power of God unto salvation, not because it is victory (which at the beginning of the soul's career would only give importance to man even if possible, which it is not), but because it is "the righteousness of God." It is not God seeking, or man bringing righteousness. In the gospel there is revealed God's righteousness. Thus the introduction opened with Christ's person, and closes with God's righteousness. The law demanded, but could never receive righteousness from man. Christ is come, and has changed all. God is revealing a righteousness of His own in the gospel. It is God who now makes known a righteousness to man, instead of looking for any from man. Undoubtedly there are fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, and God values them — I will not say from man, but from His saints; but here it is what, according to the apostle, God has for man. It is for the saints to learn, of course; but it is that which goes out in its own force and necessary aim to the need of man — a divine righteousness, which justifies instead of condemning him who believes. It is "the power of God unto salvation." It is for the lost, therefore; for they it is who need salvation; and it is to save — not merely to quicken, but to save; and this because in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed.

Hence it is, as he says, herein revealed "from faith," or by faith. It is the same form of expression exactly as in the beginning of Romans 5 — "being justified by faith" (ἐκ πίστεως). But besides this he adds "to faith." The first of these phrases, "from faith," excludes the law; the second, "to faith," includes every one that has faith within the scope of God's righteousness. Justification is not from works of law. The righteousness

of God is revealed from faith; and consequently, if there be faith in any soul, to this it is revealed, to faith wherever it may be. Hence, therefore, it was in no way limited to any particular nation, such as those that had already been under the law and government of God. It was a message that went out from God to sinners as such. Let man be what he might, or where he might, God's good news was for man. And to this agreed the testimony of the prophet. "The just shall live by faith" (not by law). Even where the law was, not by it but by faith the just lived. Did Gentiles believe? They too should live. Without faith there is neither justice nor life that God owns; where faith is, the rest will surely follow.

This accordingly leads the apostle into the earlier portion of his great argument, and first of all in a preparatory way. Here we pass out of the introduction of the epistle. "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness" (ver. 18). This is what made the gospel to be so sweet and precious, and, what is more, absolutely necessary, if he would escape certain and eternal ruin. There is no hope for man otherwise; for the gospel is not all that is now made known. Not only is God's righteousness revealed, but also His wrath. It is not said to be revealed in the gospel. The gospel means His glad tidings for man. The wrath of God could not possibly be glad tidings. It is true, it is needful for man to learn; but in nowise is it good news. There is then the solemn truth also of divine wrath. It is not yet executed. It is "revealed," and this too "from heaven." There is no question of a people on earth, and of God's wrath breaking out in one form or another against human evil in this life. The earth, or, at

least, the Jewish nation, had been familiar with such dealings of God in times past. But now it is “the wrath of God from heaven;” and consequently it is in view of eternal things, and not of those that touch present life on the earth.

Hence, as God’s wrath is revealed from heaven, it is against every form of impiety — “against all ungodliness.” Besides this, which seems to be a most comprehensive expression for embracing every sort and degree of human iniquity, we have one very specifically named. It is against the “unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.” To hold the truth in unrighteousness would be no security. Alas! we know how this was in Israel, how it might be, and has been, in Christendom. God pronounces against the unrighteousness of such; for if the knowledge, however exact, of God’s revealed mind was accompanied by no renewal of the heart, if it was without life towards God, all must be vain. Man is only so much the worse for knowing the truth, if he holds it ever so fast with unrighteousness. There are some that find a difficulty here, because the expression “to hold” means holding firmly. But it is quite possible for the unconverted to be tenacious of the truth, yet unrighteous in their ways; and so much the worse for them. Not thus does God deal with souls. If His grace attract, His truth humbles, and leaves no room for vain boasting and self-confidence. What He does is to pierce and penetrate the man’s conscience. If one may so say, He thus holds the man, instead of letting the man presume that he is holding fast the truth. The inner man is dealt with, and searched through and through.

Nothing of this is intended in the class that is here brought before us. They are merely persons who plume themselves on their orthodoxy, but in a wholly unrenewed condition. Such men have never been wanting since the truth has shone on this world; still less are they now. But the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against them pre-eminently. The judgments of God will fall on man as man, but the heaviest blows are reserved for Christendom. There the truth is held, and apparently with firmness too. This, however, will be put to the test by-and-by. But for the time it is held fast, though in unrighteousness. Thus the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against (not only the open ungodliness of men, but) the orthodox unrighteousness of those that hold the truth in unrighteousness.

And this leads the apostle into the moral history of man — the proof both of his inexcusable guilt, and of his extreme need of redemption. He begins with the great epoch of the dispensations of God (that is, the ages since the flood). We cannot speak of the state of things before the flood as a dispensation. There was a most important trial of man in the person of Adam; but after this, what dispensation was there? What were the principles of it? No man can tell. The truth is, those are altogether mistaken who call it so. But after the flood man as such was put under certain conditions — the whole race. Man became the object, first, of general dealings of God under Noah; next, of His special ways in the calling of Abraham and of his family. And what led to the call of Abraham, of whom we hear much in the epistle to the Romans as elsewhere, was the departure of man into idolatry. Man despised at first the outward testimony of God, His eternal power and Godhead, in the creation

above and around him (verses 19, 20). Moreover, He gave up the knowledge of God that had been handed down from father to son (ver. 21). The downfall of man, when he thus abandoned God, was most rapid and profound; and the Holy Spirit traces this solemnly to the end of Romans 1 with no needless words, in a few energetic strokes summing up that which is abundantly confirmed (but in how different a manner!) by all that remains of the ancient world. “Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man,” etc. (verses 22-32.) Thus corruption not only overspread morals, but became an integral part of the religion of men, and had thus a quasi-divine sanction. Hence the depravity of the heathen found little or no cheek from conscience, because it was bound up with all that took the shape of God before their mind. There was no part of heathenism practically viewed now, so corrupting as that which had to do with the objects of its worship. Thus, the true God being lost, all was lost, and man’s downward career becomes the most painful and humiliating object, unless it be, indeed, that which we have to feel where men, without renewal of heart, espouse in pride of mind the truth with nothing but unrighteousness.

In the beginning of Romans 2 we have man pretending to righteousness. Still, it is “man” — not yet exactly the Jew, but man — who had profited, it might be, by whatever the Jew had; at the least, by the workings of natural conscience. But natural conscience, although it may detect evil, never leads one into the inward possession and enjoyment of good — never brings the soul to God. Accordingly, in chapter 2 the Holy Spirit

shows us man satisfying himself with pronouncing on what is right and wrong — moralizing for others, but nothing more. Now God must have reality in the man himself. The gospel, instead of treating this as a light matter, alone vindicates God in these eternal ways of His, in that which must be in him who stands in relationship with God. Hence therefore, the apostle, with divine wisdom, opens this to us before the blessed relief and deliverance which the gospel reveals to us. In the most solemn way he appeals to man with the demand, whether he thinks that God will look complacently on that which barely judges another, but which allows the practice of evil in the man himself (Romans 2:1-3). Such moral judgments will, no doubt, be used to leave man without excuse; they can never suit or satisfy God.

Then the apostle introduces the ground, certainty, and character of God's judgment (verses 4-16). He "will render to every man according to his deeds: to them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: to them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first and also of the Gentile."

It is not here a question of how a man is to be saved, but of God's indispensable moral judgment, which the gospel, instead of weakening asserts according to the holiness and truth of God. It will be observed therefore, that in this connection the apostle shows the place both of conscience and of the law, — that God in judging will take into full consideration the circumstances and condition of every soul of man. At the same time he

connects, in a singularly interesting manner, this disclosure of the principles of the eternal judgment of God with what he calls “my gospel.” This also is a most important truth, my brethren, to bear in mind. The gospel at its height in no wise weakens but maintains the moral manifestation of what God is. The legal institutions were associated with temporal judgment. The gospel, as now revealed in the New Testament, has linked with it, though not contained in it, the revelation of divine wrath from heaven, and this, you will observe, according to Paul’s gospel. It is evident, therefore, that dispensational position will not suffice for God, who holds to His own unchangeable estimate of good and evil, and who judges the more stringently according to the measure of advantage possessed.

But thus the way is now clear for bringing the Jew into the discussion. “But if [for so it should be read] thou art named a Jew,” etc. (ver. 17.) It was not merely, that he had better light. He had this, of course, in a revelation that was from God; he had law; he had prophets; he had divine institutions. It was not merely better light in the conscience, which might be elsewhere, as is supposed in the early verses of our chapter; but the Jew’s position was directly and unquestionably one of divine tests applied to man’s estate. Alas! the Jew was none the better for this, unless there were the submission of his conscience to God. Increase of privileges can never avail without the soul’s self-judgment before the mercy of God. Rather does it add to his guilt: such is man’s evil state and will. Accordingly, in the end of the chapter, he shows that this is most true as applied to the moral judgment of the Jew; that uone so much dishonoured God as wicked Jews, their own Scripture attesting it;

that position went for nothing in such, while the lack of it would not annul the Gentile's righteousness, which would indeed condemn the more unfaithful Israel; in short, that one must be a Jew inwardly to avail, and circumcision be of the heart, in spirit, not in letter, whose praise is of God, and not of men.

The question then is raised in the beginning of Romans 3, If this be so, what is the superiority of the Jew? Where lies the value of belonging to the circumcised people of God? The apostle allows this privilege to be great, specially in having the Scriptures, but turns the argument against the boasters. We need not here enter into the details; but on the surface we see how the apostle brings all down to that which is of the deepest interest to every soul. He deals with the Jew from his own Scripture (verses 9-19). Did the Jews take the ground of exclusively having that word of God — the law? Granted that it is so, at once and fully. To whom, then, did the law address itself? To those that were under it, to be sure. It pronounced on the Jew then. It was the boast of the Jews that the law spoke about them; that the Gentiles had no right to it, and were but presuming on what belonged to God's chosen people. The apostle applies this according to divine wisdom. Then your principle is your condemnation. What the law says, it speaks to those under it. What, then, is its voice? That there is none righteous, none that doeth good, none that understandeth. Of whom does it declare all this? Of the Jew by his own confession. Every mouth was stopped; the Jew by his own oracles, as the Gentile by their evident abominations, shown already. — All the world was guilty before God.

Thus, having shown the Gentile in Romans 1 manifestly wrong, and hopelessly degraded to the last degree — having laid bare the moral dilettantism of the philosophers, not one whit better in the sight of God, but rather the reverse — having shown the Jew overwhelmed by the condemnation of the divine oracles in which he chiefly boasted, without real righteousness, and so much the more guilty for his special privileges, all now lies clear for bringing in the proper Christian message, the. gospel of God. “Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets” (verses 20, 21).

Here, again, the apostle takes up what he had but announced in chapter 1 — the righteousness of God. Let me call your attention again to its force. It is not the mercy of God., Many have contended that so it is, and to their own great loss, as well as to the weakening of the word of God. “Righteousness” never means mercy, not even the “righteousness of God.” The meaning is not what was executed on Christ, but what is in virtue. of it. Undoubtedly divine judgment fell on Him; but this is not “the righteousness of God,” as the apostle employs it in any part of his writings any more than here, though we know there could be no such thing as God’s righteousness justifying the believer, if Christ had not borne the judgment of God. The expression means that righteousness which God can afford to display because of Christ’s atonement. In short, it is what the words say — “the righteousness of God,” and this “by faith of Jesus Christ.”

Hence it is wholly apart from the law, whilst witnessed to by the law and prophets; for the law with its types had looked onward to this new kind of righteousness; and the prophets had borne their testimony that it was at hand, but not then come. Now it was manifested, and not promised or predicted merely. Jesus had come and died; Jesus had been a propitiatory sacrifice; Jesus had borne the judgment of God because of the sins He bore. The righteousness of God, then, could now go forth in virtue of His blood. God was not satisfied alone. There is satisfaction; but the work of Christ goes a great deal farther. Therein God is both vindicated and glorified. By the cross God has a deeper moral glory than ever — a glory that He thus acquired, if I may so say. He is, of course, the same absolutely perfect and unchangeable God of goodness; but His perfection has displayed itself in new and more glorious ways in Christ's death, in Him who humbled Himself, and was obedient even to the death of the cross.

God, therefore, having not the least hindrance to the manifestation of what He can be and is in merciful intervention on behalf of the worst of sinners, manifests it is His righteousness "by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe" (ver. 22). The former is the direction, and the latter the application. The direction is "unto all;" the application is, of course, only to "them that believe;" but it is to all them that believe. As far as persons are concerned, there is no hindrance; Jew or Gentile makes no difference, as is expressly said, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to

declare his righteousness for the [passing over or praeter-mission, not] remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus" (verses 23-26). There is no simple mind that can evade the plain force of this last expression. The righteousness of God means that God is just, while at the same time He justifies the believer in Christ Jesus. It is His righteousness, or, in other words, His perfect consistency with Himself, which is always involved in the notion of righteousness. He is consistent with Himself when He is justifying sinners, or, more strictly, all those who believe in Jesus. He can meet the sinner, but He justifies the believer; and in this, instead of trenching on His glory, there is a deeper revelation and maintenance of it than if there never had been sin or a sinner.

Horribly offensive as sin is to God, and inexcusable in the creature, it is sin which has given occasion to the astonishing display of divine righteousness in justifying believers. It is not a question of His mercy merely; for this weakens the truth immensely, and perverts its character wholly. The righteousness of God flows from His mercy, of course; but its character and basis is righteousness. Christ's work of redemption deserves that God should act as He does in the gospel. Observe again, it is not victory here; for that would give place to human pride. It is not a soul's overcoming its difficulties, but a sinner's submission to the righteousness of God. It is God Himself who, infinitely glorified in the Lord that expiated our sins by His one sacrifice, remits them now, not looking for our victory, nor as yet even in leading us on to victory, but by faith in Jesus and His blood. God is

proved thus divinely consistent with Himself in Christ Jesus, whom He has set forth a mercy-seat through faith in His blood.

Accordingly the apostle says that boast and works are completely set aside by this principle which affirms faith, apart from deeds of law, to be the means of relationship with God (verses 27, 28). Consequently the door is as open to the Gentile as to the Jew. The ground taken by a Jew for supposing God exclusively for Israel was, that they had the law, which was the measure of what God claimed from man; and this the Gentile had not. But such thoughts altogether vanish now, because, as the Gentile was unquestionably wicked and abominable, so from the law's express denunciation the Jew was universally guilty before God. Consequently all turned, not on what man should be for God, but what God can be and is, as revealed in the gospel, to man. This maintains both the glory and the moral universality of Him who will justify the circumcision by faith, not law, and the uncircumcision through their faith, if they believe the gospel. Nor does this in the slightest degree weaken the principle of law. On the contrary, the doctrine of faith establishes law as nothing else can; and for this simple reason, that if one who is guilty hopes to be saved spite of the broken law, it must be at the expense of the law that condemns his guilt; whereas the gospel shows no sparing of sin, but the most complete condemnation of it all, as charged on Him who shed His blood in atonement. The doctrine of faith therefore, which reposes on the cross, establishes law, instead of making it void, as every other principle must (verses 27-31).

But this is not the full extent of salvation. Accordingly we do not hear of salvation as such in Romans 3. There is laid down the most essential of all truths as a groundwork of salvation; namely, expiation. There is the vindication of God in His ways with the Old Testament believers. Their sins had been passed by. He could not have remitted heretofore. This would not have been just. And the blessedness of the gospel is, that it is (not merely an exercise of mercy, but also) divinely just. It would not have been righteous in any sense to have remitted the sins, until they were actually borne by One who could and did suffer for them. But now they were; and thus God vindicated Himself perfectly as to the past. But this great work of Christ was not and could not be a mere vindication of God; and we may find it otherwise developed in various parts of Scripture, which I here mention by the way to show the point at which we are arrived. God's righteousness was now manifested as to the past sins He had not brought into judgment through His forbearance, and yet more conspicuously in the present time, when He displayed His justice in justifying the believer.

But this is not all; and the objection of the Jew gives occasion for the apostle to bring out a fuller display of what God is. Did they fall back on Abraham? "What shall we then say that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God." Did the Jew fancy that the gospel makes very light of Abraham, and of the then dealings of God? Not so, says the apostle. Abraham is the proof of the value of faith in justification before God. Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness. There was no law

there or then; for Abraham died long before God spoke from Sinai. He believed God and His word, with special approval on God's part; and his faith was counted as righteousness (ver. 3). And this was powerfully corroborated by the testimony of another great name in Israel (David), in Psalm 32. "For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found: surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him. Thou art my hiding-place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance. I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye."

In the same way the apostle disposes of all pretence on the score of ordinances, especially circumcision. Not only was Abraham justified without law, but apart from that great sign of mortification of the flesh. Although circumcision began with Abraham, manifestly it had nothing to do with his righteousness, and at best was but the seal of the righteousness of faith which he had in an uncircumcised state. It could not therefore be the source or means of his righteousness. All then that believe, though uncircumcised, might claim him as father, assured that righteousness will be reckoned to them too. And he is father of circumcision in the best sense, not to Jews, but to believing Gentiles. Thus the discussion of Abraham strengthens the case in behalf of the uncircumcised who believe, to the overthrow of the

greatest boast of the Jew. The appeal to their own inspired account of Abraham turned into a proof of the consistency of God's ways in justifying by faith, and hence in justifying the uncircumcised no less than the circumcision.

But there is more than this in Romans 4 He takes up a third feature of Abraham's case; that is, the connection of the promise with resurrection. Here it is not merely the negation of law and of circumcision, but we have the positive side. Law works wrath because it provokes transgression; grace makes the promise sure to all the seed, not only because faith is open to the Gentile and Jew alike, but because God is looked to as a quickener of the dead. What gives glory to God like this? Abraham believed God when, according to nature, it was impossible for him or for Sarah to have a child. The quickening power of God therefore was here set forth, of course historically in a way connected with this life and a posterity on earth, but nevertheless a very just and true sign of God's power for the believer — the quickening energy of God after a still more blessed sort. And this leads us to see not only where there was an analogy with those who believe in a promised Saviour, but also to a weighty difference. And this lies in the fact that Abraham believed God before he had the son, being fully persuaded that what He had promised He was able to perform. and therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. But we believe on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead. It is done. already. It is not here believing on Jesus, but on God who has proved what He is to us in raisin, from among the dead Him who was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification (verses 13-25).

This brings out a most emphatic truth and special side of Christianity. Christianity is not a system of promise, but rather of promise accomplished in Christ. Hence it is essentially founded on the gift not only of a Saviour who would interpose, in the mercy of God, to bear our sins, but of One who is already revealed, and the work done and accepted, and this known in the fact that God Himself has interposed to raise Him from among the dead — a bright and momentous thing to press on souls, as indeed we find the apostles insisting on it throughout the Acts. Were it merely Romans 3 there could not be full peace with God as there is. One might know a most real clinging to Jesus; but this would not set the heart at ease with God. The soul may feel the blood of Jesus to be a yet deeper want; but this alone does not give peace with God. In such a condition what has been found in Jesus is too often misused to make a kind of difference, so to speak, between the Saviour on the one hand, and God on the other — ruinous always to the enjoyment of the full blessing of the gospel. Now there is no way in which God could lay a basis for peace with Himself more blessed than as He has done it. No longer does the question exist of requiring an expiation. That is the first necessity for the sinner with God. But we have had it fully in Romans 3. Now it is the positive power of God in raising up from the dead Him that was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justifying. The whole work is done.

The soul therefore now is represented for the first time as already justified and in possession of peace with God. This is a state of mind, and not the necessary or immediate fruit of Romans 3, but is based on the truth of Romans 4 as well as 3. There never can be solid peace

with God without both. A soul may as truly, no doubt, be put into relationship with God — be made very happy, it may be; but it is not what Scripture calls “peace with God.” Therefore it is here for the first time that we find salvation spoken of in the grand results that are now brought before us in Romans 5:1-11. “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” There is entrance into favour, and nothing but favour. The believer is not put under law, you will observe, but under grace, which is the precise reverse of law. The soul is brought into peace with God, as it finds its standing in the grace of God, and, more than that, rejoices in hope of the glory of God. Such is the doctrine and the fact. It is not merely a call then; but as we have by our Lord Jesus Christ our access into the favour wherein we stand, so there is positive boasting in the hope of the glory of God. For it may have been noticed from chapter 3 to chapter 5, that nothing but fitness for the glory of God will do now. It is not a question of creature-standing. This passed away with man when he sinned. Now that God has revealed Himself in the gospel, it is not what will suit man on earth, but what is worthy of the presence of the glory of God. Nevertheless the apostle does not expressly mention heaven here. This was not suitable to the character of the epistle; but the glory of God he does. We all know where it is and must be for the Christian.

The consequences are thus pursued; first, the general place of the believer now, in all respects, in relation to the past, the present, and the future. His pathway follows; and he shows that the very troubles of the road become a distinct matter of boast. This was not a direct and intrinsic effect, of course, but the result of spiritual

dealing for the soul. It was the Lord giving us the profit of sorrow, and ourselves bowing to the way and end of God in it, so that the result of tribulation should be rich and fruitful experience.

Then there is another and crowning part of the blessing: “And not only so, but also boasting in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the reconciliation.” It is not only a blessing in its own direct character, or in indirect though real effects, but the Giver Himself is our joy, and boast, and glory. The consequences spiritually are blessed to the soul; how much more is it to Teach the source from which all flows! This, accordingly, is the essential spring of worship. The fruits of it are not expanded here; but, in point of fact, to joy in God is necessarily that which makes praise and adoration to be the simple and spontaneous exercise of the heart. In heaven it will fill us perfectly; but there is no more perfect joy there, nor anything. higher, if so high, in this epistle.

At this point we enter upon a most important part of the epistle, on which we must dwell for a little. It is no longer a question of man’s guilt, but of his nature. Hence the apostle does not, as in the early chapters of this epistle, take up our sins, except as proofs and symptoms of sin. Accordingly, for the first time, the Spirit of God from Romans 5:12 traces the mature of man to the head of the race. This brings in the contrast with the other Head, the Lord Jesus Christ, whom we have here not as One bearing our sins in His own body on the tree, but as the spring and chief of a new family. Hence, as is shown later in the chapter, Adam is a head characterized by disobedience, who brought in death, the just penalty of sin; as on the other hand we have

Him of whom he was the type, Christ, the obedient man, who has brought in righteousness, and this after a singularly blessed sort and style — “justification of life.” Of it nothing has been heard till now. We have had justification, both by blood and also in virtue of Christ’s resurrection. But “justification of life” goes farther, though involved in the latter, than the end of Romans 4; for now we learn that in the gospel there is not only a dealing with the guilt of those that are addressed in it; there is also a mighty work of God in the presenting the man in a new place before God, and in fact, too, for his faith, clearing him from all the consequences in which he finds himself as a man in the flesh here below.

It is here that you will find a great failure of Christendom as to this. Not that any part of the truth has escaped: it is the fatal brand of that “great house” that even the most elementary truth suffers the deepest injury; but as to this truth, it seems unknown altogether. I hope that brethren in Christ will bear with me if I press on them the importance of taking good heed to it that their souls are thoroughly grounded in this, the proper place of the Christian by Christ’s death and resurrection. It must not be, assumed too readily. There is a disposition continually to imagine that what is frequently spoken of must be understood; but experience will soon show that this is not the case. Even those that seek a place of separation to the Lord outside that which is now hurrying on souls to destruction are, nevertheless, deeply affected by the condition of that Christendom in which we find ourselves.

Here, then, it is not a question at all of pardon or remission. First of all the apostle points out that death has come in, and that this was no consequence of law,

but before it. Sin was in the world between Adam and Moses, when the law was not. This clearly takes in man, it will be observed; and this is his grand point now. The contrast of Christ with Adam takes in man universally as well as the Christian; and man in sin, alas! was true, accordingly, before the law, right through the law, and ever since the law. The apostle is therefore plainly in presence of the broadest possible grounds of comparison, though we shall find more too.

But the Jew might argue that it was an unjust thing in principle — this gospel, these tidings of which the apostle was so full; for why should one man affect many, yea, all? “Not so,” replies the apostle. Why should this be so strange and incredible to you? for on your own showing, according to that word to which we all bow, you must admit that one man’s sin brought in universal moral ruin and death. Proud as you may be of that which distinguishes you, it is hard to make sin and death peculiar to you, nor can you connect them even with the law particularly: the race of man is in question, and not Israel alone. There is nothing that proves this so convincingly as the book of Genesis; and the apostle, by the Spirit of God, calmly but triumphantly summons the Jewish Scriptures to demonstrate that which the Jews were so strenuously denying. Their own Scriptures maintained, as nothing else could, that all the wretchedness which is now found in the world, and the condemnation which hangs over the race, is the fruit of one man, and indeed of one act.

Now, if it was righteous in God (and who will gainsay it?) to deal with the whole posterity of Adam as involved in death because of one, their common father, who could deny the consistency of one man’s saving? who would

defraud God of that which He delights in — the blessedness of bringing in deliverance by that One man, of whom Adam was the image? Accordingly, then, he confronts the unquestionable truth, admitted by every Israelite, of the universal havoc by one man everywhere with the One man who has brought in (not pardon only, but, as we shall find) eternal life and liberty — liberty now in the free gift of life, but a liberty that will never cease for the soul's enjoyment until it has embraced the very body that still groans, and this because of the Holy Ghost who dwells in it.

Here, then, it is a comparison of the two great heads — Adam and Christ, and the immeasurable superiority of the second man is shown. That is, it is not merely pardon of past sins, but deliverance from sin, and in due time from all its consequences. The apostle has come now to the nature. This is the essential point. It is the thing which troubles a renewed conscientious soul above all, because of his surprise at finding the deep evil of the flesh and its mind after having proved the great grace of God in the gift of Christ. If I am thus pitied of God, if so truly and completely a justified man, if I am really an object of God's eternal favour, how can I have such a sense of continual evil? why am I still under bondage and misery from the constant evil of my nature, over which I seem to have no power whatever? Has God then no delivering power from this? The answer is found in this portion of our epistle (that is, from the middle of chapter 5).

Having shown first, then, the sources and the character of the blessing in general as far as regards deliverance, the apostle sums up the result in the end of the chapter: "That as sin hath reigned in death, even so might grace

reign through righteousness unto eternal life," the point being justification of life now through Jesus Christ our Lord.

This is applied in the two chapters that follow. There are two things that might make insuperable difficulty: the one is the obstacle of sin in the nature to practical holiness; the other is the provocation and condemnation of the law. Now the doctrine which we saw asserted in the latter part of Romans 5 is applied to both. First, as to practical holiness, it is not merely that Christ has died for my sins, but that even in the initiatory act of baptism the truth set forth there is that I am dead. It is not, as in Ephesians 2, dead in sins, which would be nothing to the purpose. This is all perfectly true — true of a Jew as of a pagan — true of any unrenewed man that never heard of a Saviour. But what is testified by Christian baptism is Christ's death. "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized unto Jesus Christ were baptized unto his death?" Thereby is identification with His death. "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." The man who, being baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, or Christian baptism, would assert any license to sin because it is in his nature, as if it were therefore an inevitable necessity, denies the real and evident meaning of his baptism. That act denoted not even the washing away of our sins by the blood of Jesus, which would not apply to the case, nor in any adequate way meet the question of nature. What baptism sets forth is more than that, and is justly found, not in Romans 3, but in Romans 6. There is no inconsistency in Ananias's word to the apostle Paul —

“wash away thy sins, calling upon the name of the Lord.” There is water as well as blood, and to that, not to this, the washing here refers. But there is more, which Paul afterwards insisted on. That was said to Paul, rather than what was taught by Paul. What the apostle had given him in fulness was the great truth, however fundamental it may be, that I am entitled, and even called on in the name of the Lord Jesus, to know that I am dead to sin; not that I must die, but that I am dead — that my baptism means nothing less than this, and is shorn of its most emphatic point if limited merely to Christ’s dying for my sins. It is not so alone; but in His death, unto which I am baptized, I am dead to sin. And “how shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?” Hence, then, we find that the whole chapter is founded on this truth. “Shall we sin,” says he, proceeding yet farther (ver. 15), “because we are not under the law, but under grace?” This were indeed to deny the value of His death, and of that newness of life we have in Him risen, and a return to bondage of the worst description.

In Romans 7 we have the subject of the law discussed for practice as well as in principle, and there again meet with the same weapon of tried and unfailing temper. It is no longer blood, but death — Christ’s death and resurrection. The figure of the relationship of husband and wife is introduced in order to make the matter plain. Death, and nothing short of it, rightly dissolves the bond. We accordingly are dead, says he, to the law; not (as no doubt almost all of us know) that the law dies, but that we are dead to the law in the death of Christ. Compare verse 6 (where the margin, not the text, is substantially correct) with verse 4. Such is the principle.

The rest of the chapter (7-25) is an instructive episode, in which the impotence and the misery of the renewed mind which attempts practice under law are fully argued out, till deliverance (not pardon) is found in Christ.

Thus the latter portion of the chapter is not doctrine exactly, but the proof of the difficulties of a soul who has not realised death to the law by the body of Christ. Did this seem to treat the law that condemned as an evil thing? Not so, says the apostle; it is because of the evil of the nature, not of the law. The law never delivers; it condemns and kills us. It was meant to make sin exceeding sinful. Hence, what he is here discussing is not remission of sins, but deliverance from sin. No wonder, if souls confound the two things together, that they never know deliverance in practice. Conscious deliverance, to be solid according to God, must be in the line of His truth. In vain will you preach Romans 3, or even 4 alone, for souls to know themselves consciously and holily set free.

From verse 14 there is an advance. There we find Christian knowledge as to the matter introduced; but still it is the knowledge of one who is not in this state pronouncing on one who is. You must carefully guard against the notion of its being a question of Paul's own experience, because he says, "I had not known," "I was alive," etc. There is no good reason for such an assumption, but much against it. It might be more or less any man's lot to learn. It is not meant that Paul knew nothing of this; but that the ground of inference, and the general theory built up, are alike mistaken. We have Paul informing us that he transfers sometimes in a figure to himself that which was in no wise necessarily his own experience, and perhaps had not been so at any

time. But this may be comparatively a light question. The great point is to note the true picture given us of a soul quickened, but labouring and miserable under law, not at all consciously delivered. The last verses of the chapter, however, bring in the deliverance — not yet the fulness of it, but the hinge, so to speak. The discovery is made that the source of the internal misery was that the mind, though renewed, was occupied with the law as a means of dealing with, flesh. Hence the very fact of being renewed makes one sensible of a far more intense misery than ever, while there is no power until the soul looks right outside self to Him who is dead and risen, who has anticipated the difficulty, and alone gives the full answer to all wants.

Romans 8 displays this comforting truth in its fulness. From the first verse we have the application of the dead and risen Christ to the soul, till in verse 11 we see the power of the Holy Ghost, which brings the soul into this liberty now, applied by-and-by to the body, when there will be the complete deliverance. “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh.” A wondrous way, but most blessed! And there (for such was the point) it was the complete condemnation of this evil thing, the nature in its present state, so as, nevertheless, to set the believer as before God’s judgment free from itself as well as its consequences. This God has wrought in Christ. It is not in any degree settled as to itself by His blood. The shedding of His blood was absolutely

necessary: without that precious expiation all else had been vain and impossible. But there is much more in Christ than that to which too many souls restrict themselves, not less to their own loss than to His dishonour. God has condemned the flesh. And here it may be repeated that it is no question of pardoning the sinner, but of condemning the fallen nature; and this so as to give the soul both power and a righteous immunity from all internal anguish about it. For the truth is that God has in Christ condemned sin, and this for sin definitely; so that He has nothing more to do in condemnation of that root of evil. What a title, then, God gives me now in beholding Christ, no longer dead but risen, to have it settled before my soul that I am in Him as He now is, where all questions are closed in peace and joy! For what remains unsolved by and in Christ? Once it was far otherwise. Before the cross there hung out the gravest question that ever was raised, and it needed settlement in this world; but in Christ sin is for ever abolished for the believer; and this not only in respect of what He has done, but in what He is. Till the cross, well might a converted soul be found groaning in misery at each fresh discovery of evil in himself. But now to faith all this is gone — not lightly, but truly — in the sight of God; so that he may live on a Saviour that is risen from the dead as his new life.

Accordingly Romans 8 pursues in the most practical manner the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free. First of all, the groundwork of it is laid in the first four verses, the last of them leading into every-day walk. And it is well for those ignorant of it to know that here, in verse 4, the apostle speaks first of “walking not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” The latter clause in the first

verse of the authorised version mars the sense. In the fourth verse this could not be absent; in the first verse it ought not to be present. Thus the deliverance is not merely for the joy of the soul, but also for strength in our walking after the Spirit, who has given and found a nature in which He delights, communicating withal His own delight in Christ, and making obedience to be the joyful service of the believer. The believer, therefore, unwittingly though really, dishonours the Saviour, if he be content to walk short of this standard and power; he is entitled and called to walk according to his place, and in the confidence of his deliverance in Christ Jesus before God.

Then the domains of flesh and Spirit are brought before us: the one characterized by sin and death practically now; the other by life, righteousness, and peace, which is, as we saw, to be crowned finally by the resurrection of these bodies of ours. The Holy Ghost, who now gives the soul its consciousness of deliverance from its place in Christ, is also the witness that the body too, the mortal body, shall be delivered in its time. “If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by [or because of] his Spirit that dwelleth in you.”

Next, he enters upon another branch of the truth — the Spirit not as a condition contrasted with flesh (these two, as we know, being always contrasted in Scripture), but as a power, a divine person that dwells in and bears His witness to the believer. His witness to our spirit is this, — that we are children of God. But if children, we are His heirs. This accordingly leads, as connected with the deliverance of the body, to the inheritance we are to

possess. The extent is what God Himself, so to speak, possesses — the universe of God, whatever will be under Christ: and what will not? As He has made all, so He is heir of all. We are heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.

Hence the action of the Spirit of God in a double point of view comes before us. As He is the spring of our joy, He is the power of sympathy in our sorrows, and the believer knows both. The faith of Christ has brought divine joy into his soul; but, in point of fact, he is traversing a world of infirmity, suffering, and grief. Wonderful to think the Spirit of God associates Himself with us in it all, deigning to give us divine feelings even in our poor and narrow hearts. This occupies the central part of the chapter, which then closes with the unfailing and faithful power of God for us in all our experiences here below. As He has given us through the blood of Jesus full remission, as we shall be saved by this life, as He has made us know even now nothing short of present conscious deliverance from every whit of evil that belongs to our very nature, as we have the Spirit the earnest of the glory to which we are destined, as we are the vessels of gracious sorrow in the midst of that from which we are not yet delivered but shall be, so now we have the certainty that, whatever betide, God is for us, and that nothing shall separate us from His love which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Then, in Romans 9 - 11, the apostle handles a difficulty serious to any mind, especially to the Jew, who might readily feel that all this display of grace in Christ to the Gentile as much as to the Jew by the gospel seems to make very cheap the distinctive place of Israel as given of God. If the good news of God goes out to man,

entirely blotting out the difference between a Jew and a Gentile, what becomes of His special promises to Abraham and to his seed? What about His word passed and sworn to the fathers? The apostle shows them with astonishing force at the starting-point that he was far from slighting their privileges. He lays down such a summary as no Jew ever gave since they were a nation. He brings out the peculiar glories of Israel according to the depth of the gospel as he knew and preached it; at least, of His person who is the object of faith now revealed. Far from denying or obscuring what they boasted of, he goes beyond them "Who are Israelites," says he, "to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all God blessed for ever." Here was the very truth that every Jew, as such, denied. What blindness! Their crowning glory was precisely what they would not hear of. What glory so rich as that of the Christ Himself duly appreciated? He was God over all blessed for ever, as well as their Messiah. Him who came in humiliation, according to their prophets, they might despise; but it was vain to deny that the same prophets bore witness to His divine glory. He was Emmanuel, yea, the Jehovah, God of Israel. Thus then, if Paul gave his own sense of Jewish privileges, there was no unbelieving Jew that rose up to his estimate of them.

But now, to meet the question that was raised, they pleaded the distinguishing promises to Israel. Upon what ground? Because they were sons of Abraham. But how, argues he, could this stand, seeing that Abraham had another son, just as much his child as Isaac? What

did they say to Ishmaelites as joint-heirs? They would not hear of it. No, they cry, it is in Isaac's seed that the Jew was called. Yes, but this is another principle. If in Isaac only, it is a question of the seed, not that was born, but that was called. Consequently the call of God, and not the birth simply makes the real difference. Did they venture to plead that it must be not only the same father, but the same mother? The answer is, that this will not do one whit better; for when we come down to the next generation, it is apparent that the two sons of Isaac were sons of the same mother; nay, they were twins. What could be conceived closer or more even than this? Surely if equal birth-tie could ensure community of blessing — if a charter from God depended on being sprung from the same father and mother, there was no case so strong, no claim so evident, as that of Esau to take the same rights as Jacob. Why would they not allow such a pretension? Was it not sure and evident that Israel could not take the promise on the ground of mere connection after the flesh? Birthright from the same father would let in Ishmael on the one hand, as from both parents it would secure the title of Esau on the other. Clearly, then, such ground is untenable. In point of fact, as he had hinted before, their true tenure was the call of God, who was free, if He pleased, to bring in other people. It became simply a question whether, in fact, God did call Gentiles, or whether He had revealed such intentions.

But he meets their proud exclusiveness in another way. He shows that, on the responsible ground of being His nation, they were wholly ruined. If the first book in the Bible showed that it was only the call of God that made Israel what they were, its second book as clearly proved

that all was over with the called people, had it not been for the mercy of God. They set up the golden calf, and thus cast off the true God, their God, even in the desert. Did the call of God. then, go out to Gentiles? Has He mercy only for guilty Israel? Is there no call, no mercy, of God for any besides?

Hereupon he enters upon the direct proofs, and first cites Hosea as a witness. That early prophet tells Israel, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God. Jezreel, Lo-ruhamah, and Lo-ammi were of awful import for Israel; but, in presence of circumstances so disastrous, there should be not merely a people but sons of the living God, and then should Judah and Israel be gathered as one people under one head. The application of this was more evident to the Gentile than to the Jew. Compare Peter's use in 1 Peter 2:10. Finally he brings in Isaiah, showing that, far from retaining their blessing as an unbroken people, a remnant alone would be saved. Thus one could not fail to see these two weighty inferences: the bringing in to be God's sons of those that had not been His people, and the judgment and destruction of the great mass of His undoubted people. Of these only a remnant would be saved. On both sides therefore the apostle is meeting the grand points he had at heart to demonstrate from their own Scriptures.

For all this, as he presses further, there was the weightiest reason possible. God is gracious, but holy; He is faithful, but righteous. The apostle refers to Isaiah to show that God would "lay in Zion a stumbling-stone." It is in Zion that He lays it. It is not among the Gentiles, but in the honoured centre of the polity of Israel. There

would be found a stumblingstone there. What was to be the stumbling-stone? Of course, it could hardly be the law: that was the boast of Israel. What was it? There could be but one satisfactory answer. The stumbling-stone was their despised and rejected Messiah. This was the key to their difficulties — this alone, and fully explains their coming ruin as well as God's solemn warnings.

In the next chapter (Romans 10) he carries on the subject, showing in the most touching manner his affection for the people. He at the same time unfolds the essential difference between the righteousness of faith and that of law. He takes their own books, and proves from one of them (Deuteronomy) that in the ruin of Israel the resource is not going into the depths, nor going up to heaven. Christ indeed did both; and so the word was nigh them, in their mouth and in their heart. It is not doing, but believing; therefore it is what is proclaimed to them, and what they receive and believe. Along with this he gathers testimonies from more than one prophet. He quotes from Joel, that whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. He quotes also from Isaiah — "Whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed." And mark the force of it — whosoever." The believer, whosoever he might be, should not be ashamed. Was it possible to limit this to Israel? But more than this — "Whosoever shall call." There. is the double prophecy. Whosoever believed should not be ashamed; whosoever called should be saved. In both parts, as it may be observed, the door is opened to the Gentile.

But then again he intimates that the nature of the gospel is involved in the publishing of the glad tidings. It is not

God having an earthly centre, and the peoples doming up to worship the Lord in Jerusalem. It is the going forth of His richest blessing. And where? How far? To the limits of the holy land? Far beyond. Psalm 19 is used in the most beautiful manner to insinuate that the limits are the world. Just as the sun in the heavens is not for one people or land alone, no more is the gospel. There is no language where their voice is not heard. “Yea verily, their sound went forth into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world.” The gospel goes forth universally. Jewish pretensions were therefore disposed of; not here by new and fuller revelations, but by this divinely skilful employment of their own Old Testament Scriptures.

Finally he comes to two other witnesses; as from the Psalms, so now from the law and the prophets. The first is Moses himself. Moses saith, “I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people,” etc. How could the Jews say that this meant themselves? On the contrary, it was the Jew provoked by the Gentiles “By them that are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you.” Did they deny that they were a foolish nation? Be it so then; it was a foolish nation by which Moses declared they should be angered. But this does not content the apostle, or rather the Spirit of God; for he goes on to point out that Isaiah “is very bold” in a similar way; that is, there is no concealing the truth of the matter. Isaiah says: “I was found of them who sought me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me.” The Jews were the last in the world to take such ground as this. It was undeniable that the Gentiles did not seek the Lord, nor ask after Him; and the prophet says that Jehovah was found of them that sought Him not, and

was made manifest to them that asked not after Him. Nor is there only the manifest call of the Gentiles in this, but with no less clearness there is the rejection, at any rate for a time, of proud Israel. “But unto Israel he saith, All day long have I stretched out my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people.”

Thus the proof was complete. The Gentiles — the despised heathen — were to be brought in; the self-satisfied Jews are left behind, justly and beyond question, if they believed the law and the prophets.

But did this satisfy the apostle? It was undoubtedly enough for present purposes. The past history of Israel was sketched in Romans 9; the present more immediately is before us in Romans 10. The future must be brought in by the grace of God; and this he accordingly gives us at the close of Romans 11. First, he raises the question, “Has God cast away his people?” Let it not be! Was he not himself, says Paul, a proof to the contrary? Then he enlarges, and points out that there is a remnant of grace in the worst of times. If God had absolutely cast away His people, would there be such mercy? There would be no remnant if justice took its course. The remnant proves, then, that even under judgment the rejection of Israel is not complete, but rather a pledge of future favour. This is the first ground.

The second plea is not that the rejection of Israel is only partial, however extensive, but that it is also temporary, and not definitive. This is to fall back on a principle he had already used. God was rather provoking Israel to jealousy by the call of the Gentiles. But if it were so, He had not done with them. Thus the first argument shows

that the rejection was not total; the second, that it was but for a season.

But there is a third. Following up with the teaching of the olive-tree, he carries out the same thought of a remnant that abides on their own stock, and points to a re-instatement of the nation, And I would just observe by the way, that the Gentile cry that no Jew ever accepts the gospel in truth is a falsehood. Israel is indeed the only people of whom there is always a portion that believe. Time was when none of the English, nor French, nor of any other nation believed in the Saviour. There never was an hour since Israel's existence as a nation that God has not had His remnant of them. Such has been their singular fruit of promise; such even in the midst of all their misery it is at present. And as that little remnant is ever sustained by the grace of God, it is the standing pledge of their final blessedness through His mercy, whereon the apostle breaks out into raptures of thanksgiving to God. The day hastens when the Redeemer shall come to Zion. He shall come, says one Testament, out of Zion. He shall come to Zion, says the other. In both Old and New it is the same substantial testimony. Thither He shall come, and thence, go forth. He shall own that once glorious seat of royalty in Israel. Zion shall yet behold her mighty, divine, but once despised Deliverer; and when He thus comes, there will be a deliverance suited to His glory. All Israel shall be saved. God, therefore, had not cast off His people, but was employing the interval of their slip from their place, in consequence of their rejection of Christ, to call the Gentiles in sovereign mercy, after which Israel as a whole should be saved. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable

are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? or who hath first liven to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever."

The rest of the epistle takes up the practical consequences of the great doctrine of God's righteousness, which had been now shown to be supported by, and in no wise inconsistent with, His promises to Israel. The whole history of Israel, past, present, and future falls in with, although quite distinct from, that which he had been expounding. Here I shall be very brief.

Romans 12 looks at the mutual duties of the saints. Romans 13 urges their duties towards what was outside them, more particularly to the powers that be, but also to men in general. Love is the great debt that we owe, which never can be paid, but which we should always be paying. The chapter closes with the day of the Lord in its practical force on the Christian walk. In Romans 14 and the beginning of Romans 15 we have the delicate theme of Christian forbearance in its limits and largeness. The weak are not to judge the strong, and the strong are not to despise the weak. These things are matters of conscience, and depend much for their solution on the degree to which souls have attained. The subject terminates with the grand truth which must never be obscured by details — that we are to receive, one another, as Christ has received us, to the glory of God. In the rest of chapter 15 the apostle dwells on the extent of his apostleship, renews his expression of the thought and hope of visiting Rome, and at the same time shows

how well he remembered the need of the poor at Jerusalem. Romans 16 brings before us in the most. instructive and interesting manner the links that grace practically forms and maintains between the saints of God. Though he had never visited Rome, many of them were known personally. It is exquisite — the delicate love with which he singles out distinctive features in each of the saints, men and women, that come before him. Would that the Lord would give us hearts to remember, as well as eyes to see, according to His own grace! Then follows a warning against those who bring in stumbling-blocks and offences. There is evil at work, and grace does not close the eye to danger; at the same time it is never under the pressure of the enemy, and there is the fullest confidence that the God of peace will break the power of Satan under the feet of the saints shortly.

Last of all, the apostle links up this fundamental treatise of divine righteousness in its doctrine, its dispensational bearings, and its exhortations to the walk of Christians, with higher truth, which it would not have been suitable then to bring out; for grace considers the state and the need of the saints. True ministry gives out not merely truth, but suited truth to the saints. At the same time the apostle does allude to that mystery which was not yet divulged — at least, in this epistle; but he points from the foundations of eternal truth to those heavenly heights that were reserved for other communications in due time.

First Corinthians

As usual, the introductory words (1 Cor. 1:1-3) of the epistle give us no little intimation of that which is to follow. The apostle speaks of himself as such “called [to be] an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God,” but coupling a brother with him, “and Sosthenes our brother,” he writes to “the church of God at Corinth” — not to the saints, as was the case in the epistle to the Romans, but to the church at Corinth “to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus,” as in the former epistle — “called [to be] saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.”

This will be found to lead the way into the main subject of the present communication. Here we must not look for the great foundations of Christian doctrine. There is the unfolding of the assembly in a practical way; that is, the church of God is not viewed here in its highest character. There is no more than an incidental glance at its associations with Christ. No notice is here taken of the heavenly places as the sphere of our blessing; nor are we given to hear of the bridal affections of Christ for His body. But the assembly of God is addressed, those sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints called, “with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.” Thus room is left for the profession of the Lord’s name. It is not, as in Ephesians, “to the saints which are in Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus.” There is no such closeness of application, nor intimacy, nor confidence in a really intrinsically holy character. Sanctified they were in Christ Jesus. They had taken the

place of being separate, “calling upon the name of the Lord;” but the remarkable addition should be noticed by the way — “with all that in every place call upon the name of the Lord, both theirs and ours.” And this is the more notable, because if there be an epistle which the unbelief of Christendom tries more than another to annul in its application to present circumstances, it is this first letter to the Corinthians. Nor need we wonder. Unbelief shrinks from that which calls, now rather recalls, the saints to a due sense of their responsibility in virtue of their position as the church of God here below. Those at Corinth had forgotten it. Christendom has not merely forgotten but denied it, and so would fain treat a large part of that which will come before us tonight as a bygone thing. It is not disputed that God did thus work in times past; but they have not the smallest serious thought of submitting to its directions as authoritative for present duty. Yet who can deny that God has taken more care to make this plain and certain in the very frontispiece of this epistle than anywhere else? He is wise and right: man is not. Our place is to bow and believe.

There is another point also to be weighed in the next verses (4-8). The apostle tells them how he thanks his God always on their behalf, but refrains from any expression of thankfulness as to their state. He recognises their rich endowments on God’s part. He owns how they had been given all utterance, and all knowledge, the working of the Spirit of God, and His power. This is exceedingly important; for there is a disposition often to consider that difficulties and disorder among the saints of God are due to a want of government and of ministerial power. But no amount of

gift, in few or many, can of itself produce holy spiritual order. Disorder is never the result of weakness alone. This, of course, may be taken advantage of, and Satan may tempt men to assume the semblance of a strength they do not possess. No doubt assumption would produce disorder; but weakness simply (where it leads souls, as it should, to spread out their need before the Lord) brings in the gracious action of the Holy Ghost, and the unfailing care of Him who loves His saints and the assembly. It was not so at Corinth. Theirs was rather the display of conscious strength; but at the same time they lacked the fear of God, and the sense of responsibility in the use of what God had given them. They were like children disporting themselves with not a little energy that wrought in vessels which altogether failed in self-judgment. This was a source, and a main source, of the difficulty and disorder at Corinth. It is also of great importance to us; for there are those that continually cry out for increase of power as the one panacea of the church. What reflecting spiritual mind could doubt that God sees His saints are not able to bear it? Power in the sense in which we are now speaking of it — that is, power in the form of gift — is far from being the deepest need or the gravest desideratum of the saints. Again, is it ever the way of God to display Himself thus in a fallen condition of things? Not that He is restrained, or that He is not Sovereign. Not, moreover, that He may not give, and liberally as suits His own glory; but He gives wisely and holily, so as to lead souls now into exercise of conscience and brokenness of spirit, and thus keep and even deepen their sense of that to which God’s church is called, and the state into which it has fallen.

At Corinth there was a wholly different state of things. It was the early rise of the church of God, if I may so say, among the Gentiles. And there was not wanting an astonishing sample of the power of the Spirit in witness of the victory that Jesus had won over Satan. This was now, or at least should have been, manifested by the church of God, as at Corinth. But they had lost sight of God's objects. They were occupied with themselves, with one another, with the supernatural energy which grace had conferred on them in the name of the Lord. The Holy Ghost in inspiring the apostle to write to them in no way weakens the sense of the source and character of that power. He insists on its reality, and reminds them that it was of God; but at the same time he brings in the divine aim in it all. "God," says he, "is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord." Immediately after he alludes to the schisms that were then at work among them, and calls on them to be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment; informing them of the tidings which had reached him through the house of Chloe, that there were contentions among them, some saying, "I am of Paul," others "I am of Apollos;" some, "I am of Cephas," and others "I am of Christ himself." There is no abuse to which flesh cannot degrade the truth. But the apostle knew how to introduce the Lord's name and grace with the grandly simple but weighty facts of His person and work. It was unto His name that they were baptized; it was He that had been crucified. And be it observed, that from the first of this epistle it is the cross of Christ that has the prominence. It is not so much His blood-shedding, nor even His death and resurrection, but His cross. This would have been as much out of place in the beginning of Romans as the putting forward

of propitiation would be out of place here. Expiation of sins by Christ, His death and resurrection, are given of God to be displayed before the saints, who needed to know the firm, immutable foundation of grace; but what the saints wanted most was to learn the gross inconsistency of turning to selfish ease, honour, and aggrandisement the privileges of God's church, and the power of the Spirit of God that wrought in its members.

It is the cross which stains the pride of man, and puts all his glory in the dust. Hence the apostle brings Christ crucified before them. This to the Jew was a stumbling-block, and to the Greek foolishness. These Corinthians were deeply affected by the judgment of both Jews and Greeks. They were under the influence of man. They had not realized the total ruin of nature. They valued those that were wise, scribes, or disputers of this world. They were accustomed to the schools of their age and country. They conceived that if Christianity did such great things when those who possessed it were poor and simple, what might it not do if it could only be backed by the ability, and the learning, and the philosophy of men! How it must ride triumphantly to victory! How the great must bow, and the wise be brought in! What a glorious change would result when not the unlettered poor only, but the great and the noble, the wise and the Prudent, were all joined in the confession of Jesus!

Their thoughts were fleshly, not of God. The cross writes judgment on man, and folly on his wisdom, as it is itself rejected by man as folly; for what could seem more egregiously unreasonable to a Greek than the God that made heaven and earth becoming a man, and, as such, crucified by the wicked hands of His creatures here below? That God should use His power to bless man was

natural; and the Gentile could coalesce as to it with the Jew. Hence too, in the cross, the Jew found his stumbling-block; for he expected a Messiah in power and glory. Though the Jew and the Greek seemed opposite as the poles, from different points they agreed thoroughly in slighting the cross, and in desiring the exaltation of man as he is. They both, therefore, (whatever their occasional oppositions, and whatever their permanent variety of form,) preferred the flesh, and were ignorant of God — the one demanding signs, the other wisdom. It was the pride of nature, whether self-confident or founded on religious claims.

Hence the apostle Paul, in the latter part of chap. 1, brings in the cross of Christ in contrast with fleshly wisdom, as well as religious pride, urging also God's sovereignty in calling souls as He will. He alludes to the mystery (1 Cor. 2), but does not develop here the blessed privileges that flowed to us from a union with Christ, dead, risen, and ascended; but demonstrates that man has no place whatever, that it is God who chooses and calls, and that He makes, nothing of flesh. There is glorying, but it is exclusively in the Lord. No flesh should glory in his presence."

This is confirmed in 1 Corinthians 2, where the apostle reminds them of the manner in which the gospel had entered Corinth. He had come there setting his face against all things that would commend himself. No doubt, to one of such eminent ability and such varied gifts as the apostle Paul, it was hard, to speak after the manner of men, to be nothing. How much it must have called for self-denial utterly to decline that which he could have handled so well, and which people at Corinth would have hailed with loud acclamation. Just think of

the great apostle of the Gentiles, on the immortality of the soul, giving free rein to the mighty spirit that was in him! But not so. What absorbed his soul, in entering, the intellectual and dissolute capital of Achaia, was the cross of Christ. He determined therefore, as he says, to know nothing else — not exactly to know the cross alone, but "Jesus Christ and him crucified." It was emphatically, though not exclusively, the cross. It was not simply redemption, but along with this another order of truth. Redemption supposes, undoubtedly, a suffering Saviour, and the shedding of that precious blood which ransoms the captives. It is Jesus who in grace has undergone the judgment of God, and brought in the full delivering power of God for the souls that believe. But the cross is more than this. It is the death of shame pre-eminently. It is utter opposition to the thoughts, feelings, judgments, and ways of men, religious or profane. This is the part accordingly that he was led in the wisdom of God to put forward. Hence the feelings of the apostle were distrust of self, and dependence on God according to that cross. As he says, "I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling." Thus, as Christ Himself is said in 2 Cor. 13 to be crucified in weakness, such was also the servant here. His speech and his preaching was "not in enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." Accordingly, in this chapter he proceeds to supplement the application of the doctrine of the cross to the state of the Corinthians by bringing in the Holy Ghost; for this again supposes the incapacity of man in divine things.

All is opened out in a manner full of comfort, but at the same time unsparing to human pride. Weigh from the prophecy of Isaiah the remarkable quotation — "Eye

hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit." There is first the great standing fact before our eyes. Such is the Saviour to the saved. Christ crucified is the death-knell on all man's wisdom, and power, and righteousness. The cross writes total condemnation on the world. It was here the world had to say to Jesus. All that it gave Him was the cross. On the other hand, to the believer it is the power of God and the wisdom of God, because he humbly but willingly reads in the cross the truth of the judgment of his own nature as a thing to be delivered from, and finds Him that was crucified, the Lord Himself, undertaking a deliverance just, present, and complete; as he says, "Of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." Flesh is absolutely put down. Man cannot go lower for weakness and ignominy than the cross on which hangs all the blessedness God gives the believer. And therein God is glorified as He is nowhere else. This in both its parts is exactly as it should be; and faith sees and receives it in Christ's cross. The state of the Corinthians did not admit of Christ risen being brought in, at least here. It might have drawn a halo, as it were, round human nature — this presenting the risen man in the first instance. But he points to God as the source, and Christ as the channel and means, of all the blessing. "Of him," says he, "are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." But then, as he shows, there was not only this great source of blessing in Christ, but there is the power that works in us. Never is it the spirit of man that lays hold of this infinite good

which God vouchsafes him. Man requires a divine power to work within him, just as he needs the Saviour outside himself Accordingly, in 1 Corinthians 2, still carrying on the thought of Christ crucified, and connecting it with their condition, he intimates that he was in no wise limited to it. If persons were grounded in Christianity, he was prepared to go into the greatest depths of revealed truth; but then the power of entering safely was not human, but of the Holy Ghost. Man is no more capable of fathoming the depths of divine things than a brute can comprehend the works of human wit or science. This doctrine was utterly repulsive to the pride of the Greeks. They might admit man to have need of pardon, and of moral improvement. They fully admitted his want of instruction, and refinement, and, so to speak, of spiritualization, if it only might be. Christianity deepens our estimate of every want. Man not only wants a new life or nature, but the Holy Ghost. It is not merely His grace in a general sense, but the power of the Holy Ghost personally dwelling in him. It is this alone which can lead us into the deep things of God. And this, he lets us see, affects not merely this particular or that, but the whole working of divine grace and power in man. The whole and sole means of communicating blessing to us must be the Holy Ghost. Hence he insists, that as it is the Spirit of God in the first place who reveals the truth to us, so it is the same Spirit who furnishes suitable words, as, finally, it is through the Holy Ghost that one receives the truth revealed in the words He Himself has given. Thus, from first to last, it is a process begun, carried on, and completed by the Holy Ghost. How little this makes of man!

This introduces 1 Corinthians 3 and gives point to his rebukes. He taxes them with walking as men. How remarkable is such a reproach! Walking as men! Why, one might ask, how else could they walk? And this very difficulty — as no doubt it would be to many a Christian now (that walking as men should be a reproach) — was no doubt a clap of thunder to the proud but poor spirits at Corinth. Yes, walking as men is a departure from Christianity. It is to give up the distinctive power and place that belongs to us; for does not Christianity show us man judged, condemned, and set aside? On the faith of this, living in Christ, we have to walk. The Holy Ghost, besides, is brought in as working in the believer, and this, of course, in virtue of redemption by our Lord Jesus. And this is what is meant by being not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, which is proved by the Holy Ghost dwelling in us.

Here the apostle does not explain all this, and he gives a very withering reason for his reticence. These Corinthians had an uncommonly good opinion of themselves, and so they must be told plainly the reason why he does not open out these deep things. They themselves were not fit; they were but babes. What! the polished Greek believers no more than babes! This was rather what they would have said of the apostle or of his teaching. They thought themselves far in advance. The apostle had dwelt on the elementary truths of the gospel. They yearned after the fire of Peter and the rhetoric of Apollos. No doubt they might easily flatter themselves it was to carry on the work of God. How little many a young convert knows what will best lead him on! How little the Corinthians dreamt of depreciating the Second man, or of exalting the first! Hence the apostle

tells them that he could not speak unto them as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. “I have fed you with milk, and not with meat.” Far from denying, he owns that their insinuation was true — he had only brought before them elementary truths. They were not in a condition to bear more. Now this is full of meaning and importance practically at all times. We may damage souls greatly by presenting high truths to those that want the simplest rudiments of divine truth.

The apostle, as a wise master-builder, laid the foundation. The state of the Corinthians was such that he could not build on the foundation as he would have desired. His absence had given occasion for the breaking out of their carnal wishes after the world’s wisdom. They were making even the ardour of a Peter and the eloquence of an Apollos to be a reason for dissatisfaction with one that, I need not say, was superior to both of them. But the apostle meets them in a way most unexpected to their self-satisfaction and pride, and lets them know that their carnality was the real reason why he could not go on with them into deeper things.

This leads him to point out the seriousness of the work or building; for he presents the church of God under this figure. What care each servant needs to take how and what he builds! What danger of bringing in that which would not stand the fire or judgment of God — nay, further, of bringing in that which was not simply weak and worthless, but positively corrupting; for it was to be feared there were such elements even then at Corinth! Again he brings in another principle to bear upon them. Their party spirit, their feeling of narrowness, the

disposition to set up this servant of Christ or that, was not only a dishonour to the Master, but a real loss to themselves. Not that there is any ground to suppose it was the fault of Peter or Apollos any more than of Paul. The evil was in the saints themselves, who indulged in their old zeal of the schools, and allowed their natural partiality to work. In point of fact this never can be without the most grievous impoverishment to the soul, as well as a hindrance to the Holy Ghost. What faith must learn is, that “all things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas;..... all are yours.” Thus the subject enlarges, as is his wont, taking in an immense breadth of the Christian’s possessions — life, death, things present, and things to come. “All are yours, and ye are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.”

This again brings in another point before the subject closes. He is not content with the pressing of responsibility on others; he had a solemn sense of his own place, which made him wonderfully independent of the judgments of men. Obedience gives firmness as well as humility. Not in the smallest degree was the pride of the Corinthians met by pride on his part, but by keeping the Lord and His will before his soul. Yet this is certainly true that this effect of faith looks like pride to a man who merely views things on the surface. The calm going on in the service of Christ, the endurance of this spirit or that, as no more than the idle wind, was no doubt exceedingly unpleasant to such as were wise in their own conceit, and valued the criticism they freely bestowed on the different servants of the Lord. But Paul sees all in the light of the eternal day. They had forgotten this, and were in a sense trafficking with these powers of the Spirit of God. They were making them the

counters of a game they were playing in this world. They had forgotten that what God gives He gives in time, but in view of eternity. The apostle puts the truth of the case before their souls as he had it vividly before his own. (1 Cor. 4)

Another thing is noticeable here. He had reproached them with walking not as Christians but as men (that is, with their habitual life and conversation formed on human principles instead of divine). On the other hand, it would appear from what follows, that they reproached the apostle in their hearts, — not, of course, in so many words, — with not being enough of a gentleman for their taste. This seems to me the gist of the fourth chapter. It was a thing that they considered quite beneath a Christian minister to work from time to time with his hands, often poor, occasionally in prison, knocked about by crowds, and so on. All this they thought the fruit of indiscretion and avoidable. They would have preferred respectability, public and private, in one who stood in the position of a servant of Christ. This the apostle meets in a very blessed way. He admitted that they were certainly not in such circumstances; they were reigning as kings. As for him it was enough to be the off-scouring of all men, this was his boast and blessedness. He wished that they did indeed reign that he might reign with them (that the blessed time might really arrive). How his heart would rejoice in that day with them! And surely the time will come, and they would all reign together when Christ reigns over the earth. But he quite admits that for the present the fellowship of Christ's sufferings was the place he had chosen. Of honour in the world, and ease for the flesh, he at least could not, if they could, boast. Present greatness was what he in no

wise coveted; to suffer great things for His sake was what the Lord had promised, and what His servant expected in becoming an apostle. If his own service was the highest position in the church, his was certainly the lowest position in the world. This was as much an apostle's boast and glory as anything that God had given them. No answer can I conceive more telling to any one of his detractors at Corinth who had a heart and conscience.

In 1 Corinthians 5 we enter on another and more painful part of the epistle. A fearful instance of sin had come to light, so gross, indeed, that the like was not even named among the Gentiles. In fact it was a case of incest, and this among those called of God, and sanctified in Christ Jesus! The question is not in the least raised whether the guilty person was a saint or not; still less does he allow that which one so often and painfully heard pleaded in extenuation, "Oh, but he [or she] is a dear Christian." Christian affection is most excellent; as brethren we should love even to laying down life for each other; as it is also very right that we should own the work God has wrought, above all what He has wrought in grace. But when one bearing the name of the Lord has, through unwatchfulness, fallen into wickedness, which of course grieves the Holy Ghost and stumbles the weak, it is not the time to talk thus. It is the time, in the very love that God implants, to deal sternly with that which has disgraced the name of the Lord. Is this to fail in love to the person? The apostle showed ere long that he had more love for this evildoer than any of them. The second epistle to the Corinthians entreats them to confirm their love to him whom they had put away. They were too hard against him then, as they were too loose now. Here

their consciences needed to be roused. To deal with the matter they owed to the Lord Jesus. It was not merely getting rid of the obnoxious man. They had to prove themselves clear in the matter certainly; but he puts before them another course, whenever the guilty one had repented.

“I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already,” etc. The case was most gross, and there was no question about it. The facts were indisputable; the scandal was unheard of. “I have judged already, as though present, concerning him that hath so done this deed, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh.” There was no discussion raised whether the person might be converted. The fact is, church discipline supposes and goes on the ground that those on whom it is exercised are Christians; but when it is a question of discipline, it is not the season for the display of Christian affection. This would falsify the conscience and turn the eye from off the point to which the Holy Ghost was directing attention. There was wickedness in their midst; and while known and unjudged, all were implicated; none could be clean till it was put away. Accordingly the apostle, while he expresses the desire that the spirit of the man should be saved in the day of the Lord, flesh being destroyed, at the same time rouses the saints to that which became the name of the Lord on the very ground that they were unleavened. If they were free from evil, let them act consistently. Let them preserve that purity in practice which was theirs in principle. They were unleavened, and therefore should be a new lump. Notoriously there

was old leaven among them. What business had it there? “Put away from” — not the table of the Lord merely, this he does not say, but — “Put away from among yourselves.” This is much stronger than expelling from the table. Of course, it implies exclusion from the Lord’s table, but from their table too — “with such an one, no, not to eat.” An ordinary meal, or any such act expressive even in natural things of fellowship with the person thus dishonouring the Lord, is forbidden.

Mark, they must put away. It is not the apostle acting for them; for God took particular care that this case, demanding discipline to the uttermost, should be where the apostle was not. What an admirable instruction for us who have no longer an apostle! None can pretend that it was an assembly where there was a high degree of knowledge or spirituality. The very reverse was the case. The responsibility of discipline depends on our relationship as an assembly to the Lord, not on its changing states. The Corinthians were babes; they were carnal. He who loved them well could not speak of them as spiritual. Nevertheless, this responsibility attached to the very fact that they were members of Christ — His body. If saints are gathered to the name of the Lord, and so are God’s assembly, if they have faith to take such a position here below, and have the Holy Ghost owned as in their midst, this, and nothing short of this, is their responsibility; nor does the ruined state of the church touch the question, nor can it relieve them from their duty to the Lord. The church at Corinth had soon failed most gravely far and wide. This was the more shameful, considering the brightness of the truth vouchsafed to them, and the striking manifestation of divine power in their midst. The presence of apostles elsewhere in the

earth, the beautiful display of Pentecostal grace at Jerusalem, the fact that so short a time had elapsed since they had been brought out of heathenism into their standing in God's grace, all made the present state of the Corinthians so much the more painful; but nothing can ever dissolve the responsibility of saints, whether as individuals or as an assembly. "Put away from among yourselves that wicked person."

Another thing is to be observed, — that the Holy Spirit's scale of sin is not that of man. Which of you, my brethren, would have thought of classing a railer with an adulterer? A railer is one who uses abusive language for the purpose of injuring another, — not the transient out-breaking of flesh, sad as it is, but provoked it may be, or at any rate, happening through unwatchfulness. The habit of evil speaking stamps him who practises it as a railer; and such a man is unfit for the company of the saints, for God's assembly. It is the old leaven of malice and wickedness. He is unclean. Doubtless the world would not so judge; but this is not the world's judgment. The Corinthians were under the influence of the world. The apostle had already shown that to walk as men is beneath the Christian. Now we see that to walk as the world, no matter how refinedly, ever exposes Christians to act worse than men of the world. God has stamped upon His children the name of Christ; and what does not express His name is inconsistent, not only with the Christian, but with His assembly. They are all as such held responsible, according to the grace and holiness and glory of Christ, for the sin done in their midst, of which they are cognisant. They are bound to keep themselves pure in ways.

There was another case also: brother was going to law with brother. (1 Cor. 6) We have no reason to think they had fallen so far as to go to law with those that were not brethren; this would seem to be a lower step still. But brother was going to law with brother,,and this before the unjust. How often now-a-days one hears, “Well, one expects something better from a brother; and surely he ought to suffer the consequences of his ill-doing.” This was just the feeling of the Corinthian plaintiff. What, then, is the weapon that the apostle uses in this case? The dignified place in the glory that God designs for the Christian: “Know ye not that we shall judge the world — judge angels?” Were such going before the Gentiles? Thus is seen how practical all truth is, and how God casts the bright light of the approaching day on the smallest matters of the life of today.

Again, there was no quarter in the world where personal purity was more unknown than at Corinth. Indeed, such were the habits of the ancient world, it would only defile the ears and minds of God’s children to have any proofs of the depravity in which the world then lay, and that too in its best estate, the wisest and the greatest not excepted, — those, alas. whose writings are in the hands of the youth of our day, and more than ever, perhaps, in their hands. Those wits, poets, and philosophers of heathen antiquity lived in habitual, yea, often in unnatural grossness, and thought nothing of it. It is a danger for the saints of God to be tinctured by the atmosphere of the world outside when the first fervour of grace cools, and they begin to take up their old habits. It was certainly so at Corinth.

Accordingly the believers there were betrayed into their former uncleanness of life when the heavenly light got

dim. And how does the apostle deal with this? He recalls to them the Holy Spirit's dwelling in them. What a truth, and of what force to the believer! He does not say simply that they were redeemed, though he brings it in also; still less does he merely reason on the moral heinousness of the sin; neither does he cite the law of God that condemned it. He presses upon them that which was proper to them as Christians. It was no question of man, let him be Gentile or Jew, but of a Christian. Thus he sets before them the distinctive Christian blessing — the Holy Ghost dwelling in the believer, and making his body (not his spirit but his body) a temple of the Holy Ghost; for here was precisely where the enemy seems to have misled these Corinthians. They affected to think they might be pure in spirit, but do what they liked with their bodies. But, answers the apostle, it is the body which is the temple of the Holy Ghost. The body belongs to the Lord and Saviour; the body, therefore, and not the spirit only, He claims now. No doubt that the spirit be occupied with Christ is a grand matter; but the licentious flesh of man would talk, at any rate, about the Lord, and at the same time indulge in evil. This is set aside by the blessed fact that the Holy Ghost even now dwells in the Christian, and this on the ground of his being bought with a price. Thus the very call to holiness ever keeps the saint of God in the sense of his immense privileges as well as of his perfect deliverance.

1 Corinthians 7 naturally leads from this into certain questions that had been proposed to the apostle touching marriage and slavery — questions which had to do with the various relationships of life. The apostle accordingly gives us what he had learned from the Lord,

as well as what he could speak of as a commandment of the Lord, distinguishing in the most beautiful manner, not between inspired and non-inspired, but between revelation and inspiration. All the word is inspired; there is no difference as to this. There is no part of Scripture that is less inspired than another. “All (every) scripture is given by inspiration of God;” but all is not His revelation. We must distinguish between parts revealed and the whole inspired. When a thing is revealed of God, it is absolutely new truth, and of course is the commandment of the Lord. But the inspired word of God contains the language of all sorts of men, and very often the conversation of wicked men — nay, of the devil I need not say that all this is not a revelation; but God communicates what Satan and wicked men say (as for instance Pilate’s words to our Lord and the Jews). None of these evidently was that which is called a revelation; but the Holy Ghost inspired the writers of the book to give us exactly what each of these said, or revealed what was in the mind of God about them. Take, for example, the book of Job, in which occur the sayings of his friends. What intelligent reader could think that they were in any way authorised communicators of the mind of God? They say sometimes very wrong things, and sometimes wise, and often things that do not in the smallest degree apply to the case. Every word of the book of Job is inspired; but did all the speakers utter necessarily the mind of God? Did not one of the speakers condemn one or other of the rest? Need one reason on such facts? This, no doubt, makes a certain measure of difficulty for a soul at the first blush; but on maturer consideration all becomes plain and harmonious, and the word of God is enhanced in our eyes.

And so it is in this chapter, where the apostle gives both the commandment of the Lord, and his own matured spiritual judgment, which he expressly says was not the commandment of the Lord. Still he was inspired to give his judgment as such. Thus the whole chapter is inspired, one part of it just as much as another. There is no difference in inspiration. What was written by the different inspired instruments is of God as absolutely as if He had written it all without them. There is no degree in the matter. There can be no difference in inspiration. But in the inspired word of God there is not always revelation. Sometimes it is a record which the Spirit gave a man to make of what he had seen and heard, sometimes he recorded by the Spirit what no man could have seen or heard. Sometimes it was a prophecy of the future, sometimes a communication of God's present mind according to His eternal purpose. But all is equally and divinely inspired.

The apostle then lays down — at least as far as may be here briefly sketched — that while there are cases where it is a positive duty to be married, undisguisedly there was a better place of undivided devotedness to Christ. Blessed is he who is given. thus to serve the Lord without let: still it must be the gift of God. The Lord Jesus had laid down the same principle Himself. In Matthew 19, it is needless to say, you have the selfsame truth in another form.

Again, while the Lord employs the apostle thus to give us both His own commandment and His mind, the general principle is stated as to the relationships of life. It is broadly laid down that one should remain in that condition in which he is called, and for a very blessed reason. Supposing one were a slave even, he is already,

if a Christian, a freeman of Christ. You must remember that in these days there were everywhere bondmen: those that then ruled the. world took them from all classes and all countries There were bondmen highly educated, and once in a high position of life. Need it be said that often these bondmen rose up against their cruel masters? The very knowledge of Christ, and the possession of conscious truth, if grace did not counteract mightily, would tend to increase their sense of horror at their position. Suppose, for instance, a refined person, with the truth of God communicated to his soul, was the slave of one living in all the filth of heathenism, what a trial it would be to serve in such a position! The apostle urges the truth of that liberty in Christ which Christendom has well-nigh forgotten — that if I am Christ's servant I am emancipated already. Match if you can the manumission he has got. Twenty millions will procure no such emancipation. At the same time, if my master allows me liberty, let me use it rather. Is it not a remarkable style of speech and feeling? The Christian, even if a slave, possesses the best freedom after all: anything else is but circumstantial. On the other hand, if you are a freeman, take care how you use your liberty: use it as the Lord's bondman. The freeman is reminded of his bondmanship; the bondman is reminded of his freedom. What a wonderful antithesis of man is the Second Man! How it traverses all the thoughts, circumstances, and hopes of flesh!

Then he brings before us the different relationships at the end of the chapter, as they are affected by the coming of the Lord. And there is nothing which shows more the importance of that hope as a practical power. There is not only the direct but the indirect allusion

when the heart is filled with an object; and the indirect is a yet stronger witness of the place it holds than the direct. A mere hint connects itself with that which is your joy and constant expectation; whereas when a thing is little before the heart you require to explain, prove, and insist upon it. But this chapter brings vividly before them how all outward things pass away, even the fashion of this world. Time is short. It is too late either to make much of scenes so changing, or to seek this thing or that here below with such a morrow before our eyes. Hence he calls on those who had wives to be as those who had none, on those who were selling and buying to be above all the objects that made up the sum of business. In short, he puts Christ and His coming as the reality, and all else as the shadows, transitions, movements of a world that even now crumbles underneath us. No wonder that he follows all up at the end with his own judgment, — that the man most blessed is he who has the least entanglement, and is the most thoroughly devoted to Christ and His service.

Next in 1 Corinthians 8 he begins to take up another danger for the Corinthian saints. They had the sound of the truth ringing in their ears; and assuredly there are few sounds sweeter than the liberty of the Christian. But what is more liable to abuse? They had abused power to self-exaltation; they were now turning liberty to license. But there is a solemn fact which none can afford to forget as to both power and liberty — that without responsibility nothing is more ruinous than either. Herein lay the sad failure of these saints. In the sense of responsibility they were utterly wanting They seem to have forgotten completely that the Lord from whom the liberty had come is the One in whose sight, and for

whose glory, and according to whose will, all power was to be used. The apostle recalls them to this; but he takes up their license in going into heathen temples, and eating things offered to idols, not first of all on the high ground of the Lord, but on account of their brethren. In their boasted liberty, and because they knew an idol was nothing, they considered that they might go anywhere, and do what they pleased. Nay, not so, cries the apostle; you must consider your brother. There is many a disciple who, far from knowing how vain idolatry is, thinks a good deal of the idol. Thus, you that know so much, if you make light of going here and there, will induce other disciples to follow your steps who may slip into idolatry through it, and thus a brother perish for whom Christ died; and what is the liberty of one who is instructed may prove the extreme ruin of one who is equally a believer in the Lord. Thus he looks at the thing in its full character and ultimate tendency if unchecked. Grace, as we know, can arrest these tendencies, and avert the evil results.

In 1 Corinthians 9 he interrupts the course of his argument by an appeal to his own place as an apostle. Some were beginning to question his apostolate. It was not that he in the slightest degree forgot his call by God’s will to that special service; neither was he insensible to the blessed liberty in which he was serving the Lord. He could lead about a sister-wife like another; he had foregone this for the Lord’s sake. He could look for support from the church of God; he preferred to work with his own hands. So in the second epistle to the Corinthians he begs them to forgive the wrong; for he would not accept anything from them. They were not in a condition to be entrusted with such a gift. Their state

was such, and God had so overruled it in His ways, that the apostle had received nothing from them. This fact he uses in order to humble them because of their pride and licentiousness.

The course of this chapter then touches on his apostolic place, and at the same time his refusal to use the rights of it. Grace can forego all questions of right. Conscious of what is due, it asserts rights for others, but refuses to use them for itself. Such was the spirit and the faith of the apostle. And now he shows what he felt as to practical state and walk. Far from being full of his knowledge, far from only using his place in the church for the assertion of his dignity and for immunity from all trouble and pain here below, he on the contrary was as one under the law to meet him that was under it; he was as a Gentile to meet him that was free from law (that is, a Gentile). Thus he was a servant of all that he might save some. Besides, he lets them know the spirit of a servant, which was so lacking in the Corinthians in spite of their gifts; for it is not the possession of a gift, but love which serves and delights in service. The simple fact of knowing that you have a gift may and often does minister to self-complacency. The grand point is to have the Lord before you, and when others are thought of, it is in the love which has no need to seek greatness, or to a et it. The love of Christ proves its greatness by serving others.

This, then, was the spirit of that blessed servant of the Lord. He reminds them of another point — that he was himself diligent in keeping his body in subjection. He was like a man with a race that was going to be run, and who gets his body into training. He puts this in the strongest way, “Lest that by any means, when I have

preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." Mark the tact of the apostle. When he has something discreditable to say, he prefers to say it about himself; when he has something pleasing to say, he loves to put it with regard to others. So here he says, "Lest I myself become a castaway," not "you." He meant their profit, no doubt; his aim was for them to have their own consciences searched by it. If Paul even was exercising himself to have a conscience void offence; if Paul was keeping his body in subjection, how much more did these men need it? They were abusing all the comfort that Christianity brings, to live at ease and play the gentleman, if one may speak according to modern language. They had not entered in the smallest degree into the spirit of the moral glory of Christ humbled here below. They had dislocated the cross from Christianity. They had severed themselves from the power of service. Thus they were in the utmost possible jeopardy; but the apostle, who had the blessedness of Christ before him, and the fellowship of His sufferings is scarce another had like him, — even he used all diligence of heart, and held a tight rein over himself. Faithful man as he was, he allowed himself none of these licenses. Liberty indeed he prized, but it was not going here and there to feasts of idols. He was free to serve Christ, and time was short: what had such an one to do with heathen temples?

Thus he wants them to feel their danger, but first of all he begins with himself. He was free but watchful; and he was jealous over himself, the greater the grace shown him. It was not that he in the smallest degree doubted his security in Christ, as some so foolishly say; or that such as have eternal life may lose it again. But it is plain that men who merely take the place of having eternal

life may, and often do, abandon that place. Those who have eternal life prove it by godliness; those who have it not prove the lack of it by indifference to holiness, and lack of that love which is of God. So the apostle shows that all his knowledge of the truth, far from making him careless, prompted him to yet greater earnestness, and to daily denial of himself. This is a very important consideration for us all (I press it more especially on the young in such a day as this); and the greater the knowledge of the saints, the more they need to keep it in view.

The apostle draws their attention to another warning in the history of Israel. These had eaten of the same spiritual meat, for so he calls it; they had the heaven-sent manna, — had drunk of the same spiritual drink; yet what became of them? How many thousands of them perished in the wilderness? The apostle is approaching far closer to their state. He began with application to his own case, and now he points to Israel as a people sanctified to Jehovah. At length the word is, “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful.” This was a great comfort, but it was also a serious caution. “God is faithful who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able.” It is in vain, therefore, to plead circumstances as an excuse for sin. “But [He] will, with the temptation, also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it. Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry.” He makes it plain that he is, with characteristic address, dealing with their little-exercised consciences from the statement of his own earnest vigilance over his ways, and then from the sad and

solemn history of Israel judged of the Lord. Thus, too, he goes forward into new ground, — the deeper spiritual motives, the appeal to Christian affection as well as to faith. The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? He begins with that which most nearly touches the heart. It would have been an order more natural, if one may so say, to speak of the body of Christ; as we know in the Lord's supper habitually, there is that which brings before us first the body and then the blood. The departure from what may be called the historical order makes the emphasis incomparably greater. More than that, the first appeal is founded on the blood of Christ, the answer of divine grace to the deepest need of a soul found in its guilt before God and covered with defilement. Was this to be slighted? "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" He does not here say, "the blood" or the "body of the Lord." This we find in 1 Corinthians 11; but it is here Christ, because it becomes a question of grace. "The Lord" brings in the idea of authority. This, then, is evidently an immense advance in dealing with the subject. Accordingly he now develops it, not on the ground of injury to a brother, but as a breach of fellowship with such a Christ, and indifference to His immense love. But he does not forget His authority: "Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table and of the table of demons." It is not simply the love of Christ, but His full authority as the Lord. The apostle contrasts two mighty powers that were contesting — demons, on the one hand, a power stronger than man, struggling as to him here below; and, on the other hand, there was the

Lord that had shed His blood for them, but the Lord of all who should judge quick and dead. Hence he follows up with a comprehensive and simple principle, but full of liberty withal, that in going into the market you need ask no questions. If I do not know that the food has been connected with idols, the idol is nothing to me; but the moment I know it, it is no longer the question of an idol but a demon; and a demon, be assured, is a very real being indeed. Thus what the apostle insists on amounts to this, that their vaunted knowledge was short indeed. Whenever a person boasts, you will in general find. that he particularly fails precisely where he boasts most. If you set up for great knowledge, this will be the point in which you may be expected to break down. If you set up for exceeding candour, the next thing we may well dread to hear is that you have played very false. The best thing is to see that we give ourselves credit for nothing. Let Christ be all our boast. The sense of our own littleness and of His perfect grace is the way, and the only way, to go on well. “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?”

Then in 1 Corinthians 11 we enter on another point. It would seem that the sisters at Corinth gave them a deal of trouble, and that they had forgotten entirely their due relative place. No doubt the men were at least as much to blame. It is hardly possible that women should ever put themselves forward in the church unless Christian men have deserted their true, responsible position and public action. It is the man’s place to guide; and although women may assuredly be far more useful in certain cases, still, unless the man guides, what an evident departure from the order God has assigned to

them both! How complete a desertion of the relative position in which they were placed from the first! Thus it was at Corinth. Among the heathen, women played a most important part, and in no quarter of the world, perhaps, so prominent a one as there. Need it be said that this was to their deep shame? There was no city in which they were so degraded as that in which the attained such conspicuous and unnatural prominence. And how does the apostle meet this new feature? He brings in Christ. This is what decides all. He affirms the everlasting principles of God, and he adds that which has so brightly been revealed in and by Christ. He points out that Christ is the image and the glory of God, and that the man stands in an analogous place as connected with and distinguished from the woman. That is to say, the woman's place is one of unobtrusiveness, and in fact, she is most effective where she is least seen. The man, on the contrary, has a public part — a rougher and ruder task, no doubt — one that may not at all bring into play the finer affections, but which demands a calmer and more comprehensive judgment. The man has the duty of the outward rule and administration.

Accordingly he marks the first departure from what was right by the woman's losing the sign of her subjection. She was to have a covering, on her head; she was to have that which indicated as a sign that she was subject to another. The man seemed to have failed just in the opposite way; and although this may seem a very little thing, what a wonderful thing it is, and what power it shows, to be able to combine in the same epistle eternal things and the very smallest matter of personal decorum, the wearing of long hair or short, the use of a covering on the head or not! How truly it marks God and

His word!! Men. would scorn to combine them both in the same epistle; it seems so petty and so incongruous. But it is the littleness of man which calls for big matters to make him important; but the smallest things of God have significance when they bear on the glory of Christ, as they always do. In the first place, it was out of order that a woman should prophesy with her head uncovered; man's place was to do so. He was the image and the glory of God. The apostle connects it all with first principles, going up to the creation of Adam and Eve in a very blessed manner, and above all bringing in the second Man, the last Adam. Did they think to improve on both?

The latter part of the chapter takes up not the relative place of the man and the woman, but the supper of the Lord, and so the saints gathered together. The first part of it, as is evident, has nothing to do with the assembly, and thus does not dispose of the question whether a woman should prophesy there. In fact, nothing is said or implied in the early verses of the assembly at all. The point primarily mooted is of her prophesying after the manner of a man, and this is done with the greatest possible wisdom. Her prophesying is not absolutely shut out. If a woman has a gift for prophecy, which she certainly may have as well as a man, for what is it given of the Lord but for exercise? Certainly such an one ought to prophesy. Who could say the gift of prophecy given to a woman is to be laid up in a napkin? Only she must take care how she does exercise it. First of all, he rebukes the unseemly way in which it was done — the woman forgetting that she was a woman, and the man that he is responsible not to act as a woman. They seem to have reasoned in a petty way at Corinth, that because

a woman has a gift no less than a man, she is free to use the gift just as a man might. This is in principle wrong; for after all a woman is not a man, nor like one officially, say what you please. The apostle sets aside the whole basis of the argument as false; and we must never hear reasoning which overthrows what God has ordained. Nature ought to have taught them better. But he does not dwell on this; it was a withering rebuke even to hint at their forgetfulness of natural propriety.

Then, in the latter verses, we have the supper of the Lord, and there we find the saints expressly said to be gathered together. This naturally leads the way to the spiritual gifts that are treated of in 1 Corinthians 12. As to the supper of the Lord, happily I need not say many words to you. It is, by the great mercy of God, familiar to most of us; we live, I may say, in the enjoyment of it, and know it to be one of the sweetest privileges God vouchsafes us here below. Alas! this very feast had furnished occasion, in the fleshly state of the Corinthians, to a most humiliating abuse. What led to it was the Agape, as it was styled; for in those days there was a meal which the Christians used to take together. Indeed, the social character of Christianity never can be overlooked without loss, but in an evil state it is open to much abuse. Everything that is good may be perverted; and it never was intended to hinder abuse by extinguishing that which was only to be maintained aright in the power of the Spirit of God. No rules, no abstinence, no negative measures, can glorify God, or make His children spiritual; and it is only by the power of the Holy Ghost in producing a sense of responsibility to the Lord as well as of His grace that saints are duly kept. So it was then at Corinth, that the meeting for the

Lord's Supper became mingled with an ordinary meal, where the Christians ate and drank together. They were glad to meet — at any rate, originally it was so, when love was gratified with the company of each other. Being not merely young Christians, but unwatchful and then lax, this gave rise to sad abuse. Their old habits re-asserted their influence. They were accustomed to the feasts of the heathen, where people thought nothing whatever of getting drunk, if it was not rather meritorious. It was in some of their mysteries considered a wrong to the god for his votary not to get drunk, so debased beyond all conception were the heathen in their notions of religion.

Accordingly these Corinthian brethren had by little and little got on until some of them had fallen into intemperance on the occasion of the Eucharist; not, of course, simply by the wine drank at the table of the Lord, but through the feast that accompanied it. Thus the shame of their drunkenness fell upon that Holy Supper; and hence the apostle regulated, that from that time forward there should be no such feast coupled with the Lord's Supper. If they wished to eat, let them eat at home; if they came together in worship, let them remember it was to eat of the Lord's body, and to drink of the Lord's blood. He puts it in the strongest terms. He does not feel it needful or suitable to speak of "the figure" of the Lord's body. The point was to make its grace and holy impressiveness duly felt. It was a figure, no doubt; but.still, writing to men who were at least wise enough to judge aright here, he gives all its weight, and the strongest expression of what was meant. So Jesus had said. Such it was in the sight of God. He that partook undiscerningly and without self-judgment was

guilty of the body and blood of the Lord Jesus. It was a sin against Him. The intention of the Lord, the true principle and practice for a saint, is to come, examining his ways, trying his springs of action, putting himself to the proof; and so let him eat (not stay away, because there is much discovered that is humbling). The guard and warning is, that if there be not self-judgment, the Lord will judge. How low is the state of things to which all saints tend, and not the Corinthians only! There ought to have been, I suppose, an interposition of the church's judgment between the Christian's lack of self-judgment and the Lord's chastenings; but, alas! man's duty was altogether lacking. It was from no want of gifts. They had no sense of the place God designed self-judgment to hold; but the Lord never fails.

In 1 Corinthians 12 accordingly, the apostle enters on a full statement of these spiritual powers. He shows that the distinctive feature of that which the Spirit of God leads to is the confession, not exactly of Christ, but of Jesus as Lord. He takes the simplest and most necessary ground — that of His authority. This is observable in verse 3: "Wherefore I give you to understand that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed, and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost." Impossible that the Spirit should dishonour, yea, that He should not exalt, Him who humbled Himself for God's glory. "Now, there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord; and there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God that worketh all in all." They had forgotten all this. They were pre-occupied with human thoughts, with this clever Jew and that able Gentile. They had lost sight of

God Himself working in their midst. The apostle points out that if there were different services, if distinct gifts to one and another, it was for the common good of all. He illustrates the nature of the church as a body with its various members subserving the interests of the body and the will of the head. “By one Spirit were we all baptized into one body;” it is not the Holy Ghost merely making many members, but “one body.” Accordingly he confronts with this divine aim their misuse of their spiritual powers, — independence one of another, disorder as to women, self-glorification, and the like, as we see in 1 Corinthians 14 the detail. He presses that the least comely members, those that are least seen, may be of more importance than any others; just as in the natural body some of the most vital parts are not even visible. What would a man do without a heart, or liver, or lungs? So in the spiritual body there are members which are most important and not seen at all. But men are apt to value most those which make a showy appearance. Thus he rebukes the whole tenor and spirit of Corinthian vanity; at the same time he maintains their place of blessing and responsibility to the last. After all their faults he does not hesitate to, say, “Now ye are the body of Christ.” This way of dealing with souls has been grievously enfeebled in the present day. Grace is so feebly known, that the first thought you will find amongst godly people is what they ought to be; but the ground and weapon of the apostle Paul is what they are by God’s grace. “Ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular; and God hath set some in the church.” It was far from his mind in the least to deny it. Observe here an important use of the expression, “the church.” It cannot be the local assembly, because, looking at Corinth, no apostles were there. Whatever

might be the providential arrangements outside in the world, he is looking at the assembly of God here on earth; and it is the assembly as a whole, the Corinthian assembly being, as every true assembly is, a kind, of representative, of the church universally. It is the church of God here below; not merely churches, though that was true also.

Thus we can look at what the church will be by-and-by — glorified and absolutely perfect. We can also look at a particular local assembly. Besides there is this most important sense of the church never to be forgotten — namely, that divine institution viewed as a whole on. earth. Members of Christ no doubt compose it; but there is His body, the assembly as a whole, in which God works here below. Such is the reason why we do not find in this epistle evangelists or pastors, because it is not a question of what is needed to bring souls in or lead them on. He looks at the church as a thing already, subsisting as the witness of the power of God before men. Therefore it was not at all necessary to dwell on those gifts which are the fruit of Christ's love to and cherishing of the church. It is regarded as a vessel of power for the maintenance of God's glory, and responsible for this here below. Therefore tongues miracles, healings, the use of outward powers, are largely dwelt on here.

But we pass on to another and a still more important theme, a wonderfully full picture even for God's word, that most perfect and beautiful unfolding of divine love which we have in 1 Corinthians 13. After all, if the Corinthians had coveted gifts, they had not coveted the best But even if we may desire the best gifts, there is — better still; and the best of all is charity — love.

Accordingly we have this in the most admirable manner brought out both in what it is and in what it is not, and that too as corrective of the wrong desires of the Corinthians, and the evil spirit which had manifested itself in the exercise of their gifts; so that what seems to be an interruption is the wisest of parentheses between chapter 12, which shows us the distribution of gifts and their character, and chapter 14, which directs the due exercise of gifts in the assembly of God. There is but one safe motive-power for their use, even love. Without it even a spiritual gift only tends to puff up its owner, and to corrupt those who are its objects.

Hence 1 Corinthians 14 thus opens: “Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy.” And why? Prophecy seemed to be somewhat despised amongst the Corinthians. Miracles and tongues were liked, because these made themselves of importance. Such wonders made men stare, and drew general attention to those who were invested evidently with a superhuman energy. But the apostle lays it down, that the gifts which suppose the exercise of spiritual understanding have a far higher place. He himself could speak more tongues than they all. It need hardly be added that he did more miracles than any of them. Still, what he valued most was prophesying. We must not suppose that this gift simply means a man preaching. Prophesying never means preaching. More than this, prophesying is not simply teaching. It, no doubt, is teaching; but it is a good deal more. Prophesying is that spiritual application of the word of God to the conscience which puts the soul in His presence, and makes manifest as light to the hearer the mind of God. There is a great deal of valuable teaching, exhortation,

and application, that has no such character. It is all very true, but it does not put the soul in the presence of God; it gives no such absolute certainty of God's mind flashing on the condition and judging the state of the heart before Him. I do not speak now of the unconverted, though prophesying might affect such as well as the converted. The direct object of it was, of course, the people of God; but in the course of the chapter the unbeliever is shown coming into the assembly and falling on his face, and owning that God was among them of a truth. Such is the genuine effect. The man finds himself judged in the presence of God.

There is no need to enter into all that this chapter brings before us, but it may be well to observe that we have giving of thanks and blessing, as well as singing and prayer. Prophesying and the rest are brought in as all pertaining to the Christian assembly. What was not directly edifying, as speaking in a tongue, is forbidden unless one could interpret. I doubt very much whether there was any revelation after the scheme of Scripture was complete. To suppose anything revealed, when that which is commonly called the canon was closed, would be an impeachment of God's purpose in it. But till the last portion of His mind was written down in a permanent form for the church, we can quite understand His goodness in allowing a special revelation now and then. This gives no warrant to look for anything of the sort at any time subsequent to the completion of the New Testament. Again, it is plain from this that there are certain modifications of the chapter. Thus so far it is true that if anything has, through the will of God, terminated (for instance, miracles, tongues, or revelations), it is evident that such workings of the Spirit

ought not to be looked for; but this does not in the smallest degree set aside the Christian assembly or the exercise according to God's will of what the Spirit still distinctly gives. And undoubtedly He does continue all that is profitable, and for God's glory, in the present state of His testimony and of His church here below. Otherwise the church sinks into a human institute.

In the end of the chapter a very important principle is laid down. It is vain for people to plead the mighty power of God as an excuse for anything disorderly. This is the great difference between the power of the Spirit and the power of a demon. A demon's power may be uncontrollable: chains, fetters, all the power of man outside, may utterly fail to bind a man who is filled with demons. It is not so with the power of the Spirit of God. Wherever the soul walks with the Lord, the power of the Spirit of God on the contrary is always connected with His word, and subject to the Lord Jesus. No man can rightly pretend that the Spirit forces him to do this or that unscripturally. There is no justification possible against Scripture; and the more fully the power is of God, the less will a man think of setting aside that perfect expression of God's mind. All things therefore are to be done decently and in order — an order which Scripture must decide. The only aim, as far as we are concerned, that God endorses, is that all be done to edification, and not for self-display.

The next theme (1 Cor. 15) is a most serious subject doctrinally, and of capital importance to all. Not only had the devil plunged the Corinthians into confusion upon moral points, but when men begin to give up a good conscience, it is no wonder if the next danger is making shipwreck of the faith. Accordingly, as Satan had

accomplished the first mischief among these saints, it was evident the rest threatened soon to follow. There were some among them who denied the resurrection — not a separate state of the soul, but the rising again of the body. In fact the resurrection must be of the body. What dies is to be raised. As the soul does not die, “resurrection” would be quite out of place; to the body it is necessary for God’s glory as well as man. And how does the apostle treat this? As he always does. He brings Christ in. They had no thought of Christ in the case. They seem to have had no wish to deny the resurrection of Christ; but should not a Christian have at once used Christ to judge all by? The apostle at once introduces His person and work as a test. if Christ did not rise, there is no resurrection, and therefore no truth in the Gospel; “your faith is vain: you are yet in your sins.” Even they were quite unprepared for so dreadful a conclusion. Shake the resurrection and Christianity goes. Having reasoned thus, he next points out that the Christian waits for the time of joy and glory and blessing for the body by-and-by. To give up resurrection is to surrender the glorious hope of the Christian, and to be the most miserable of men.. For what could be more cheerless than to give up all present enjoyment without that blessed hope, for the future at Christ’s coming? Thus strongly was the whole complex nature of man before the apostle’s mind in speaking of this hope of blessedness by-and-by.

Then, somewhat abruptly, instead of discussing the matter any more, he unfolds a most weighty revelation of truth “But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the. resurrection of

the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." True, the kingdom is not yet come for which we are waiting, but it 'will come. See how all truth hangs together, and how Satan labours to make a consistency in error. He knows the weakness of man's mind. Nobody likes to be inconsistent. You may be dragged into it, but you are never comfortable when you have a sense of inconsistency about you. Hence, after one. error gains empire over the mind of man, he is ready to embrace others just to make all consistent.

Such was the danger here among the Corinthians. They had been offended by the apostle's supreme indifference to all that is of esteem among men. His habits of speech and life were not at all up to the mark that they supposed seemly before the world in a servant of God. Out of this fertile root of evil has the clergy grown. It has been the effort to acquire as much refinement as possible. Holy orders make a man a sort of gentleman if he was not so before. This seems to have been at work in, the minds of these critics of the apostle. Here we find what lay at the bottom of the matter. There is generally a root of evil doctrine where you find people wrong in practice. At any rate, where it is a deliberate, persistent, and systematic error, it will not be merely a practical one, but have a root deep underneath. And this was what now came out at Corinth. It was feebleness about that which, after all, lies at. the very foundation of Christianity. They did not mean to deny the person of Christ or His condition as risen from the dead; but, this is what the enemy meant, and into this their wrong notion tended to drift them. The next step, after denying resurrection for the Christian, would be to deny it about Christ. And here the apostle does not fail to rebuke

them, and in a manner trenchant enough. He (exposes the stupidity of their questions, wise as they flattered themselves to be. How? It is always the danger of man that he is not content to believe; he would like first of all to understand. But this is ruinous in divine things, which are entirely outside sense and reason. All real understanding for the Christian is the fruit of faith.

The apostle does not hesitate in apostrophising the unbeliever, or at any rate, the errorist he has in view, to expose his folly. “Thou fool,” says he, “that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die.” Thus the strongest possible censure falls on these Corinthians, and this for the very matter in which they plumed themselves. Human reasoning is poor indeed outside its own sphere. However, he is not content merely with putting down their speculations; he brings in subsequent and special revelation. The previous part of the chapter had pointed out the connection of Christ’s resurrection with our resurrection, followed by the kingdom which finally gives place in order that God may be all in all. In the latter part of the chapter he adds what had not been explained hitherto, From the early portion we should not have known but that all saints die, and that all rise at Christ’s coming. But this would not be the full truth. It is most true that the dead in Christ rise, of course, but this does not explain about the living saints. He had vindicated the glorious character of the resurrection; he had proved how fundamental, and momentous, and practical, is the truth that the body is to be raised again, which they were disposed to deny as though it were a low thing, and useless even if possible. They imagined the true way to be spiritual was to make much of the spirit of man. God’s way of making us

spiritual is by a simple but strong faith in the resurrection-power of Christ; look to His resurrection as the pattern and spring of our own. Then at the last he adds that he would show them a mystery. On this I must just say a few words in order to develop its force.

The resurrection itself was not a mystery, The, resurrection of just and unjust was a well-known Old Testament truth. It might be founded on Scriptures comparatively few, but it was a fundamental truth of the Old Testament, as the apostle Paul lets us hear in his controversy with the Jews in the Acts of the Apostles. In fact, the Lord Jesus also assumes the same thing in the gospels. But if the raising of the dead saints was known, and even the raising of the wicked dead, the change of the living saints was a truth absolutely unrevealed. Up to this it was not made known, It was a New Testament truth, as this indeed is what is meant by a “mystery.” It was one of those, truths that were kept secret in the Old Testament, but now revealed — not so much a thing difficult to comprehend when stated, as a thing not revealed before. “And behold,” says he, “I show you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.” Evidently this supports and confirms, while it might seem an exception to, the resurrection; but, in point of fact, it gives so much the more force and consistency to the rising of the dead in a very unexpected way. The general truth of the resurrection assuredly does put the sentence of death on all present things to the believer, showing that the earth cannot rightly be the scene of his enjoyment, where all is stamped with death, and that he must wait for the resurrection power of Christ to be applied before he enters the scene where the rest of God will be our rest,

and where there will be nothing but joy with Christ, and even this earth will behold Christ and His saints reigning over it till the eternal day. The addition to this of the New Testament truth of the chance gives immense impressiveness to all, and a fresh force, because it keeps before the Christian the constant expectancy of Christ. “Behold, I show you a mystery” — not now that the dead in Christ shall rise, but “we,” beginning with the “we” “we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed; for this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality.” And “therefore,” as he closes with the practical deduction from it all, “my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work, of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”

The last chapter is now before us, in which the apostle lays down a weighty exhortation as to collections for the saints. He puts it on the ground of their being prospered in any degree, and connects it with the special day of Christian enjoyment, when they gather together for the communion of saints. “Upon the, first day of the week let every one of you lay by in store as he has been prospered, that there be no gatherings when I come.” Need it be said how human influence has dislocated the truth there? No doubt this was precisely what the apostle, or the Holy Ghost rather, discerned to be at work at Corinth, the same mistake that has wrought so malignantly in Christendom; that is to say, personal rank, learning, eloquence, or a great name (as of an

apostle for instance), invoked to call out the generosity of the saints (perhaps, even of the world), and increase the proceeds by all these or like means.

But is there not another danger? Is there no snare for you, beloved brethren? When persons are more or less free from the ordinary incubus of tradition, when they are not so much under the influence of excitement, and of those appeals to the love of being known and of pleasing this or that man, or the cause, or any of those human motives that often do operate, I apprehend that they are exposed to danger in a wholly opposite direction. Do we sufficiently make it a matter of personal responsibility to the Lord, everyone of us, to give, and that in connection with the first day of the week and its blessed surroundings and objects, when we meet at His table? Do we every one of us give as we are prospered by the way? It is very well to keep clear of human influence, but let us see to it that we do not forget that "the Lord has need" of our giving for the purposes He loves here below. And of this I am sure, that if we have rightly cast aside mere human calls, and if we do thank God for the deliverance from worldly influence, and from the power of custom, public opinion, etc., it would be a deep reproach if we did not do double as much now, under the grace that confides in us, as we used to do under the law that used to govern us. Your own consciences must answer whether you can meet the Lord about this matter. I believe that we are in no small danger of settling down in the conviction that our old way was quite wrong, and simply keeping the money in our pockets. It does seem to me, I confess, that bad as human pressure may be in order to raise money, bad as may be a variety of earthly objects in this way or that,

bad as a worldly lavish expenditure is, after all, a selfish personal keeping to ourselves of what we have is the worst thing of all. I am quite persuaded that the danger of the saints of God who have been brought outside the camp lies here, — lest, delivered from what they know to be wrong, they may not seek in this an exercised conscience. Standing in the consciousness of the power of God's grace, they need to be continually looking out that they be devoted to Him. To cease doing what was done in a wrong way, and sometimes for wrong ends too, is not enough. Let there be zealous and vigilant exercise of soul, and enquiry how to carry out right objects in right ways, and so much the more, if indeed a simpler, fuller knowledge of God's grace and of Christ's glory has been given us.

Then we have various forms of ministry noticed. It is not here gifts as such, but persons devoted to labouring in the Lord; for there is a difference between the two things, as this chapter shows us strikingly. For instance, the apostle himself comes before us in ministry with his especial gift and position in the church. Then again, Timothy is there, his own son in the faith, not only an evangelist, but with a charge over elders at length, to a certain extent acting occasionally for the apostle Paul. Again, we have the eloquent Alexandrian thus introduced: "As touching our brother Apollos I greatly desired him to come unto you, but his will was not at to come at this time." How delicate and considerate the grace of Paul who wished Apollos to go to Corinth then, and of Apollos who wished not to go — under the circumstances! On the face of the case we have the working of liberty and responsibility in their mutual relations; and the apostle Paul is the very one to tell us

that Apollos's will was not to go as he himself wished at this time. It was no question of one in a place of worldly superiority regulating the movements of another of subordinate degree. The apostle did express his strong desire for Apollos to go; but Apollos must stand to his Master, and be assured that he was using a wisdom greater than that of man's. Finally, we observe another character of service lower down in "the house of Stephanas." This was a simpler case and a humbler position, but very real before God, whatever the danger of being slighted of men. Hence, I think, the word of exhortation — "I beseech you, brethren, (ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the first-fruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints,)" etc. They gave themselves up in an orderly manner to this work. "That ye submit yourselves," not merely to Timothy or to Apollos, but to such, to the simple-hearted Christian men whose desire was to serve the Lord with the measure of power they had, and this proved by their persevering labour. Undoubtedly, in the midst of the difficulties of the church, in the face of the oppositions and disappointment, manifold griefs, enemies, and sources of sorrow and shame, it requires the power of God to go on without being moved by any of these things. It is an easy thing to make a start; but nothing short of the power of God can keep one without wavering at the work in the face of everything to cast down. And this was the question. We may suppose that these Corinthians were troublesome enough. From the statements made in the early part of the epistle it is evident; and so the apostle calls upon them to submit themselves. Evidently there was an unsubject spirit, and those ministered to thought they were just as good as

the house of Stephanas. It is good to submit ourselves “unto such, and to every one that helpeth with us and laboureth.” I am persuaded, beloved brethren, that it is no impeachment of the blessedness of the brotherhood to maintain the speciality of ministry in the Lord. There can be in these matters no more deplorable error than to suppose that there is not to be this godly submission one toward another, according to the place and power that the Lord is pleased to entrust.

The Lord grant that our souls may hold fast the truth here revealed, and in no general or perfunctory way. All I pretend to now is to give a sketch or combination of the parts of the epistle. But may the word itself, and every part of it, sink into our souls and be our joy, that we may not only take the precious truth of such an epistle as the Romans for the peace and joy of our hearts in believing individually, but also may understand our place by faith as of God’s assembly on earth, and with thankful praise as those that call on the name of the Lord — ours as well as theirs — as those that find ourselves practically in need of such exhortations. The Lord give us His own spirit of obeying the Father.

Second Corinthians

2 Corinthians 1. It is impossible to read the two epistles to the Corinthians with the smallest care without perceiving the strong contrast between the wounded tone of the first epistle (the heart aggrieved so much the more because it loved the saints), and now, in the second, that same heart filled with consolation about them from God. This is exceedingly assuring, and it is as evidently divine, the effectual working of God’s own grace.

In human things nothing really shuts out decay. The utmost wise men essay is to put a drag on the progress of corruption, and to stave off as long as may be the too rapid inroads of death. Thanks be to God, it h not so in divine things. There is nothing which so brings out the resources of God as His supremacy over evil in grace, nothing that so manifests His tender mercy and His goodness wherever there is real faith. And spite of the painful disorders of the Corinthians, reality was there. So the apostle, though heart-broken because of their state, would confidently look up to God about them, even in his first so strongly reproving epistle; for it was the Lord Himself who had told him He had much people in that city. There was small appearance of it when he wrote the earlier letter to them; but the Lord was right, as He always is, and the apostle confided in the Lord spite of appearances. He now tastes the joyful fruit of his faith in the recovering grace of the Lord. Hence in this epistle we have not so much as in the former the evidence of their outward disorders. The apostle is not occupied as there with the regulation of the state of the

church as such, but we see souls restored. There is indeed the result of that salutary dealing in the very different state of individuals, and also of the assembly; but very emphatically, whatever might be the effect on the many, to a large extent there is a blessed unfolding of life in Christ in its power and effects.

Thus our epistle reminds us to a certain extent of the epistle to the Philippians, resembling it, though not of course the same, nor by any means of so lofty a character; but nevertheless a state appears wholly different from the downward path which the first epistle had reproved. For this change God had prepared His servant; for He takes in everything in His matchless wisdom and ways. He considers not only those written to, but the one He was employing to write. Assuredly He had dealt with them, but He had also dealt with His servant Paul. It was another sort of dealing, — not without humbling to them, in him withering to nature, without the shame that necessarily befell the saints at Corinth, but so much the more fitting him to go out in love toward them. As he knew what God’s grace had wrought in their hearts, he could the more freely express the sympathy he felt, and, encouraged by all that had been wrought, take up what remained to be accomplished in them. But the unfailing grace of God, that works in the midst of weakness and in the face of death, and had so wrought mightily in him, made the Corinthians very dear to him, and enabled him to bring to bear on their circumstances and their state the most suited comfort that it was ever the mission of that blessed man to minister to the hearts of those that were broken down.

This he now pours forth abundantly, “Blessed be God;” for his heart, surcharged with grief when the first epistle was written, could open, “Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble,” — no matter what, were it through grave faults, were it to their own deep shame and to his grief as once. But now the comfort far overcomes the sorrow, and we are enabled to “comfort them that are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.” Here with a true heart he at once brings in the sufferings of Christ: “For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ. And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation.”

The difference in this from Philippians, to which I have referred, is remarkable. The point in hand there is, that they were working out their own salvation, the apostle being, in a certain sense, completely shut out from them. Unable from circumstances, he there lets them know that he does not mingle himself with them in the same way. Their state did not need it. Undoubtedly this is a difference; but it is only that which is owing to their manhood in grace. Here they wanted more. It was the unfolding of grace in both; but the difference was largely to the credit of His name in the Philippians. It was the proof of their excellent condition that the apostle had such perfect confidence in them, even while he was absolutely precluded from being near them. He was at a distance from them, and had but small prospect of meeting with them shortly.

To the Corinthians he could speak otherwise. He was comparatively near, and was hoping the third time, as he tells us in the latter part of the epistle, to come to them. Nevertheless he interweaves his own experience with theirs in a way which is wonderfully gracious to those who had a heart. “And whether we be afflicted,” he says, “it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation.” Was it not the reckoning of grace? Whatever came on them, it was for their comfort. If affliction, the Lord would turn it to their blessing; if joy and consolation, no less to their blessing. At the same time he lets them know what trouble had come upon himself, and in the most delightful manner turns it to account. Whatever was the might of God that had sustained him when there was nothing on their part to give him comfort, but rather to add to the anguish of his spirit, now that grace was operating in their hearts, he shows how dependant he felt on their prayers. Truly beautiful is grace, and far different from the manner of man.

How blessed to have the working of God not only in Him that is absolute perfection, but in one who feels like ourselves, who had the same nature in the same state that has wrought such continual mischief towards God! At the same time, it is proved by such a one as this servant of God to be only the means of furnishing additional proof in another form that the might of God’s Spirit is without limit, and can work the greatest moral wonders even in a poor human heart. Undoubtedly we should lose much if we had it not in its full perfection in Christ; but how much we should lose if we had not also

the working of grace, not where human nature was itself lovely, not a spot without nor a taint of sin within, but where everything natural was evil, and nothing else; where nevertheless the power of the Holy Ghost wrought in the new man, lifting the believer completely above the flesh. This was the case with the apostle.

At the same time there was the answer of grace in their hearts, though it might be developed comparatively but little. Evidently there was a great deal that required to be set right in them; but they were on the right road. This was a joy to his heart, and so at once he encourages them, and gives them to know how little his heart had turned away from them, how he loved to link himself with them instead of standing aloof from them. “Ye also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons thanks may be given by many on our behalf. For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity,” etc. He had been charged with the contrary. Being a man of remarkable wisdom and power of discernment, he paid the penalty that this must always entail in this world. That is, they imputed it to his ability and natural penetration; and the real power of the Spirit of God was thus merely accredited to flesh.

There was also an imputation of vacillation if not dishonesty. His purpose of visiting Corinth had been set aside. First of all the apostle takes this up in a spirit of self-renunciation, bent on Christ’s glory. Supposing their imputation to be true, supposing Paul had been as fickle-minded a man as his enemies insinuated, if he had said he would come and did not come after all, what then? At any rate his preaching was not thus. The word that Paul preached was not “yea and nay.” In Christ it was “Yea,”

where there is no “nay.” There is no refusal nor failure. There is everything to win, and comfort, and establish the soul in Christ. There is no negation of grace, still less of uncertainty in Christ Jesus the Lord. There is everything that can comfort the sad, attract the hard, and embolden the distrustful. Let it be the very vilest, what is there lacking that can lead on and into the highest place of blessing and enjoyment of God, not only in hope, but even now by the Spirit of God in the face of all adversaries? This was the Christ that he loved to preach. By Him came grace and truth. He at least is absolutely what He speaks. Who or what was so worthy of trust? And this is put in a most forcible way. “For,” says he, “all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen.” It is not a bare literal accomplishment of the promises. This is not the, statement any more than the state of things which is come in now; but as to all the promises of God, it matters not what they may be, in Him is the yea, and in Him the Amen, to the glory of God by us. They have found their every verification in Christ.

Was eternal life promised? In Him was eternal life in its highest form. For what will be eternal life in the millennial day compared with that which was and now is in Jesus? It will be a most real introduction and outshining of eternal life in that day; but still in Christ the believer has it now, and in its absolute perfection. Take, again, remission of sins. Will that display of divine mercy, so needed by and precious to the guilty sinner, be known in the millennium at all comparably with what God has brought in and sends out now in Christ? Take what you please, — say heavenly glory; and is not Christ in it in all perfection? It does not matter, therefore, what may be looked at, “whatever be the promises of God, in

him is the yea, and in him the Amen." It is not said in us. Evidently there are many promises not yet accomplished as regards us. Satan has not lost but acquired, in the dominion of the world, a higher place by the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ; but faith can see in that very act by which he acquired it his eternal downfall. Now is the judgment of the world. The prince of the world is judged, but the sentence is not executed yet. Instead of being dethroned by the cross, he has thereby gained in the world that remarkable place and title. But for all that, whatever the apparent success of the devil, and whatever the delay as to "the promises of God, in Him is the yea, and in Him the Amen, unto the glory of God by us."

But further, the apostle is not content with this alone. He would have them know, having thus described the word which he preached, that which was infinitely dearer to him than his own character. Now he tells them that it was to spare them he had not come to Corinth. This ought to have been a reproof; and it is given in the most delicate manner. It was the sweet result of divine love in his heart. He preferred to tarry or turn aside, rather than to visit the Corinthians in their then condition. Had he come at all, he must have come with a rod, and this he could not endure. He wished to come with nothing but kindness, to blame nobody, to speak of nothing painful and humiliating to them (albeit, in truth, more humiliating to him, for he loved them). And as a parent would be ashamed in his child's shame far more than the child is capable of feeling, so precisely the apostle had this feeling about those he had begotten in the gospel. He loved the Corinthians dearly, spite of all their faults, and he would rather bear their unworthy

suggestions of a fickle mind because he did not visit them at once, than come to censure them in their evil and proud state. He wished to give them time, that he might come with joy.

In 2 Corinthians 2 this is entered into a little more, and the deep anxiety of his heart is shown about them. We may easily gather what an open door for evangelizing is to one who was a great preacher of the gospel, as well as an apostle and a teacher of the Gentiles. Although such an opportunity now offered itself, and was, no doubt, a strong impelling cause to work there, still he had no rest for his spirit. His heart was disturbed about the state of Corinth, and the case that tried him most in their midst. It seemed as if he felt nothing else, as if there was no sufficient call to occupy him in other quarters. He could turn from that most animating and immediate reward to any labourer in this world. Whatever might be the preciousness of presenting Christ to those who knew Him not, to see the manifestation of the glory of Christ in those that did know Him, to see it restored where it was obscured was something even nearer to his heart. The one would be, no doubt, great joy to wretched souls, and the spread of the glory of the Lord in the regions beyond; but here the glory of the Lord had been tarnished in those that bore His name before men; and how could Paul feel this lightly? What pressed so urgently on him? Hence it was that no attraction of gospel service, no promise of work, however fair, that called him elsewhere, could detain him. He felt the deepest affliction about the saints, as he says here, and had no rest in his spirit, because he found not Titus his brother, who had been to see them.

Then, again, among the particular instances which most pressed on him was, his exceeding trouble about the man he had ordered them to put away. For this he had authority from God, and the responsibility of heeding it abides, I need not say, in its entirety for us. We are just as much under that authority as they were. But now that God had wrought in the man who was the chief and grossest evidence of the power of Satan in the assembly, what a comfort to his heart! This sin, unknown even among the Gentiles, and the more shameful as being where the name of the Lord Jesus had been confessed and the Spirit dwelt, became the occasion of the most salutary instruction for all their souls, for they had learnt what becomes God's assembly under such humiliating circumstances. And they had responded to the solemn call pressed on them in the name of the Lord, and had purged out the evil leaven from the midst of their paschal feast. Only now they were in danger on the judicial side. They were disposed to be as over-severe as they had been previously unexercised and lax. Paul would infuse the same spirit of grace towards the penitent offender that filled himself. They had realised at length the shame that had been done to the Lord's glory, and were indignant with themselves as parties to identifying His name, not to speak of themselves, with such scandals. Thus they were slow to forgive the man that had wrought such a wrong, and Satan sought in an opposite way to separate them in heart from the blessed apostle, who had roused them to just feelings after their too long slumber. Just as Paul was horrified at their indifference to sin at first, so now it was impossible but that he must be concerned, lest there should be a failure in grace as a little before in righteousness. But there is nothing like a manifestation of grace to call out grace;

and he lets them know what was his own feeling, not merely about the wrong-doer, but about themselves. “To whom ye forgive anything, I forgive also; for if I forgave anything, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ; lest Satan should gain an advantage over us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.” This is his spirit. It is no longer a command, but a trust reposed in the saints; and when we think of that which is afterwards to appear in this epistle, what was still at work among them as well as what had been, it is certainly a most blessed and beautiful proof of the reality of grace, and of the effects which can be, as they have been, produced by it in the heart of a saint here below. What do we not owe to Jesus?

After having disposed of this matter for the present (for he recurs to it afterwards), he turns to speak of the way in which he was led of God through trial, no matter of what character. let the question be of the man who had wandered so far astray, but was now restored really to the Lord, and to whom he desired that his brethren should publicly confirm their love; or let it be that he is turned aside from gospel work because of his anxiety on their account, he now tells them of the triumph which the Lord gave him to prove everywhere.

This leads in 2 Corinthians 3 to an unfolding of righteousness in Christ, but in a style considerably different from what we found in the Epistle to the Romans. There the broad and deep, foundations were exposed to view, as well as the Spirit’s power and liberty consequent on the soul’s submission to Christ’s work. The proposition was — God just and the justifier, not by blood only, but in that resurrection power in which

Christ rose from among the dead. According to no less a work of such a Saviour we are justified.

But in this chapter the Spirit goes higher still. He connects righteousness with heavenly glory, while at the same time this righteousness and glory are shown to be perfectly in grace as regards us. It is not in the slightest degree glory without love (as sometimes people might think of glory as a cold thing); and if it withers up man from before it, — the fleshly nature no doubt, it is only with a view to the enjoyment of greater vigour, through the power of Christ resting on us in our detected and felt weakness.

The chapter opens with an allusion to the habit so familiar to God's church of sending and requiring a letter of commendation. "Do we begin again to commend ourselves? or need we, as some others, epistles of commendation to you, or letters of commendation from you?" Not at all. And what then is his letter of commendation? Themselves. What confidence he must have had in the gracious power of God, that his letter of commendation could be the Corinthian saints! He does not look around to choose the most striking instances of those converted by him. He takes what was perhaps the most humiliating scene that he had ever experienced, and he points even to these saints as a letter of commendation. And why so? Because he knew the power of life in Christ. He was reassured. In the darkest day he had looked up to God with confidence about it, when any other heart had failed utterly; but now that light was beginning to dawn upon them, yet still but dawned so to speak afresh, he could boldly say that they were not merely his, but Christ's, letter. Bolder and bolder evidently he becomes

as he thinks of the name of the Lord and of that enjoyment which he had found, and found afresh, in the midst of all his troubles. Hence he says, “Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.” There were not wanting there those that endeavoured to impose legal principles on the Corinthians. Not that here it was the strongest or subtlest effort of the enemy. There was more of Sadduceeism at work among them than of Pharisaism; but still not infrequently Satan finds room for both, or a link between both. His ministry was emphatically not that which could find its type in any form of the law, or in what was written upon stone, but on the fleshy table of the heart by the Spirit of the living God. Accordingly this gives rise to a most striking contrast of the letter that kills and of the spirit that gives life. As is said here, “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; who also hath made us able ministers of the new covenant.” Then lest any should conceive that this was the accomplishment of the Old Testament, he lets us know it is no more than the spirit of that covenant, not the letter. The covenant itself in its express terms awaits both houses of Israel in a day not yet arrived; but meanwhile Christ in glory anticipates for us that day, and this is, of course, “not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.”

Next, we find a long parenthesis; for the true connection of the end of verse 6 is with verse 17, and all between

properly forms a digression. I shall read the words outside the parenthesis, in order to make this manifest. He had said that “the spirit giveth life.” Now the Lord (he adds) “is that spirit;” which last word ought to be printed with a small “s,” not a capital. Some Bibles have this, I dare say, correctly; but others, like the one in my hand, incorrectly. “That spirit” does not mean the Holy Ghost, though it is He alone that could enable a soul to seize the spirit under the letter. But the apostle, I believe, means that the Lord Jesus is the spirit of the different forms that are found in the law. Thus he turns aside in a remarkable but characteristic manner; and as he intimates in what sense he was the minister of the new covenant (i.e. not in a mere literal fashion but in the spirit of it), so he connects this spirit with the forms of the law all through. There is a distinct divine purpose or idea couched under the legal forms, as their inner spirit, and this, he lets us know, is really Christ the Lord “Now the Lord is that spirit.” This it is that ran through the whole legal system in its different types and shadows.

Then he brings in the Holy Ghost, — “and where” (not simply “that spirit,” but) “the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.” There is a notable difference between the two expressions. “The Spirit of the Lord” is the Holy Spirit that characterizes Christianity; but underneath the letter of the Jewish system, faith seized “the spirit” that referred to Christ. There was the outward ritual and commandment with which flesh made itself content; but faith always looked to the Lord, and saw Him, however dimly, beyond the letter in which God marked indelibly, and now makes known by ever accumulating proofs, that He from the first pointed to the One that was coming. A greater than anything then manifested was there;

underneath the Moseses and the Aarons, the Davids and the Solomons, underneath what was said and done, signs and tokens converged on One that was promised, even Christ.

And now “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.” This was unknown under the Levitical order of things. There was a veiled form of truth, and now it is manifest. The Holy Ghost brings us into the power and enjoyment of this as a present thing. Where He is, there is liberty.

But looking back for a moment at the parenthesis, we see that the direct effect of the law (no matter what may be the mercy of God that sustained, spite of its curse) is in itself a ministration of death. Law can only condemn; it can but enforce death as on God’s part. It never was in any sense the intention of God by the law to introduce either righteousness or life. Nor these only, but the Spirit He now brings in through Christ. “If the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away,” — it was not at all an abiding thing, but merely temporary in its own nature, — “how shall not the ministration of the Spirit be, rather glorious? For if the ministration of condemnation” (another point after the ministration of death; if it then) “be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory.” It is not simply the mercy of God, you observe, but the ministration of righteousness. When the Lord was here below, what was the character of His ministration? It was grace; not yet a ministration of righteousness. Of course, He was emphatically righteous, and everything

He did was perfectly consistent with the character of the Righteous. Never was there the smallest deflection from righteousness in aught He ever did or said. Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. But when He went up to heaven on the footing of redemption through His blood, He had put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself: the ministration was not of grace merely, but of righteousness. In short, righteousness without redemption must destroy, not save; grace before redemption could not deliver, but at most forbear to judge; but righteousness founded on redemption provides the stablest possible basis for the believer.

Whatever the mercy displayed to us now, it is perfectly righteous in God to show it. He is vindicated in everything. Salvation is no stretch of His prerogative. Its language is not, “The person is guilty; but I will let him off; I will not execute the sentence against him.” The Christian is now admitted to a place before God according to the acceptance of Christ Himself. Being altogether by Christ, it brings nothing but glory to God, because Christ who died was God’s own Son, given of His own love for this very purpose, and there in the midst of all wrongs, of everything out of course here below, while the evil still remains unremoved, and death ravages still, and Satan has acquired all possible power of place as god and prince of this world, this deepest manifestation of God’s own glory is given, bringing souls which were once the guiltiest and the vilest out of it, not only before God, but in their own souls, and in the knowledge and enjoyment of it, and all righteously through Christ’s redemption. This is what the apostle triumphs in here. So he calls it not the ministration of life indeed; for there was always the new birth or nature

through the mercy of God; but now he brings in a far fuller name of blessing, that of the Spirit, because the ministration of the Spirit is over and above life. It supposes life, but moreover also the gift and presence of the Holy Ghost. The great mistake now is when saints cling to the old things, lingering among, the ruins of death when God has given them a title flowing from grace, but abundant in righteousness, and a ministration not merely of life, but of the Spirit.

So he goes on farther, and says that “that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth. For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious.” This again is another quality that he speaks of. We come to what abides — to what never can be shaken, as he puts it to the Hebrews later. To this permanence of blessing we are come in Christ, no matter what else may come. Death may come for us; judgment certainly will for the world — for man at least. The complete passing away of this creation is at hand. But we are already arrived at that which remains, and no destruction of earth can possibly affect its security; no removal to heaven will have any other effect than to bring out its lustre and abidingness. So he says, “Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech: and not as Moses, which put a veil over his face.”

This characterized the dealings of the law, that there never was the bringing God and man, so to speak, face to face. Such a meeting could not yet be. But now it is. Not only has God come down to man face to face, but man is brought to look in where God is in His own glory, and without a veil between. It is not the condescension of the Word made flesh coming down to where man is,

but the triumph of accomplished righteousness and glory, because the Spirit comes down from Christ in heaven. It is the ministration of the Spirit, who comes down from the exalted man in glory, and has given us the assurance that this is our portion, now to look into it, soon to be with Him. Hence he says it is “not as Moses, which put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished: but their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the Old Testament; which veil is done away in Christ.” This is as in Christ when known to us. So “even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart. Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away.” But then we do not wait here for their turning to the Lord, which will be their portion by-and-by. Meanwhile the Lord has turned to us, turning us to Himself, in His great grace, and brought us into righteousness, peace, as well as glory in hope — yea, in present communion, through redemption. The consequence is, all evil is gone for us, and all blessedness secured, and known to be so, in Christ; and, as he says here, “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.” Then, he adds further, “We all, with open [unveiled] face, beholding [“as in a glass” is uncalled for] the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” Thus the effect of the triumph of our Lord Jesus, and of the testimony of the Holy Ghost, is to put us into present association with the glory of the Lord as the object before our souls; and this is what transforms us according to its own heavenly character.

In 2 Corinthians 4 the apostle takes into account the vessel that contains the heavenly treasure. He shows that as “we have this ministry, and “have received mercy” therefore to the uttermost, “we faint not; but have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God. But if our gospel be hid, it is bid to them that are lost.” Such is the solemn conclusion: “In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

This is the gospel of the glory of Christ. It is not merely that we have the heavenly title, as we are taught in 1 Corinthians 15. The utmost on this subject brought before us there was, that we are designated “heavenly,” and are destined to bear the image of the heavenly One by-and-by. The second epistle comes between the two points of title and destiny, with the transforming effect of occupation with Christ in His glory on high. Thus space is left for practice and experience between our calling and our glorification. But then this course between is by no means sparing to nature; for, as he shows here, “we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.” God makes us feel this, and helps on the practical transformation; and by what means? By bringing us into

every kind of trouble and sorrow, so as to make nothing of flesh. For it is the allowed liveliness of nature that hinders the manifestation of the treasure; whereas its judgment leaves room for the light to shine out. This, then, is what God carries on. It explained much in the apostle's path which they had not been in a state to comprehend; and it contributed, where received and applied in the Spirit, to advance God's objects as regards them. "Death worketh in us, but life in you." What grace, and how blessed the truth! But see the way in which the process is carried on, "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are alway delivered unto death." He speaks of the actualisation: all helps the great object, even such circumstances as seemed the most disastrous possible. God exposed His servant to death. This was only carrying out more effectually the breaking down that was always going on. "So then death worketh in us, but life in you. We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak; knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you. For all things are for your sakes." And thus then, if there was the endurance of affliction, he would encourage their hearts, calling, as he felt it, "light affliction." He knew well what trial was. "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for

the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."

This introduces the Christian's estimate of both death and judgment as measured by Christ. He looks now steadily at all that can possibly appal the natural heart. Death the Christian may pass through. Judgment will never be for the Christian. Nevertheless his sense of judgment, as it really will come, although not for himself, is most influential and for others too. There may be a mighty effect on the soul, and a deep spring of worship, and a powerful lever in service, through that which does not concern us at all. The sense of what it is may be all the more felt because we are delivered from its weight; and we can thus more thoroughly, because more calmly, contemplate it in the light of God, seeing its inevitable approach and overwhelming power for those that have not Christ. Accordingly he says, "We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven."

But let us not forget that he takes care (for his heart was not relieved as to every individual in Corinth) to add solemnly, "If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked." He was not quite sure but that some there might be found exposed, because devoid of a Saviour. There are those who give this a very different turn, and make it to be a verse of consolation instead of warning; but such a view deprives us of the true scope of the clause. The common version and natural interpretation appears to me quite correct. It does not mean "since being clothed we shall not be found naked," which has

no worthy lesson to convey to any soul. The readings differ, but that which answers to the common version I believe to be correct. The apostle would warn every soul that, although every one will be clothed in the day that is coming (namely, at the resurrection of the body, when souls are no longer found without the body but clothed), nevertheless some, even in spite of that clothing, shall be found naked. The wicked are then to be clothed no less than the saints, who will have been already raised or changed; their bodies shall be raised from the dead just as truly as those of the righteous; but when the unrighteous stand in resurrection before the great white throne, how, bare will they appear? What will it be in that day to have no Christ to clothe us?

After so salutary a caution to such as made too much of knowledge in the neglect of conscience, the apostle turns to that fulness of comfort which he was communicating to the saints. “We,” he says, “that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened.” He has no wish to deny the sorrow and weakness. He knew what it is to suffer and be sorrowful far better than any of them. “We that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed.” Thus there is no mere wish to get away from the present scene with its sadness and trial. It is never allowed one to be impatient. To desire to be with Christ is right; but to be restive under that which connects us with shame and pain is not of Christ. “Not for,” then, “that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon.” This was his ardent wish, — to be “clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.” It is not that he might die, but the very reverse, — that the mortality already working in

him might be swallowed up by Him who is eternal life, and our life.

He that hath wrought us for the self-same thing is God." It is not here wrought something for us, but "wrought us." This is a remarkable expression of the grace of God in associating with His unfailing purpose in Christ. "He that hath wrought us for the self-same thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit;" given us, therefore, even now a taste of the blessedness and glory that are in store for us. "Therefore we are always confident." Think of such language! Think of it as the apostle's words describing, our portion, and in full view of both death and judgment! "We are always confident." We can easily understand one whose eye was simply on Christ and His love, saying, "We are confident," though turning to look at that which might well tax the stoutest heart. Certainly it were madness not to be overwhelmed by it, unless there were such a ministration of the Spirit as the apostle was then enjoying in its fruits in his soul. But he did enjoy it profoundly; and, what is more, he puts it as the common enjoyment of all Christians. It is not alone a question of his own individual feelings, but of that which God gave him to share now with the saints of God as such. "Therefore," says he, "we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: for we walk by faith, not by sight: we are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. For we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ."

This, again, is a very important truth indeed in its own place, and the effect is most striking; namely, deep

anxiety about the lost, and the consciousness of our own manifestation to God now. Not that I mean by this that we shall not be manifested by-and-by; for we shall be perfectly. But if we are manifest in conscience before God now, it is evident that there is nothing that can cause the slightest uneasiness in our being manifested before Christ's tribunal. The truth is, so far is the manifestation before our Lord a source of alarm to the saint (though it should surely solemnise the heart), that I am persuaded the soul would lose a positive and substantial blessing, if it could by any possibility escape being manifested there. Nor does it matter what the degree of manifestation may now be in conscience. Still, it can never be perfect till then; and our God would give us perfection in this as in all else. It is now hindered by various causes, as far as we are concerned. There is the working of self-love in the hearts of the saints; there is that which has cast a film over the eye which dulls our souls. Alas! we know it too well.

The effect of our manifestation before the tribunal of Christ is, that we shall know as we are known. That is, it will be carrying out in absolute perfection what we now know in the measure of our spirituality. Now, what is the effect of one's arriving at a better knowledge of himself, and a deeper consciousness of the Christian's place in Christ? Always a real blessing, and a means of greater enjoyment of Christ. Is it not much to have a lowlier feeling about ourselves? to esteem others better than ourselves? and thus to deepen daily in the grace of the Lord Jesus? And are not these things the result? And will the perfect knowledge of ourselves be a loss, and not a gain?

At the same time, it is solemn assuredly for every secret to be spread out between the Lord and ourselves. It is solemn for all to be set in the light in which we may have been misled now, and which may have caused trouble and grief to others, casting reproach on the name of the Lord, — in itself an affecting and afflicting thing. Never should we be deceived by Satan. He may accuse the saints, but they ought in no case to be deceived by him. He deceives the world, and accuses the brethren. Alas! we know, in point of fact, that we are liable through unwatchfulness to his wiles; but this does not make it less a humiliation for us, and a temporary advantage for Satan when we fall into his trap. We are not ignorant of his devices; but this will not always, nor in itself in any case, preserve us. There are defeats. The judgment-seat of Christ will disclose all; where each hidden thing will be clear; where nothing but the fruit of the Spirit shall stand for ever.

Nevertheless the sight of that judgment-seat brings at once before his eye, not the saints, but the perishing world; and so complete is the peace of his own spirit, so rich and sure the deliverance Christ has accomplished for all the saints, that the expressed effect is to kindle his heart about those that are braving everlasting destruction — those on whom the judgment-seat can bring nothing but hopeless exclusion from God and His glory.

For we say here by the way, that we must be all manifested, whether saints or sinners. There is a peculiarity in the phrase which is, to my thinking, quite decisive as to its not meaning saints only. As to the objection to this founded on the word “we,” there is no force in it at all. “We” is no doubt commonly used in the

apostolic epistles for saints, but not for them exclusively. Context decides. Be assured that all such rules are quite fallacious. What intelligent Christian ever understood from scripture all the canons of criticism in the world? They are not to be trusted for a moment. Why have confidence in anything of the sort? Mere traditional formulas or human technicalities will not do for the ascertainment of God's word. The moment men rest on general laws by which to interpret scripture, I confess they seem to me on the brink of error, or doomed to wander in a desert of ignorance. We must be disciplined if we would learn indeed; and we need to read and hear things as God writes them; but we do well and wisely to eschew all human byways and short-cuts for deciding the sense of what God has revealed. It is not only the students of medieval divinity, or of modem speculation, who are in danger. None of us is beyond the need of jealousy over self, and of simple-hearted looking to the lord.

Here, indeed, the apostle's reasoning, and the nicety of language, furnish demonstrative evidence in the passage (that is, both in the spirit and in the letter), that we must all, whether saints or sinners, be manifested before Christ; not at the same time nor for the same end, but all before His judgment-seat at some time. Had the language been, "we must all be judged," the "we" must have been there limited to the unconverted. While they only come into judgment, believer and unbeliever must alike be manifested. The effect of manifestation for the believer will be the fulness of rest and delight in the ways of God. The effect of the manifestation for the unbeliever will be the total withering up of every excuse or pretence that had deceived him here below. No flesh

shall glory in His presence, and man must stand self-convicted before the Judge of all. Thus the choice of language is, as usual in scripture, absolutely perfect, and to my mind quite decisive that the manifestation here is universal. This acts on the servant of Christ, who knows what the terror of the Lord is, and calls him out to “persuade men.” What is meant by this? It is really to preach the gospel to men at large.

At the same time the apostle adds, “We commend not ourselves again unto you, but give you occasion to glory on our behalf.” For he had expressed his trust of being made manifest to their consciences, as well as stated how absolutely we are manifested to God. “For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God: or whether we be sober, it is for your cause.” Then he brings in the constraining power of the love of Christ, and why? Because, as he looked round him, he saw nothing but death written on man, and all that pertains to him here below. The whole scene was one vast grave. Of course, he was not thinking of the saints of God, but, contrariwise, in the midst of this universal death, as far as man is concerned, he rejoices to see some alive. I understand, therefore, that when he says, “If one die for all, then were all dead,” he means those who had really died by sin, and because of the contrast it seems to me plain “He died for all, that they which live” (these are the saints, the objects of God’s favour) “should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.” What was the effect of this? That having thus before his soul, not the universal death of all only, but some who by grace were alive, through the death and resurrection of Christ, he now brings out, not the contrast of the new creation with all

that went before — yea, the contrast of the Messianic hopes as such with that higher glory which he was now asserting. Even a living Messiah could not satisfy what his soul had learnt to be in accordance with the glory of God. Not, of course, that he did not delight in the hope of his nation. It is one thing to value what God will do for the earth by-and-by, it is quite another to fail in appreciating that which God has now created and revealed in a risen Christ above, — once rejected and dying for us. Accordingly it is one glory that will display the promises and ways of God triumphing over man and Satan; it is another and far surpassing glory which He who is the Messiah, but much more, and now the heavenly man, reveals. His death is the judgment of our sins in God's grace, and an end of the whole scene for us, and hence perfect deliverance from man and from present things — yea, even from the best hopes for the earth.

What can be better than a Messiah come to bless man in this world? But the Christian is not occupied with this at all. According to the Old Testament he looked at it, but now that the Messiah is seen dead and risen, now that He is passed into heavenly glory through death, this is the glory for the Christian. "Henceforth know we no man after the flesh:" this puts the saints in a common position of knowledge. "Henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh." As for a living Messiah, and all the expectations that were bound up with Him and His coming here below, all this is passed away for the Christian. It is not that the Messiah will not return as such; but as for the sphere and character of our own relations, they are founded on death and resurrection,

and seen on high. Such is the way the apostle treats it. He looks at Christ in His relationship with us as One that has passed out of this earth and the lower creation into heavenly places. It is there and thus we know Him. By knowing Him he means the special form of the truth with which we are concerned, the manner in which we are put into positive, living association with Him. That which we know as our centre of union, as the object of our souls, is Christ risen and glorified. In any other point of view, however bright and glorious, “now henceforth know we him no more. Therefore if any man be in Christ,” etc.

It is not merely if any man look to Christ: the Old Testament saints rejoiced to see His day; but this is a very different thing from being in Christ. There are many who take the scriptures in so crude and vague a manner that to their eyes it is all the same; but I hope such is not the case with any here. No doubt, to be in Christ as we are now is through looking, to Him. But it was not always so. Take the disciples in the days of Christ’s pathway here below: were they in Christ then? Certainly not. There was the working of divine faith in them. They were unquestionably “born again;” but is this the same thing as being “in Christ”? Being in Christ means that, redemption having come in, the Holy Ghost can and does give us a conscious standing in Christ in His now risen character. To be “in Christ” describes the believer, not in Old Testament times, but now.

“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was

in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself." Thus there is a blessed and suited ministry. The law directed a people at a distance from God. It Supposed such a condition and dealt accordingly. Even if a poor brute touched the mountain, it was to be stoned. At length God came down to meet man in grace as he is; and man rejected God manifest in flesh. Redemption was thereby effected; man is brought without sin to God. Christ is the person who made both good. He brought God down to man, and He brought man in Himself up to God. Such is the position in which we stand. It is not any longer merely God coming down to man in Christ. This is neither the manner nor the measure in which He reveals Himself now. The Lord Jesus Christ is gone up to heaven; and this not as a sole individual, but as the head of a family. He would not take the place of headship until all the evil was completely gone. He would give us His own acceptance before God. He took His stand on retrieving God's moral glory by bearing our sins; yet as He came down, so He went up to God, holy and spotless. He had by His own blood blotted out the sins of others who believe in Him. It was not merely a born Messiah, the chief of Israel, but "God was in Christ."

Observe, not that God is in Christ, but that He was. It is a description of what was manifested when the Lord was here below. But if it be a mistake to read God is, it is a still greater error too common in books, old and new alike, that God has reconciled the world. This is not the meaning of the statement. The English version is perfectly right; the criticism that pretends to correct it is thoroughly wrong It is never said that the world is reconciled to God. Christ was a blessed and adequate image of God; and God was in Him manifesting Himself

in the supremacy of His own grace here below. No doubt His law had its suited place; but God in grace is necessarily above the law. As man, at least as of Israel, Jesus was born under the law; but this was in not the slightest degree an abandonment of God's rights, and still less of His grace. God came near to men in love in the most attractive form, going in and out among them, taking up little children, entering into houses when asked, conversing by the way, going about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with Him. It was not merely in quest of the lost sheep of Israel. How could such grace be restrained only to Jews? God had larger thoughts and feelings than this. Therefore let a Gentile centurion come, or a Samaritan woman, or any body else: who was not welcome? For "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them."

Full of grace and truth, He would not even raise the question of this trespass or that. There was no doubt of man's guilt; but this was not the divine way of Christ. Other and more efficacious aims were in the hand of the God of all grace. He would save, but at the same time exercise the conscience more than ever. For great would be the loss for a sinner awakened, if it were possible for him not to take God's part against himself. This is the real course and effect of repentance in the soul. But God was in Christ reconciling the world for all that, yea in order to it. It was not a question of dealing with them for their trespasses. And what now that He is gone away? "He hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation." He is gone, but not the errand of mercy for which He came. The Messiah as such disappears for the time; there remains the fruit of the blessed manifestation of

God in Christ in an evil world. “Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech by us: we pray in Christ’s stead, be reconciled to God.” But how can this be? On what basis can we essay such a task! Not because the Spirit of God is in us, however true it may be, but because of the atonement. Redemption by Christ’s blood is the reason. “For God hath made him. to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”

Then, following up this in the next chapter (2 Cor. 6), the, true moral traits of the Christian ministry are shown, and what a price it had in his eyes. What should not be done and endured for the sake of worthily carrying out this ministration of Christ here below! What should be the practical witness to a righteousness not acquired by us, but freely given of God! Such is the character of it, according to the work of Christ before God and of His redemption; so we should “give no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed: but in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments.” In every thing crushing to nature did the apostle fulfil his mission. Is the reproach of Christ to be an apostolic perquisite? Are not His servants to share it still? Is it not true from first to last?

Again, in serving the Lord, there are two special ways in which we are apt to go astray. Some err by an undue narrowness, others by as injurious laxity. In fact, it is never right to be narrow, and always wrong to be lax. In Christ there is no license or excuse for either. But the Corinthians, like others, were in danger on both sides; for each provokes the other. Hence the appeal, “O ye

Corinthians, our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged. Ye are not straitened in us, but ye are straitened in your own bowels." There was the caution against a narrow heart; but now against a lax path he warns, "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? and what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?" Thus is embraced individual responsibility as well as corporate. "For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them."

Thus, as in the exercise of ministry according to Christ, there was nothing that should not be endured; there was no scorn or trial, no pain or shame, but what he himself counted as nothing that Christ only should be served, and the witness of His name kept up in this world according to His grace; so now he presses on the saints what is incumbent on them as the epistle of Christ, to make good a true witness for Him in this world, steering clear of all that is hard and narrow, which is altogether alien from the grace of God, and of that laxity which is still more offensive to His nature. In the first verse of 2 Corinthians 7 the whole matter is wound up, "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." The second verse evidently belongs to the subject succeeding. In the rest of the seventh chapter he renews (and has, I think, connected both with these words about the ministry and the responsibility of the saints) what he had alluded to already among them. He touches, with that delicate tact

so characteristic of him, on their repentance. He would encourage their hearts in every way, but now ventures to go somewhat farther in the grace of Christ.

Accordingly his own feelings are told out, — how exceedingly cast down he had been, and oppressed on every side, so that he had no rest. “Without were fightings, within were fears.” Indeed, the fear had gone so far, that he had actually been tried as to the inspired epistle he had written. The apostle had a question raised in his mind about his own inspired epistle! Yet what writing was more certainly of God? “For though I made you sorry with the letter, I do not regret, though I did regret.” How clearly we learn, whatever the working of God in man, that after all the inspiration of a vessel is far above his own will, and the fruit of the action of the Holy Ghost! As we find an unholy man might be inspired of God to bring out a new communication — for example, a Balaam or a Caiaphas, so holy men of God still more. But the remarkable thing to note is the way in which a question was raised even about an epistle which God has preserved in His own book, and, without a doubt, divinely inspired. But he also mentions how glad he was now that, having sent off that letter, he had made them sorry. “For I perceive that the same epistle hath made you sorry, though it were but for a season. Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance; for ye were made sorry according to God, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing.” How great is the grace! “For sorrow according to God worketh repentance to salvation not to be regretted: but the sorrow of the world worketh death. For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed according to God, what carefulness it wrought in you,

yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter." What a comfort to the heart that had been so profoundly touched by their state!

In 2 Corinthians 8, and 2 Corinthians 9, the subject of contributing for saints is resumed, though a great deal more fully than in 1 Cor. 16, and with a fresh spring of joy communicated to his spirit. What an evidence is given of the exercises of his heart in this thing too! It appears he had spoken confidently about the Corinthian saints. There had been afterwards much to wound and weaken that confidence; but he now returns to the matter, and reckons with certainty that the God who had wrought in the painful matter, not of the guilty man only, but in them all about it, — that His grace would also give him cause for joy in rousing their hearts into largeness of love for those that were depressed elsewhere. He had boasted of the liberality of the Corinthians, which had kindled zeal in others. On the one hand, he would have his hope of them verified, on the other he desired none to be burdened, but certainly fruit Godward both in the givers and in the receivers. How rich and enriching in His grace! Blessed be God for His unspeakable gift!

In 2 Corinthians 10, and 2 Corinthians 11 he comes to another subject — his own ministry — on which a few words must suffice. Enough had been cleared away to open his heart on it: he could enlarge here. It was his confidence in them that made him write. When his spirit was bound, because of there being so much to cause shame and pain, he could not be free; but now he is.

Hence we have here a most blessed opening of what this servant of God felt in what was necessarily a sore distress to his spirit. For what could be more humbling than that the Corinthian saints, the fruit of his own ministry, had admitted into their hearts insinuations against him, doubts of the reality of his apostolate, all that lowering which, in other forms but not substantially unlike, we may have too often observed, and just in proportion to the importance and spiritual value of the trust reposed of God in any on the earth? The apostle knew sorrow as no other ever knew it. Not even the twelve tasted its bitterness as he did, from spirituality and from circumstances; and the manner in which he deals with it, the dignity, and at the same time the lowliness, the faith that looked right to the Lord, but at the same time the warmth of affection, grief of heart mingling with joy, furnish such a tableau as is unique even in the word of God. No such analysis appears anywhere else of the heart of one serving the saints in the midst of the greatest outrages to his love, as we recognise in this epistle. He bows to the charge of rudeness in speech; but they had used the admitted power of his letters against himself. Yet he warns lest what he is absent they may learn in him present. Others might exalt themselves through his labours; he hoped when their faith was increased to preach the gospel in the regions beyond. (2 Cor. 10) They had exalted the other apostles in disparagement of him. They had even imputed to him selfishness. It might be true, thought they, that he had reaped no material benefit himself from them; but what about others, his friends? How much there was calculated to wound that generous heart, and, what he felt yet more, to damage his ministry! But in the midst of such sorrow and the rather

as flowing from such sources, God watched over all with observant eye. Wonderfully hedged in was His servant, though to speak of himself he calls his folly. (2 Cor. 11) But no human power or wit can protect a man of God from malice; nothing can shut out the shafts of evil speaking. In vain to look to flesh and blood for protection: were it possible, how much we should have missed in this epistle! Had his detractors been brethren of the circumcision from Jerusalem, neither the trial nor the blessing would have been anything like what it is for depth; but the fact that it came to Paul from his own children in Achaia was enough to pain him to the quick, and did prove him thoroughly.

But God sometimes lifts us up to look into the glory, as He comes down into the midst of our sorrows in pitiful mercy. This, with his own heart about it, the apostle brings before us lovingly, though it is impossible, within my limits, so much as to touch on all. He spreads before us his sorrows, dangers, and persecutions. This was the ministry of which he had boasted. He had been often whipped and stoned, had been weary, thirsty, hungry, by sea and land: these were the prizes he had received, and these the honours which the world gave him. How it all ought to have gone to their hearts, if they had any feeling at all, as indeed they had! It was good for them to feel it, for they had been taking their ease. He closes the list by telling them at last how he had been let down from the wall of a city in a basket, — not a very dignified position for an apostle. It was anything but heroism thus to escape one’s enemies.

But the same man who was thus let down immediately after speaks of being caught up to heaven. Now, it is this combination of the truest and most proper dignity that

ever a man had in this world, — for how few of the sons of man, speaking of course of Christians, that approached Paul in this respect; so on the other hand, how few since have known the dignity of being content to suffer and be nothing, of having every thought and feeling of nature thoroughly crushed, like Paul, within as well as without! So much the more as he was one who felt all most keenly, for he had a heart and mind equally capacious. Such was he who had to be thus tried as Christ's bondman. But when he comes to special wonders, he does not speak about himself; when about the basket he is open. Thus here he talks ambiguously. "I know a man" is his method of introducing the new portion. It is not I, Paul, but "a man in Christ" is taken up, who had seen such things as could not be expressed in human words, nor suited to man's present state. It is therefore left completely vague. The apostle himself says he does not know whether it was in the body, or out of the body; so completely was all removed from the ordinary experience and ken of man. But he adds what is much to be observed, "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh." Thus a deeper humiliation befell him than he had ever known, — "a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan," — the allowed counterbalance to such extraordinary experiences. It was Paul. The secret could not be hid. But Christ is here, as ever, the theme of the apostle from first to last. This was the treasure in the earthen vessel; and in order to bring about corresponding profit, God works by external means as well as by inward grace, so as to carry forward His work of enhancing always and increasingly what is in Christ, and making less and less of man.

The close of the chapter sketches, with painful truth but a loving hand, the outbreakings of that nature, crushed in him, pampered in them. For he dreaded lest God should humble him among them because of their evil ways. What love such a word bespeaks!

The final chapter (2 Cor. 13) answers a challenge which he kept for the last place, as indeed it ill became the Corinthians above all men. What a distress to him to speak of it at all! They had actually dared to ask a proof that Christ had spoken to them by him. Had they forgotten that they owed their life and salvation in Christ to his preaching? As he put in the foreground patience as a sign of apostleship, which in him assuredly was taxed beyond measure, so now he fixes on this as the great seal of his apostleship — at least, to them. What can be more touching? It is not what Jesus had said by him in books, or in what power the Spirit had wrought by him. “Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, which to you-ward is not weak, but is mighty in you….. examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves.” They were the living proof to themselves that he was an apostle of Christ to them. There is no allowance of a doubt in this appeal: rather the very reverse was assumed on their part, which the apostle admirably turns to the confusion of their indecorous and baseless doubts about himself. “Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the power which the Lord hath given me to edification, and not to destruction.” Brief and pregnant salutations follow, with the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost.

Galatians

Galatians 1. We saw the second of Corinthians characterized by the most rapid transitions of feeling, by a deep and fervent sense of God's consolations, by a revulsion so much the more powerful in a heart that entered into things as few hearts have ever done since the world began. For as the first epistle had put down man in every form, and more particularly man as an expression of the world in its pride, so the second epistle breathes the comfort of God's restoring grace, and is characterized therefore by the strongest emotions of the heart; for he ardently loved these saints. He had felt their wrong, but at the same time had been lifted marvellously above what might be called personal feeling, and so much the more, therefore, could have the grief of love unmingled with that which really impairs its strength, and leaves its sensibilities incomparably less acute. So much the more, then, we find the working of spiritual feeling as expressed by him in the second epistle, where he speaks of God lifting up those that were cast down, as He had delivered himself from the imminent danger to which he had been exposed even as to life.

In the epistle to the Galatians we have another tone and style, a serious and grieved spirit, with feelings not less deep — it may be, even more profoundly moved — than in writing to the Corinthians; and for this reason, that the foundations were still more deeply affected by that which was working among the assemblies of Galatia. It was not the worldly presumption of man, nor the slight which this would inevitably cast on apostolic authority,

as well as on the order of the church, on morality even, at least on Christian morality, on the comely ways of brethren one with another in private as well as in their public assemblies. In the epistle to the Galatians a deeper question was raised — nothing less than the fountain of grace itself. Hence in this epistle it is not so much the laying bare the need of man — of the sinner, as the vindication of that same grace of God for the saint, with the exhibition of the ruinous results to him who is drawn aside from the deep and broad groundwork that God has laid for souls in Christ. Here particularly the Christian is guarded against the inroads of legalism. If the world were the great enemy at Corinth, the law perverted is that against which the Spirit of God raises up the apostle in writing to the Galatians. Flesh alas! has an affinity for both. This epistle, as those to the Corinthians, opens with an assertion of his apostolic place. At the outset here (not there) he sets aside human intervention. Men were not his source, nor was man even a medium to him. He strikes accordingly at the root of all successional or derived authority. “Paul, an apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ and,” — in order to make it still more evident, — “by God the Father, who raised him from the dead.” This is peculiar to our epistle. In the epistle to the Ephesians we shall find that the apostle claims a still higher character for all ministry. There it is not traced to God the Father, that raised Christ from the dead; but it descends from Christ ascended to heaven (which, we shall soon see, perfectly fits in with that epistle). Here it is the total judgment of flesh in its religious pretensions, and more particularly a blow to that which is an essential principle of law. The whole legal institution depended on a people lineally descended from Abraham,

as their priests on a similar succession from Aaron. Being, of course, dying men, whether it be the general privileges of Israel, or the special place of the priest, all was transmitted from father to son. In its own proper sphere and blessings Christianity knows nothing of the sort, but denies it in principle. So here Paul is “an apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, that raised him from the dead.”

To have been with the Messiah, the hearer of His words and the witness of His work, up to His departure, was ever a condition to those who were accustomed to the twelve apostles. The apostle himself meets that difficulty in the face, and in effect concedes to his detractors that he was not made an apostle by Christ here below. But if not called to have his place among the twelve, it was the Lord’s sovereign dealing to give him a better one. There is no approach to a vaunt about his dignity. He does not even deign to fill up the sketch. He leaves it to spiritual wisdom to gather what was the evident impression of the truth.

For his own special call was an indisputable fact; and it is a great joy to the heart to think how Christianity (while it leaves the deepest and the highest space in all directions, so to speak, for the working of the Holy Ghost, while there is more room in it than anywhere else for the play both of the renewed mind and the affections that the Spirit of God gives, while, consequently, it admits of the richest possible exercises of both mind and heart), nevertheless, in its grand truths rests on the most patent and certain facts. For God considers the poor; He has regard to the simple; He has children in His eye. And facts tell on their mind. Indeed, there is no soul really above them. Whoever despises the facts of

Christianity, as if nothing in Scripture were worthy of meditation, or of ministering to others but exercises and speculative deductions, will be found, if he do not find himself often, on the verge of dangerous delusions, both for the mind and for the walk.

But the apostle here does not reason about the matter. He simply states, as I have said, that his apostolic character was not only from Jesus, but from God the Father, that raised Him from the dead. it had a resurrection-source, instead of being from Christ on earth, and in relation to the work God was doing when He sent His Son here below. Along with himself he takes care expressly to couple others: “and all the brethren which are with me.” Paul did not stand alone. He had the faith that could by grace cleave to God if he had not a companion; but God blesses that faith, and acts by it on the conscience of others, even on those that, alas! too often might be ready to turn aside. In this case, happily, the brethren near at hand went along with him in heart. After wishing those addressed grace and peace, as usual, he speaks of the Lord in a manner singularly in unison with the object of the epistle: “Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us” — not from judgment, not from the wrath to come, but — “from this present evil world.” The evil that was gaining ground among the Galatian believers — legalism — links the soul with the world, and indeed proves it to be evil by giving present credit to the flesh, and association with all the system that is around us now. But in truth the Lord “gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father: to whom be glory for ever and ever.”

At once the apostle launches into the troubled sea. There is no recounting what God had done for them. There is no mention here of grace, nor even of any special powers conferred by the Spirit of God. We shall find he does not forget this elsewhere: he reasons on it in another part of the epistle. But his heart was too agitated not to betake himself at once to the point of their danger. Consequently, without further preamble, and with an ominous silence as to their state (for, indeed, it could not be spoken of), he at once breaks the ground. “I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you in the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another.”

Mark how nicely every word was suited to deal with their souls. He speaks of “the grace of Christ.” He warns against “another gospel,” i.e., a different one, which was really none at all. It was not another, as he says. “But there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.” And then he, indignant at such a thought, makes his most solemn appeals. “But though we” — Paul himself, or any that were associated with him — “though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.” Nor this only. “As we have said before, so I say now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received.” The apostle stands to the truth preached and received. What he preached was the truth as to this matter. He does not deny that others preached it; but if so, they preached the same truth. The apostle was given to preach the truth more fully than any other. To depart from this was fatal. Nor this only. If he had preached the full truth of the gospel, he insists that they had received

it. He will not hear of any pretended misunderstanding. He refuses all cover for different thoughts. In either case “let him be accursed.”

And he justifies this strength of warning: “For do I now persuade men or God? Do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be a servant of Christ.” Impossible to serve two masters! Christ never mingles with flesh or law any more than with the world. Bondage is there; and He is a deliverer, but it is to God’s glory, and for His own service in the liberty of grace.

And now the apostle enters on another part of his subject. His account proves how independent he was of the very persons whom they would have desired to have seen associated with him. It was an offence in the eyes of the Jewish Christians, and perhaps specially of the Christians that Judaize, that the apostle had been so little at Jerusalem — that his intercourse was so scanty with the twelve. The apostle accepts the fact in all its strength. Far from wishing to gain credit, either for the gospel or for his own apostolic place, in consequence of being linked with those that had been apostles before him, he insists on that very independence which they counted a reproach. His is an apostleship to itself, as real as that of the twelve, but of another order, not at the same time, nor in the same manner. All sprang, no doubt, from the same God, from the same Lord Jesus Christ; but even so from God and from the Lord in other relationships. Very particularly was it marked by the manner of his call, that his apostleship had no connection with either the world or the flesh. It had nothing whatever to do even with the Lord Himself, in the days of His flesh, when acting as minister of the circumcision in the land of Judea. Invariably, where man

seeks to bring in a successional apostleship, the twelve become the great model.

Hence it is that Rome, which most decidedly in principle rests on human succession (as all worldly religion must, to a certain extent, embrace the same principle) — Rome, I say, seeks to derive her authority, as all know, from Peter. No person can intelligently read the New Testament without perceiving the utter fallacy of such a system; for Peter was expressly, as the next chapter of this epistle tells us, apostle of the circumcision. So were the others that seemed to be the chief. If any apostleship would have served for the Gentiles, it ought to have been Paul's then; for Paul was the apostle of the uncircumcision. What a condemnation of themselves, that no system which ever seeks for an earthly succession can in the least make Paul answer its purpose! In his case the breach with man was evident; the association with heaven, and not Jerusalem, was too plain to be disputed or evaded. Successor to Paul there is none; if so, who and where? In the case of the twelve, we do find an apostle chosen to supply the gap of Judas — chosen, I admit, of God, though after a Jewish sort, as Chrysostom justly remarks, for the Holy Ghost was not yet given. I admit that this was all in place and season then for Jerusalem.

But at the same time it is plain that the apostle Paul here starts with the instructive fact, that the very thing for which some Judaizers then blamed him was the distinctive glory of that to which the Lord had called him. "I certify you, brethren," says he, "that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. For ye have heard of my

conversation in times past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it: and profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers. But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus."

Now, it is evident — and to this I call your particular attention — that the apostle here binds together his gospel with his apostolic place. This was the serious move of the enemy. You cannot attack such a servant without attacking his testimony. You cannot weaken his apostleship without endangering the very gospel that you have received yourselves. And this is always true in its measure, and shows the exceeding gravity of opposition where God raises up for His own special work in this world; but more particularly where, as in the apostle's case, the mere manner of his conversion, the special form of his separation unto God, bears the impress of the truth he was to preach. To impugn the one is to imperil the other. The Galatians did not think of this; people that are thus blinded by the enemy never do. To them, no doubt, it appeared as if they were zealous and sincere champions of unity. They were grieved to think that the Jewish church, with its twelve apostles and its elders, with its manifold links with antiquity and God's past testimony on earth, should seem separated in any measure from the apostle and his

work. No doubt there was a difference of tone. Had a man come down from the teaching of the twelve, albeit inspired of God to write, as we know some of them were, and all of them having a most truly apostolic place, he might have been startled by the teaching of St. Paul. Can it be doubted that the special form of spiritual thought and feeling formed, for instance, by James's or Peter's teaching, yea, even by that of John, while harmonizing, where the heart was open, with the instruction of Paul, nevertheless would appear at first very different? We know how feeble and slow the heart is, and how apt disciples in general are to narrow the riches of the grace and truth of God. Even in Christianity how much need there is to remember what the Lord warns us of in Luke 5 — that no man accustomed to old wine straightway desires new, but says, The old is better. This was at work even in those early days. It had tainted among others the Galatians; for although, in point of fact, what had converted them was the heavenly testimony of the apostle Paul, nevertheless they had in time become acquainted with Christians who had not been so favoured, perhaps from the churches in Judea. Saints they may have been; and such, we know, moved about from Jerusalem. At any rate, the Galatians, naturally fickle, were quick to take up prejudices. They had somehow become uneasy. Those that were used of Satan, both to oppose the apostle in person, and also to distrust that testimony which they had not spirituality enough to appreciate, busily insinuated doubts into the minds of these Gentile brethren, and found too ready an ear among them.

Thus the apostle had to link together the gospel of grace with his own apostolic dignity; and we do well to take

heed to this remarkable fact. With the utmost simplicity he shows that his own separation from man was a part of God's ways for the purpose of making more strikingly felt the great truth that he was afterwards to proclaim. He had been himself (could they deny it?) at least as zealous for the Jews' religion as any Jew of the straitest sect. He had made as much proficiency as any of his day — it may be, more. Who of his nation had advanced in Judaism beyond him? Who more zealous of the doctrines of his fathers? Therefore, it came to pass that there was nothing the apostle had not learned of which they boasted. He had been trained up under the most distinguished teacher — the great Rabbin Gamaliel; but "when it pleased him, who had separated him from his mother's womb, and called him by his grace, to reveal his Son in him." Mark, again, the strength of the expression. It is not simply that he was brought to follow Jesus, to believe and confess His name; but God revealed His Son in him. And we can all see how exactly the phrase falls in with the words of our Lord given in the Acts of the Apostles; for the wonderful truth burst upon the apostle's ear from the beginning, in the Saviour's call to him from heaven. The oneness of the saints with Christ Himself is, as we all familiarly know, clearly intimated. So here it is said that God was pleased to reveal His Son in him, that he might preach the good news of Him among the heathen.

Immediately, then, as. it is added, he conferred not with flesh and blood; neither went up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before him; but went into Arabia, and returned again, not to Jerusalem, but to Damascus, the place near which he had been called at first. "Then after three years," he says, "I went up to Jerusalem to

see Peter." Surely now there was some link with the twelve! Not so. He went simply to make the acquaintance of Peter, and abode with him — how long? Fifteen days. Far too short a time, if it were a question of due initiation into the testimony of the twelve. But, in point of fact, he did not see the twelve. He saw Peter; but "other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother." To this he gives the most solemn asseveration: "The things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not." Thus he accepts the challenge that was given by unbelief. He heartily avows what they counted a defect; and not Only so, but with the greatest solemnity assures them that he had not seen the apostles, save only Peter, and James the brother of the Lord, and these but for a short space.

The apostleship of Paul, therefore, was entirely independent of Jerusalem and the twelve. He had derived the gospel that he preached from the Lord, and not from any of his fellow-servants who had been engaged in the work before him. Nor had he conferred even then with flesh and blood; his mission as well as conversion and call were alike independent of it. He had been called, as none could deny, in a way which not even any other apostle had ever known. Of none else could it be so said that "it Pleased God to reveal his Son in him." It was not thus that Peter or the rest were drawn to follow their Master. The language would not have been applicable when the other apostles were called. There was no question of revealing His Son in them then. The very utmost that could be said was, that God had been pleased to reveal His Son to Peter and the others. But there was no sense of union then. There was no consciousness of the identification of the saint with

Christ. Accordingly, the language would have been premature and entirely beyond the conscious experience of the saints, or the real truth of the matter in the sight of God. But God took care that the call of Paul should be delayed till the whole order of the Jewish apostleship should be complete. He took care also that the twelfth apostleship should be filled up; for it is a profound mistake to suppose that Peter and the other apostles had been hasty in numbering Matthias with them, and that Paul was really the twelfth apostle according to the mind of the Lord. The truth is, that they had their relationship to the twelve tribes of Israel. This seems to have been the reason of their being twelve; and it is to me clear that our Lord establishes this as the true reference and key when He declares that, in the regeneration, the Son of Man shall sit upon the throne of his glory, and they shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. One of them fell from his place, but the vacancy was filled up directly.

Thus all had been duly prepared of God, with a far-reaching wisdom, to make the call of Paul an evidently and entirely separate thing, to make his apostleship as distinct in fact as in form; to give him fresh communications, even as to the Lord's supper, and to convey anew the very gospel that he preached as the revelation of the Son in him. The Lord did stamp the testimony of Peter as being truly the revelation of His Father. Flesh and blood had not revealed it. It was not a question of man's wit. His Father had made a revelation to Peter. What had been revealed? He revealed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God. But, I repeat, this simply was revealed to him. You cannot go farther. Jesus, the rejected Messiah, was the Son of the

living God, the giver of life, the quickening Son of God. In Paul's case the Holy Ghost could go a step farther, and that step He seems to me to take. The apostle states it with perfect calmness, and without comparing others. There is no depreciating of any soul, but the plain statement of the positive truth, which after all is the best and the humblest way, that most of all magnifies God, and edifies His children. So it was, then, that the apostle presents his own wonderful relation to Christ. It was not merely that Paul was lowered by the carping Judaizers — God's grace was being sacrificed. It was not merely that his apostleship was doubted — God's magnifying of His own Son was set at naught. It was the ungrateful heart of man that, in its avidity after something that would bring an appearance of strength and unity, would sacrifice that, which was of heaven for what was after all connected with the earth and the flesh.

Another thing, too, let me just point out in passing. If ever there was a man who more than another contended for the oneness of the saints in every sense, — above all, for the one body of Christ, for the unity of the Spirit, — it was the apostle Paul. Nevertheless, there never was one that had a deeper sense of the importance of walking, if need were, alone with God. Be assured that it is the same simplicity of faith which enters into both these things now. On the other hand, where unity becomes an object, it is never understood; and at the same time the walk of faith cannot be maintained. In short, the man who, occupied with Christ above, enters for that very reason most into the blessedness of the body of Christ here below by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, is the very one that will know in fit season

what it is not to confer with flesh and blood. No doubt this might be provoking to human importance sometimes. It might seem entirely despising his brethren. “Immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood.”

No doubt also his line of procedure did not at all consort with their desires, who were sticklers for earthly order, and a line that looks safe and respectable to natural eyes. What! an apostle, or at any rate one that says he is an apostle, setting aside what God inaugurated in Jerusalem, not even conferring with those whom the Lord Himself called by His personal summons here below? Here they might flatter themselves were plain tangible facts; here the amplest testimony on the Lord’s part that the twelve are really His chosen apostles. But as for the apostle Paul, he says he was called, and this by his master from heaven; but by his own showing nobody heard the call of Christ but himself. One can readily conceive men of strong prejudice and of weak faith thus hesitating, especially in presence of the apostle’s strong assertion of entire liberty from the law for the Gentiles. Consequently it is plain from the beginning, that the apostleship of Paul made a demand upon faith which the other apostolate did not. He was an enemy stopped in sovereign grace. He was not converted first, and then gradually led into that highest degree, but called at once to be an apostle as well as saint in a way that belonged to no one but himself. It was from and in connection with Christ in heaven. He acts on this in faith; he understands it with an energy and a brightness that increased even in his Roman prison.

But it was true from the first. “Immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood.” Had Paul gone up to present his credentials to the others, he would have lowered, obscured, and done as far as in him lay to destroy the special blessedness and peculiar glory of his apostleship. But he was not thus disobedient to the heavenly vision. And God held the reins that the truth might be kept unsullied and pure; and he goes south and north as the Lord guided His servant, but not to Jerusalem to those that were apostles before him. He visits Arabia and Damascus once more. Then after a certain lapse of time he does see Jerusalem, but no more than Peter and James, — not the apostolic college officially. And you will observe the immense importance attached to this simple account; for all here is plain matter of fact, but pregnant with the weightiest consequences as long as the church and the gospel last here below.

“The things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not. Afterwards I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia, and was unknown by face unto the churches of Judea which were in Christ.” Was this then a reproach? Be it so: such was true. It was really part of God’s wondrous ways with him, as indicating the true character of Christianity and of its ministry as contrasted with Judaism. It was therefore not only for him, but for the instruction of the Galatians, and of us all. If understood, it completely cut all the earthly swaddling-clothes of the heavenly church, and of the Christian. Those who lived in Jerusalem were too prone to preserve the clothes and the cradle which had their place and use at first, but had no claim to be kept up among the Gentiles. Whatever might be the apostle’s tenderness toward his nation elsewhere, not an earthly

link but must be snapped. Accordingly the apostle lays stress on the fact that he was “unknown by face unto the churches of Judea which were in Christ: but they had heard only, that he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed. And they glorified God in me.”

This, be it observed, was part of God’s way with him beyond all others. There was no such thing as a gradual training. The other apostles enjoyed this more. They had followed Jesus in His earthly path of presentation to Israel. They had been by degrees instructed according to the testimony which the Lord Jesus was pleased to give; and most suited it was, of course, to the time, people, and circumstances. Anything else would have been imperfect; but still it had essentially a transitional character. It was partly directed to the hearts and consciences of the Jews, partly in view of the approaching rupture of all ties with Israel.

In Paul’s case there was nothing of the sort. His testimony was characteristically though not of course exclusively heavenly, as it was also the witness of grace to the fullest. How could it be otherwise with one persecuting at the moment that he was arrested, in hot deadly opposition to God’s church up to his most unexpected call from heaven? Thus is seen sovereign grace, and nothing else, as well as a heavenly link instantly formed between the Lord in glory and His servant on earth. No wonder that the apostle attached the greatest moment to the facts of his conversion and call, and that, instead of hiding his lack of familiarity both with the apostles and with the churches in Judea, he glories in it. It was through no such channel that he had his apostleship. Christ on high had called him. Such

was the will of God the Father that had raised Christ from the dead.

Galatians 2. But we have a good deal more. He tells us that fourteen years after he again went up to Jerusalem. He went up with Barnabas, taking Titus with him. It was by revelation, not by summons from Jerusalem, or to acquire a title thereby. And “Titus,” as he says here, “who was with me, being a Greek,” etc. So far from this being the smallest allowance of Jewish prejudice, it was itself a powerful blow against it. Thus, going up with Barnabas, he took Titus, a Gentile, along with him; and even so by revelation. It was rather to have Gentile liberty secured by the twelve apostles, and that the Judaizers should be condemned by the church at Jerusalem. It was the very reverse of deriving his authority from either. He went up by revelation for the purpose of getting a condemnation in Jerusalem itself of those who would force Jewish principles on the church of God at large. The legal mischief had emanated from Jerusalem: the remedy of grace must be applied by the apostles, elders, and brethren there. It was a misuse of the respect naturally accorded to some who came from Jerusalem; and so God took care to correct the evil by a formal, public, authoritative sentence of the body there, instead of a pure and simple rejection of the error among the Gentile churches, which might have looked like a schism, or at least a divergence of feeling between them and the apostle Paul. It might have been inferred that Paul was to do what he could with the Gentile churches, but that the twelve exclusively cared for the churches in Judea, he consequently having nothing to do with them. But it is not so. The apostle goes up to Jerusalem, not only with Barnabas, who had come from

thence, but taking with him Titus, who seems not to have been there before — Titus, his own valued companion in labour, but a Gentile. In fact, what Jerusalem had done, as far as this was concerned, was to let slip men that would impose circumcision — evil workers, as he in a later epistle contemptuously calls such like of the concision; for they were corrupting the Gentile churches by Judaism, instead of helping them in Christ.

Thus, then, God directed and ruled that the apostle should go up and have the evil condemned on the spot, and at the centre from which it had emanated. And when he went there, was it a question of receiving aught from the twelve? Nay; he communicated unto them the gospel which he preached among the Gentiles. It was not that they communicated to him the gospel they had learned from Jesus here below, but he communicated to them that gospel he was in the habit of preaching among the Gentiles. But it was in no vain glory, in no tone of superiority, though, no doubt, it was a far fuller and higher testimony than theirs; for he adds, “privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run or had run in vain.” He granted that persons might indulge in some such thoughts about him. It was for the chiefs at Jerusalem to judge for themselves, and they did judge to the confusion of the apostle’s adversaries. “But neither Titus [he takes occasion to say parenthetically], being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised.” And what was the result of all this? Why, that though there were “false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage,” Paul did not give place by subjection

even for an hour, “that the truth of the gospel might continue with them.” For the foundation was at stake. “But of these who seemed to be somewhat.” Here he takes up, not the mischievous troublers of the Gentiles, whom he does not hesitate to call “false brethren,” but the highest in office he found there. “Of these who seemed to be somewhat (whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me).” It is interesting to note the earnestness and strength with which the apostle speaks, now the question had been fairly raised. Pungent, abrupt, indignant, he none the less was led of God. “But of these who seemed to be somewhat, (whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me: God accepteth no man’s person:) for they who seemed to be somewhat in conference added nothing to me; but contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter,” etc. A different issue ensued from their settling down in the mutual independence of the Gentile churches and the Jewish. “They gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision.” They thus acted and pronounced according to the evident intention of God conveyed in the character of their apostolates respectively.

Thus, it is seen, the truth was established. The apostle Paul interferes in no way with the work which God had given the others to do. He owned and valued, in its own place, the difficult, weighty, and momentous work which God had assigned to Peter, James, and the rest; but at the same time he stood firmly — humbly, of course, and lovingly, but firmly — for that which the Lord had assigned to himself and his colleagues among the

Gentiles; and, so far from Christ's liberty having been in the least weakened, the apostolic conclave put their seal, with the whole church at Jerusalem, upon it most heartily. (Acts 15) As it is said here, "They gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship, that we should go unto the heathen and they unto the circumcision. Only they would that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do." But this was not all. He mentions another fact, and of the greatest gravity, closing this part of his argument — that when Peter subsequently came down into the Gentile quarters, he had been himself affected by the subtle spirit of Judaism, i.e., the chief of the twelve! How little is man to be accounted of! And Paul, far from deriving his apostleship or aught else from Peter, was obliged to rebuke him, and this publicly. "When Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed: for before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles; but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?" I call your attention particularly to this, brethren, that an act apparently so simple as Peter's ceasing to eat with the Gentiles had such a solemn character in the eye of the apostle Paul, that he considered it a question of the truth of the gospel. Are you prepared for this searching judgment of what looked a small and indifferent matter? Do your souls go along

with Paul's decision? Or are you inclined toward the easy-going yieldingness of Peter? Can you seize the gravity of this?

Remember what it must have been to one like Paul to censure the most honoured of the twelve. For Peter is not said to have withdrawn from the Lord's table where the uncircumcised met, but from the simple matter of eating with the Gentiles. The truth of the gospel, to the apostle Paul's mind, was at stake. Need it be added that he was right and Peter wrong? The gospel had brought in before God this double conclusion, founded on the first Adam and the last. It supposed, and went forth to every creature on the ground of the total ruin of Jew and Gentile. There was no difference: all had sinned. And it proclaimed the full and equally blessed standing of those who received Christ. There was no difference in the blessing of Christ: man's guilt and God's grace were alike indiscriminate. There was no difference either way. (Rom. 3, Rom. 10) But the act of Peter went to maintain a difference. The truth of the gospel, therefore, was compromised. And there were reasons why Peter was grievously in fault, particularly as he did no longer adhere to the law, but lived as one conscious of the freedom from it which the gospel gives those who believe in a risen Christ. Why then did he want he Gentiles to live as did the Jews?

The apostle accordingly now turns to the great argument of his epistle, and the discussion of those grand principles that are characteristic to Christianity, and in full agreement with the facts that have already been brought before you. "We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of

Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we may be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." But then he goes farther. He says, "If, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is Christ therefore the minister of sin?" This would have flowed from Peter's conduct. Had Peter been right, it was evident that the gospel had put Peter in the wrong. The gospel had led Peter to treat the Jews and Gentiles all alike. The gospel had given him to sanction in his ways and words the overthrow of the partition wall. If Peter was acting rightly now, this had all been a mistake, and consequently the gospel — nay, solemn to say, Christ Himself — would be thus a minister of sin. Such was the serious but necessary import of Peter's act. Peter would have been horrified at such a conclusion. This shows us the exceeding seriousness of a step apparently so trifling as his abstaining from further intercourse with the Gentiles in mere ordinary life. The apostle's discerning eye at once judged by Christ and by that gospel which he had learned from Him. He habitually measured things not so much by their bearing on Jews or Gentiles as by their effect on Christ's glory. In point of fact, to bring in Christ is also best of all to secure the blessing, the privileges, the glory that God has in His grace for every one that believes. Paul was pleading for the real interests of the Jew just as much as of the Gentile; but he presses this most clenching argument — that Peter's conduct involved the making Christ Himself the minister of sin; "for if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor."

Then the apostle at once explains, as annexed to this, the real state of the case. “I through the law am dead to the law.” As you know, he had been under law as a Jew. And what was the effect of God’s giving him to have an application of law in his own conscience? Why, to feel himself a dead man. As it is reasoned out in Romans 7, the law came, and he died. “I through law am dead to law, that I might live unto God.” The law in itself never produces such a result. All that the law can do, even when yielded by the might of the Spirit of God, is to force on a soul the consciousness of being dead before God. The law is never life to the dead, but kills morally those who seem alive. “I through law am dead to law.” It is thus, then, that grace uses it to give me death in my conscience before God. Thus I am dead through the law. The Spirit of God can employ it to make a man feel that all is over with him; but He goes farther in grace, and by that very law brings the man in dead to the law, and not merely condemned. He through law died to law, that he might live to God! Here he comes to the positive blessing; for the Spirit cannot rest in what is but negative. But it is life after death to law, and consequently in another sphere.

He next announces the true secret of it all: “I am crucified with Christ.” It is not merely that I have found in Christ a Saviour, but I am crucified with Christ. My very nature is dealt with. All that I have as a living man in the world is gone, — not, of course, as a mere matter of fact, but, what is far more important, as a matter of faith. The history of the flesh — its sad and humbling history — is soon over; but the history that faith opens into never closes. “I am crucified with Christ.” This terminates all for me as a living man here below.

“Nevertheless” — astonishing to say, for it could not be natural life — “nevertheless, I live.” And what sort of life can this be? “Yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.” How precious to have done with one’s sinful self and to begin a life so perfect as Christ’s! “And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”

I have nothing to do with the law any more, even if I had been once under it as a Jew. For the law was used with killing power; and, slain as it were in my conscience, I found in that very place Christ Himself by the grace of God, — Christ that died for me; and not merely this, but Christ in whom I died. I am crucified with Christ: consequently all that remains for me is living this new life which Christ is in me. And this life is sustained by the very same person who is its source. “The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me,” etc. It is not a question of my loving Him, though this is and must be true of the saints; but this would tend to throw the soul on self, and it is not the reckoning of grace. What comforts the soul, what strengthens and keeps it up, is that He “loved me, and gave Himself for me.”

Thus, as he says most emphatically, “I do not frustrate the grace of God;” they did, every one who substituted aught but Christ and His cross. Every one who went back from such a gospel as this was, as far as it went, frustrating the grace of God. “If righteousness come by the law,” (he does not merely say, “come of the law,” but come by it,) “then Christ is dead [died] in vain.” Not so; it is exclusively of grace by Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. It is wholly apart from works of law.

Accordingly, in Galatians 3 he pursues his reasoning. “O foolish Galatians,” he now breaks out in an impassioned appeal to them, “who hath bewitched you [that ye should not obey the truth should here vanish], before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth crucified among you?” Observe the place the cross has here, not merely Christ’s blood, but His death on the cross. As we saw it in the Corinthians applied to judge the worldliness of the saints there, so here it judges their legalism. “This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?” There are two things in the Christian; he has a life, a new life in Christ, but he has also, the Holy Ghost. The law kills instead of giving life, and puts under condemnation instead of giving that Spirit which is necessarily a spring of sonship and liberty. Having brought in the true character of the Christian’s life as flowing simply and solely from Christ, and from Christ crucified too, so here he takes up the Holy Ghost. He was given, whether in power or in person, not by the law, but by the hearing of faith.

“Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? Have ye suffered so many things in vain, if it be yet in vain? He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?” There could be but one answer. This immense privilege had no connection with law whatever. The Holy Ghost is given as the seal of faith in Christ on the accomplishment of redemption, not before nor otherwise.

Then he takes up Abraham; for this is always the stock argument of those who would bring in circumcision and

the law, Abraham being emphatically the friend of God and the father of the faithful. And mark how the Holy Ghost turns Abraham into an additional and most unexpected proof of the grace of God and the truth of the gospel. Only we must carefully bear this in mind, that in the epistle to the Galatians we never rise exactly to church ground. It is Christian ground, certainly, but not the church as such. Of course the same persons who are here in present view belonged to the church of God; but then they are not contemplated in their heavenly relationship, but as the children of promise, as we shall see in the end of this very chapter. There are many present privileges and future glories that belong to the Christian; and promise is one of them. We are not to suppose that a higher and more heavenly character blots out the lesser place; of this the apostle takes advantage here. But he proves more when he says that Abraham believed God; it was plainly not a question of law. Abraham never. heard of the law. “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore that they which are of faith” (not those that cry up the law) “are the children of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith,” not by becoming proselytes of the gate, or entering on a legal basis, but “foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.” Later, and in a far fuller way now, the gospel was the blessed answer to this early grace. He does not say that it is the complement of it; but most decidedly it flows from the same divine spring of grace. The gospel, not the law, owns its kindred with the promise. “So then,” says he, “they which be of faith are blessed with faithful

Abraham.” The law holds out but never gives blessing. Those that are of faith, not those who pretend to the law and do it not, are blessed with their father.

But he goes deeply. He tells them that as many as take the ground of law — works are under the curse already. Not that they have actually broken down and failed; but so incapable is man of standing before God on the principle of doing the law, that it is all over with him the moment he pretends to it. “As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.” The consequence is, that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God; and this he proves, not only from the promise, but from the prophets. When the prophet speaks of any one living, it is by faith “The just shall live by faith.” Hence, you see, all exactly suits the gospel as Paul insisted on it. “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ.” He does not say, that the Gentiles were under that curse, but that Christ bought off us who were in this position from its curse; for in truth, whatever might be our boast, all we (the Jews) got from the law was a curse, not a blessing; and what Christ did for us was to purchase us from that awful plight in which the law could not but put us because we had transgressed. it. And thus the blessing of Abraham could flow freely towards the Gentiles who never were there.

And this leads to another point, — the relation of the law to the promises. How do they stand related? and how do they affect each other? The apostle turns this into an

admirable piece of divine reasoning in defence of the gospel. “Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; though it be but a man’s covenant, yet, if it be confirmed, no man annulleth or addeth thereto.” Everybody knows this. When once a covenant is “signed, sealed, and delivered,” it must not be meddled with. You cannot lawfully add to it, any more than set aside its provisions. “Now to Abraham were the promises spoken, and to his seed. He saith not, And to seeds, as to many; but as to one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. And this I say, that the covenant confirmed before by God unto Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, can not annul so that it should make the promise of none effect.” Such is the application. “For if the inheritance be of law, it is no more of promise:” otherwise by the condition of law you would annul the promise. That is to say, the covenant that was made between God and Abraham had reference to the seed which was coming, symbolized by Isaac, but really looking onward to Christ. Nothing that God afterwards introduced annulled this. If the law, introduced afterwards, were allowed to exercise control, the effect would be to set aside the promise. It would be first adding to it, and not only so, but annulling it. The inheritance, therefore, depends on the grace of God fulfilling His promise, not on man’s accomplishment of the law, even if possible. The promise is therefore entirely distinct from the law, which was not heard of for four hundred and thirty years after. The long lapse of time ought to have guarded men from mixing up the law with the promise, and thus from the appearance of annulling the promise by the law, for this would be most dishonouring to God. We can understand a foolish man making a covenant, and the next day repenting of it,

which is never true of the divine purposes. In this case it was God that gave the promise; it was He that confirmed the covenant to Christ, without saying a word about the law till four hundred and thirty years after. How impossible, therefore, to add the law to the promise! Still less is it possible to let the law set its force aside. “To Abraham were the promises made, and to his seed.”

This is exceedingly important, and the more as I believe the scope of the allusion to Abraham and to his seed is not often appreciated. The argument is founded upon the unity of the seed of promise in this connection. For God does speak elsewhere, and even on this occasion, of a numerous seed. One of the encouragements, as we know, which God furnished to Abraham was, that he should have a seed like the sand of the sea, and like the stars of the sky. These were his lineal posterity. But where the Gentiles are mentioned, God only speaks of seed without reference to number.

This is best seen by turning to Genesis 22, where both facts are found in the same context. I just refer to it for a moment, because it adds much to the beauty of the reasoning in Galatians. In verse 17 it is written, “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.” At first sight it seems most extraordinary, if the apostle referred to such a Scripture for the proof of the importance of one seed; because, if there is anything that lies on the surface of the passage, it is the multiplicity of the seed — a seed expressly said to exceed all reckoning. This, then, is not what the apostle Paul has in view, but in contrast with it. And mark the difference. When God speaks of the seed numerous as the sand or the stars, He gives them a

Jewish character of blessing. “Thy seed (i.e., the numerous seed) shall possess the gate of his enemies.” God promises the final power and glory of Israel in the earth, putting down their foes, and so forth.

But immediately after this it is added, “In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed. “Here we have the Gentiles expressly named, and to this the apostle refers. Mark it well. When God gives a pledge not of possessing the gate of enemies, when He speaks of the blessing of the nations, instead of the overthrow of Israel’s foes, then he speaks simply of “thy seed.” There is no comparison of countless seed; there is not an allusion to the sand of the sea, or to the stars of the sky. On this the apostle reasons.

What the Jews would have liked, no doubt, was power (and the Galatians, after all, were in danger of slipping into the same snare; for the law suits the world, as grace does not), and in the world present power and honour. This the Jews are destined to have by-and-by; for the promises to Abraham are not exhausted yet. Whereas the Holy Ghost by the apostle draws attention to the contrast of “thy seed” (as one) with the numerous seed, with earthly blessing attached to them; whilst to “thy seed” simply, without reference to stars or to sand, no more is annexed than the blessing of Gentiles. This it is to which we are come now under Christianity. By-and-by will be fulfilled the promised earthly blessing, and power, and glory for Israel like the sand and the stars. The Jews will surely be exalted, as well as converted nationally, and they will then put down their enemies, being made the head when other nations become the tail. But meanwhile, under the gospel, there is an express promise of the blessing of the Gentiles when

God spoke of the one seed, which is Christ. Already “thy seed,” the true Isaac, is given, and in that true seed the Gentiles are being blessed. It is no question now of being subject to the Jews, who shall never possess the gate of their enemies, but be peeled and scattered and few, while the gospel is going forth. The other part remains, and must be accomplished in its own day, when Israel’s heart turns to the Lord. Meanwhile another and a better sort of blessing is given, as a better Seed also is given — the true Heir of all the promises of God, even Christ the Lord. And, doubtless, God had all this in view when He pledged Himself with an oath to Abraham. He did not forget His people Israel; but He had always the glory of Christ before Him; and the moment we rise up to this blessed Seed of all blessing (the true Isaac, dead and risen really, as the son of Abraham was then in figure), the blessing of the Gentiles is secured in that one sole person, before the Jews are multiplied in their land under the new covenant, and possess the gate of their enemies.

This then is the apostle’s allusion and reasoning; but he proceeds to meet a natural objection. If the promise be the only means of enjoying the inheritance, what is the good of the law? Does not this make very light of it? You say that the promise is everything, and that the law cannot either set aside the promise or add other clauses to it. What then is the end of the law? It is for the purpose of bringing in transgression, answers the apostle. This is all that people’s zeal and labour come to. They spring from unbelief — from undue thoughts of self, from ignorance of God, from slight thoughts of Christ. Legal activity is but labouring in the fire for vanity; and if, alas! the Christian dooms himself to such

hard labour instead of resting in the faith of Christ, whom has he to blame? Certainly not God, nor His plain and precious word. He will gain transgression thereby; nothing more, nothing better. “Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator.” Thus it is evident that the legal system is a parenthesis. Promise was before the law, and flowed out of the grace of God. The law came in meanwhile, serving its own object, which was to bring out what was in the heart of man. For he is a sinner; and the law called out the sin into articulate transgressions, and made it perfectly plain that the heart is only evil continually, and proves it by plain transgressions; that is all. Then comes the seed, and the promise is made Yea and Amen in Him — all the promises of God. As made under the law He was for Israel; but He died and rose, and was thus free to bless a Gentile as much as a Jew. For what has a risen man to do with Israel more than the nations? All question of natural ties drops in death; as the cross is the disproof of any right to Christ in either. For Jew and Gentile were alike guilty of crucifying Him. All therefore becomes a matter of the pure grace of God; and He is pleased to bless the Gentiles in the Seed, even Christ dead and risen.

The law is of a wholly different nature, and hence was ordained of angels in the hand of a mediator. The creature intervenes here, and the consequence soon appears. For he comes to another and most cogent argument. “Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one.” The meaning is that you never can get stability in blessing until you have simply God putting

forth His own power according to His own grace. Leave room for God, and for God alone. Such is the only possible way in which blessing can be brought in, in order that such souls as we are should be blessed and maintained in it. And thus it is with the promise. In it there is one party, — even God Himself, who gave it, and accordingly fulfils it in that Seed to whom the covenant was confirmed. But the moment you bring in the law, you have two parties; and, strange to say, instead of the greater party being God, it becomes man, whose responsibility is to God. God asks, and man is called to give, i.e., is called to obedience. Alas! we know too well the result from sinful man. Grace alone in such a case brings glory to God. Thus, clearly, in the law man becomes the prominent and responsible party, not God. This never can bring man to God any more than glory to God. The law, accordingly, never was the truth, either on God's side, or man's. It was, of course, altogether just and right in itself. Man had his duty to God, and be ought to have. done his duty; but it was precisely what he could not do, because he was a sinner. To make this evident by transgressions was the object of the law. It was to demonstrate his sinfulness, not to gain the inheritance. But this was only provisional and parenthetic. After all, what God had at heart was the accomplishment of His own promise in grace. When He gave the promise to Abraham, He said, "I will give." And now in Christ He has accomplished it — I mean already. But before He sent the promised Seed, man's self-confidence needed the discipline of the intermediate thing, the law; and after infinite long-suffering on God's part, the people who undertook to obey it had to be swept out of the land for their disobedience.

The law was given them with all pomp and solemnity. It was ordained by angels, who had nothing to do with promise, which God gave direct to His friend. When He had anything unfailing to do or say, He loved to appear in grace; He said it Himself, and did it for Himself. But when men would have anything fraught with distress to His people, when through their folly confusion must ensue, contrary to all that His heart loved, then it was left to others. Thus the law was ordained by angels in the hands of a mediator. A double intervention comes between God and man, in contrast with the simplicity of His ways of grace. In grace, God in the person of His Son speaks and accomplishes ALL; and thus He is glorified from first to last. Man is only the receiver; and truly, as we know, “it is more blessed to give than to receive.” God reserves to Himself this great blessedness in the gospel; whereas under the law there was nothing of the kind. Then I must repeat that God could only make claims; and man had to take the place, if he could, of giving to God — of rendering his obedience. He was bound to do what he ought; but, in point of fact, all was a failure, and could be nothing else, because man was a sinner.

This then is what the law brought in. Is it against the promise of God? Not at all. Rather, if man had been able to obey the law and so acquire a title, then two systems would have interfered with each other as being to the same end. Some would have received the inheritance because of promise, and others on the ground of law. Thus the two totally opposite roads of grace and law would have been leading to the same result. This must be indeed confusion; as it is, there is none. Under law all is lost; under grace all is saved. The law and the promise

are both from God, but the law's use is only negative and condemnatory. It cannot and ought not to spare sinners. The promise has another and most blessed place. It brings in deliverance for man in the accomplishment of God's purpose in Christ. This is what is found under it. Thus the law pulls down what is evil, and the promise gives what is good and builds it up. The law brings man in his nothingness into evidence, it proves that he is only a poor lost sinner. Grace brings out the faithful promise of God, and His goodness to him that deserves nothing. Thus, rightly understood and applied, the law and the promises, while wholly distinct, are in no way inconsistent with each other. Merge them, as unbelief does, and all is confusion and ruin.

Further, it is laid down, if there had been a law capable of giving life, righteousness would be by the law. But this could not be. On the contrary, "the Scripture hath concluded all under sin" — not under righteousness — by law. Thus, whether it be the Gentile without law, or the Jew with it, all are shut up under sin. "The scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe."

But, he adds, faith is come (that is, the testimony to be believed by man now, or the gospel). This he means here by "faith." "Before faith came we [Jews] were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all the children of God." Instead of being under a slave, with rigorous and humiliating discipline, there is now the place of a child before his Father; the Christian stands by faith of Jesus

in direct relationship to God. “Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.”

This is shown still more fully in the allusion to baptism: “As many of us as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” It is of course assumed that every Christian had been baptized. There was no doubt or difficulty on this head in these early days. There was no believer, Jew or Gentile, who had not gladly submitted to that very blessed sign of having part with Christ, and of that which is made good by Christ. “As many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” It is not a question of law at all. Christian baptism, contrariwise, supposes man dead; and the only death that can deliver man out of his own death is the death of Christ. Therefore, when a man is baptized, he is not, of course, baptized into his own death; there is no sense in such a thought. He is baptized into Christ’s death, which is the sole means of deliverance out of his state of sin. So here the Christian puts on Christ, not the law or circumcision. He wants to get rid of the first Adam and all its appliances, not to keep it on; and therefore he puts on Christ. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female;” all is Christ and only Christ. It is not an old creation, but a new one. Can anything prove that it is not an old creation better than this — that there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female, which last at least is an absolute necessity for the perpetuation of the race? All this vanishes in Christ; we are all one in Him; and if you are Christ’s, what need to be circumcised! You do not want to become the children of Abraham in that sense, which would be the revival of the flesh. If Christ’s, they were Abraham’s seed already, “and heirs

according to the promise;" for Christ, he had shown before, was the one true Seed; and if we are Christ's, we belong to that one true Seed, and therefore are the children of Abraham without circumcision at all. Nothing can be more conclusive than this disproof of the fleshly pretensions that were connected with Jerusalem, and were brought in under cover of Abraham, but really to the subversion of the gospel.

In Galatians 4 the relation is taken up, not of the law to the promise, but of the Christian now to the condition of the saints of old — a very important point also. Here one may be very brief: "The heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; but is under tutors and governors, until the time appointed of the father. Even so we, when we were children," etc. The comparison would take in the Old Testament saints; or the application ("even so we") is to those then alive, who had been under that state of things. "We, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world; but when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." The apostle shows that, so far from bringing in Christians and putting them on the ground of the Old Testament, God is really leading those who were in that connection out of it all by redemption. He fully allows that the Lord was both made of a woman and made under the law; but what was the ultimate object in view! It was not to keep people under the law, still less could it be to put any under the law, but to bring them clean out if they had been under it before. Such was the case with the Old Testament believers, and many Jewish believers

then alive. Was it possible, then, that any could desire to put the Gentiles under law, when they had been brought out from it themselves by the will of God, the work of Christ, and the witness of the Holy Spirit? What a gross inconsistency! What a subversion, not only of the truth of God revealed in the gospel, but also of redemption, which is its basis! For Christ bought off those that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons, bringing them by grace into a place of known salvation and intelligent joy in relation with our God and Father, out of that bondage and nonage which the law supposes.

But what about the Gentiles? “Because ye are sons.” He does not condescend to reason about their place in the matter, but puts them at once in their due relationship. Because they were sons, God sent that blessed proof and power of their sonship. He gives freely the Holy Ghost on their acceptance of Christ’s name; or, as it is here written, “He sent forth the Spirit of his Son in your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.” That is, if the Holy Ghost was given as the seal of their redemption, and as the joy of the sonship, wherein they now stood, in the exercise of their nearness to God and enjoyment of His love, they cry, “Abba, Father,” — the very words of Christ himself (but in how different circumstances!) to His Father. “Wherefore, thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.”

Thence he advances to another point of his argument. Indeed, we may say that now he thunders on the Galatians that were dragging in the law. Did they know that for a Gentile Christian to take up Judaistic elements is in principle to go back to heathenism? Heathenism! Why they thought they were becoming more truly

religious, more reverent in their value for Scripture. They thought that Christianity would be all the better for adopting the ancient forms and beautiful figures of the law. Not at all, says the apostle, you are returning straight into your old heathenism without knowing it yourselves. For he had shown that our purchase by Christ delivers even the Jew from subjection to the law; whilst Gentiles are set at once on the ground of grace without the intervention of any legal apprenticeship whatever, “Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods. But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?” What can be conceived more serious or trenchant than such a statement as this? Impossible to find a blast more withering to all that they were aiming at. Born and bred in the abominable idolatries of the heathen, they were strangers to the institutions of Israel. They had been lately brought by the grace of God into Christianity, where they found Jewish brethren, now made one, as it is said, in Christ. Ignorant or false men had made them hanker after circumcision. What were they doing? When a Gentile Christian, mark, takes up such Old Testament elements, according to the Holy Ghost, it is not to him merely Judaism, but a return to his Gentile idols, little as he may think so.

Jewish elements were borne with in a Jew. The apostle Paul himself, in Rom. 14, insists upon the forbearance of a Gentile even towards the Jew that might be still encumbered by his days, meats, and so on. But the moment a Gentile takes the system up, or a Jew presses it on a Gentile, it is nothing but downright heathenism.

Who would have ventured to say, without express scripture, that the old Jewish forms thus adopted by a Gentile believer have such an idolatrous character? Yet how true it is, the more we look below the surface; indeed, in our day it becomes more and more palpable to the eye. Ritualism is the present most patent comment on the apostle's statement. The very defence set up, and the meanings which these men put on the forms and ceremonies of which they make Christianity so largely to consist, demonstrate their most barefaced turning back to idolatry. Do not suppose that idolatry has its character saved because Jesus is worshipped. Christianity refuses to be mingled with anything but itself. Tender and comprehensive as Christianity is, it is also the most exclusive thing that can be. Truth must necessarily be exclusive, and all who hold the truth must, in their adhesion to it and Him who is its personal expression, be exclusive too. (I mean by this, of course, exclusive of sin and falsehood.) There can be no compromise; but to be exclusive in any sense save as the expression of the truth in Christ would be in its own way an utter and heartless falsehood. There is nothing that requires more the power of grace; for even the truth itself, if severed from grace, ceases to be the truth. Being found only in Christ, it supposes the manifestation of grace; light does not in the same way that truth does. "Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." (Compare John 1:9 and 17.)

Now the Galatians were unwittingly in danger of giving up the truth. They were only, as they supposed, beginning to cherish a becoming attitude toward the religion of the fathers, and of all who had before Christ honoured God on earth. Venerable religion! — the only

system of earthly worship which had ever possessed God's sanction. Why not adopt what was wanting in Christianity? Where was the harm of taking up what saints of old submitted to? No, rejoins the apostle; you are going back to heathenism. They had been idolaters before they became Christians; and to take up Jewish principles in addition to Christ is to turn back again to their cast-off idols. Next, we are told, wherein this consisted. "Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. What! is this all? I have known a divine who had a character for intelligence use these words as a motto and sanction. And no wonder. Christendom is built upon this footing. They think that it is quite right, for the church especially, to appoint days for this and that saint; to have certain seasons to remind one of the Lord's incarnation, ministry, and crucifixion, of His resurrection, ascension, and so on. I choose the best facts; for I have no wish to rake up abuses. All this is counted a great, wise, and sensible help to devotion. Well, "sensible" help in the meaning of an appeal to nature it is; but it is a sensible help to idolatry, not to living faith. This is the very evil which the Spirit of God so earnestly and energetically denounces here by the apostle Paul. He does not charge them with anything of an openly gross or immoral nature; but what a proof that the truth of God, that the grace of Christ, is exclusive of everything but itself! Nor is there a greater evidence of God's tender and considerate care for us than such a fact as this. For He knows our tendency to mingle law with grace in some form or measure, and treats that which was of the fathers and long before Moses, as a foreign ingredient deleterious to Christians. As God has wrought for us on the cross, and delivered us from every atom of sin in Christ, so He will not allow

us to mix one earthly or legal element with the revelation of His grace, which He has made ours in redemption, and proclaimed to us by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven.

Hereon the apostle puts before them another expostulation: “I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain.” And this directly follows his censure of their observance of times and seasons. “Brethren, I beseech you, be as I am; for I am as ye are.” They knew very well that he had nothing to do with the law or its ordinances. “Be as I am.” By this he plainly means — free from law. “For I am as ye are.” They were, after all, Gentiles, and as such ought to have had nothing to do with the law. So he calls on them to be as free of the law as himself. For he, though a Jew, had completely done with the law, and all that pertains to it. “For I am as ye are: ye have not injured me at all.” That is, the apostle, instead of regarding his despised freedom from the law as a just reproach, glories in it. There was no insult to him, nor injury done, in saying that he did not acknowledge the law for a Christian.

But, further, he refers in a very affecting manner to some personal circumstances — how in his own body he was a witness of having nothing to do with flesh; for what God had been pleased to put upon him as serving Him in the gospel was not great power of nature, but that which made him contemptible in his preaching. It is evident that the thorn in the flesh was something which left him open to a slight, and made it difficult indeed for any one to understand how a man who was called to be an apostle should find it hard to convey plainly his mind in preaching. It is quite obvious that there was a hindrance of some sort. It seems to have been

something which affected his speech too, and exposed him to ridicule and to unfavourable comments where men were carnally-minded. But in this he could glory. It was something painful to bear. At first he prayed the Lord to take it from him; but no! though he had prayed thrice, as his Lord had done on another and wondrous occasion, so the apostle was to have communion with Christ in this way, and learn that there is something better than the taking away of that which makes nothing of the flesh. The power of Christ must rest upon him. Thus it appears that the Galatians as well as the Corinthians had been similarly affected. And this leads him to speak of another trial. When they first knew him, there was no difficulty felt on this score; they heard him as an angel of God. It was they who had changed, not he. They had so completely lost sight of the grace of Christ, the sweetness and the bloom of it, that he travailed again for them: his soul once more passed through that which had exercised him when they were converted.

Then he gives a closing blow to those who doted about the law. He says to those who would be under the law, why do you not listen to the law? Look at Abraham and his house; look at the maid Hagar; look at Isaac and Ishmael. There you have in a figure the two parties that are still found on the earth: the law party symbolized by Ishmael, the child of flesh; and those that cling to the grace of God, who have their pattern in Isaac, the child of promise. Now, what does God say about it? Why this: “Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, and the other by a freewoman.” The apostle expressly reasons on Abraham, as they were always anxious to cite Abraham, the father of circumcision. Their main support

then, as they thought Abraham, had two sons; but they stood, according to Scripture, on wholly different principles. “The child of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise.” How apt the illustration for exposing the judaizers! The case is hit off exactly to the life. Which son represented them? Under which type did they fall — Ishmael or Isaac? Whom did their principle make them resemble?

There can be no doubt about the matter. “Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law?” “Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, which answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us [all?]. For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath a husband.” The application of this is as plain as it is conclusive, for those who appealed to Abraham and bowed to the word of God. Instead of going up to Jerusalem on earth, instead of endeavouring to effect a junction with the law or anything else here below, the gospel wants no such allies, but repudiates them all. The very reverse of their system is true. The true link is with Jerusalem above, as our prototype is Isaac, the child of the freewoman. Theirs was the slave’s son — Ishmael.

Then, bringing in the name of Jerusalem, the Spirit leads him to apply the prophecy of Isaiah, which shows that millennial Israel (in their turn abandoning self-righteousness, and made free by God’s grace in Christ)

will look back and count as their own those now brought in as Christians, and find far more children begotten by the gospel, in the time of their own desolation, than even when they flourished of old, and had,all that earthly power and glory could give. Thus a decisive blow is struck at the principle of connection with the law; and it was evident that they did not truly “hear the law.” Their ears were heavy, and their eyes blinded by their legalism. Nor did they understand the prophets better. To be under law was fatal to Jerusalem. Everything lost then would be gained when promise has its way. Up to the destruction of Jerusalem it was law; but now, under Christianity, Jerusalem, being rebellious and scorning promise like Ishmael, is cast out and has nothing. She is desolate; she is no longer in the condition of the married wife, but like the fugitive bondwoman. She is as one that has no husband. Yet, wondrous to say, when she desires to be under grace by-and-by, all those that are now brought in by promise will be accounted as children to her. Such is the reasoning in which the apostle uses this very remarkable prophecy. When Jerusalem is humbled by the mercy of God, and betakes herself to her Messiah and the new covenant, she will “hear the law,” and the prophets will be accomplished in her blessing, and in the largeness of love the present children of promise (even Christians, as being in a certain mystical sense children of Jerusalem) will be her boast. But this will be Jerusalem, under not law but promise and liberty, restored by grace after having lost everything by the law, and reduced to utter desolation. But for us now the apostle carefully adds the principle of our heavenly character. Ours is Jerusalem above, not a city on earth. That is, he links on the heavenly character of Jerusalem for us before touching on the desolate place of

Jerusalem after the flesh, or of the predicted change of heart and blessing in grace, when she will be glad to appropriate, as it were, the Christians born now after the Spirit. This closes the course of the apostle's argument.

Next he turns to direct exhortation, the chief salient points of which will call for but few words. It is liberty and not law that the Christian stands in. At the same time he insists in the most peremptory manner that our liberty in Christ is to be used for holiness. He shows that the Spirit of God dwelling in the believer gives no license for the action of the flesh. In other words, if the believer simply were one forgiven by grace, without having either life in Christ or the Holy Ghost dwelling in him, he might, perhaps, plead that he could not avoid sinning. He had been brought to a place of blessing outside himself and by another, the Saviour, which in itself gives the soul motives indeed but not power; whereas, for the soul who is brought to God by the gospel, and planted in the liberty wherein Christ makes free before God, it is no more a question of flesh, but of the Holy Ghost who is given to him. And who will venture to say that the indwelling Spirit of God fails to supply power to him who submits to the righteousness of God in Christ? Hence the point is not at all whether we have intrinsic power, but whether He is not now abiding in us as "a Spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." — Undoubtedly such is the assurance of God's word to His children; and thus Galatians 5 is in contrast with Romans 7. In that chapter of Romans we have a man converted indeed, but without liberty, and consequently powerless. He sees the right, feels the good, desires the holy, but never, accomplishes. The

reason is, that he has not yet come to own by faith that he has no strength any more than righteousness, and that Christ is all and in all. He is afresh making efforts to improve, yet still in bondage and misery. He is occupied with himself. He feels what he ought to do, but he does it not, and thus is increasingly wretched. Sense of duty is not power. What gives power is the heart surrendering itself in everything, and thus set at liberty by Christ. I am perfectly delivered, and the measure of my deliverance is Christ, and Christ raised from the dead. This is Christianity; and when the soul thankfully accepts from God this blessed liberty, the Holy Ghost is given to and acts in the believer as a Spirit of peace and power; so that if there is the flesh lusting against the Spirit, the Spirit resists this, in order that (for such is the true meaning) they should not do the things that they would.

Accordingly he draws from this a most weighty argument against bringing in the law as the rule of life for the believer. You do not need it, because the Holy Ghost thus working strengthens you unto love. Liberty comes first, mark; power and love afterwards. And how true all this is! Make a child thoroughly happy, and you will soon see that its duty becomes comparatively light and a joy. But when one is miserable, does not every duty, even where it may be as light as a feather, feel as if it were an iron chain on you? It is no wonder that one who is thus tied and bound feels restive under it. Far otherwise is God’s way with souls. He makes one first thoroughly happy in the sense of His grace and the liberty Christ has won, and then the Holy Ghost becomes an indwelling spring of power, though His power is put forth in us only as we have Christ kept

before us. Thus, if we walk in the Spirit, we shall not fulfil the desires of the flesh. Such is the secret of true power. The consequence is, “If ye are led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law;” and more than this, if we are producing the fruits of the Spirit, he can easily say, “Against such there is no law.” Let others talk as they will of the law, no law can censure the real fruits of the Holy Ghost, or those in whom they are found.

Then we come to the closing chapter (Gal. 6); and here we find the Spirit of God calling for tenderness in dealing with those who are overtaken in a fault. “Ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.” Besides, we have a more daily duty: “Bear ye one another’s burdens.” It is not merely to seek in love a fallen brother, but to be the succourer of others in their difficulties. Love finds its activity in caring for those that are cast down, “and so fulfils the law of Christ.” Do you want a law? Is not this just the law for you! It is the law of Christ. Thus He lived and moved here below. The law of Moses tells a man to do his duty in his own place. The law of Christ makes the going out of love towards another, so to speak, to be his joy. It was exactly what Christ was on earth; and the expression of Christ is the prime call of the Christian.

But there is more for us. He shows that God would give us a deliverance from self-importance; and what a mercy it is to be so blessed, that one can afford to forget one’s self! Now, the law always brings fallen man into importance: such it must be in its principle. The law necessarily makes the man, and the man’s doings, to be the prominent object. Hence the effect of the law in all its ramifications on man is the same. Thus it wrought

among the Galatians. After all their vapouring about the law, they were biting and devouring one another. Was this the love the law claimed? Had they been occupied with Christ, they would have really loved one another, and in other respects too fulfilled the law, without thinking about themselves or it. Such is the effect of Christianity, and such in perfection was Christ Himself. But spite of, or rather because of, their use of law, they were self-important, without holy power, and judged instead of loving each other. How abortive is man in the things of God! “For if a man think himself to be something when he is nothing he deceiveth himself. But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For every man shall bear his own ‘burden.” Thus, whatever may be the energy that seeks souls in love, there is nothing after all like Christianity for maintaining individual responsibility intact.

How wholesome is the language here, “Every one shall bear his own burden!” But responsibility is always according to the relation in which one stands, and the measure of knowledge which each possesses, or ought to possess. Let me press this gravely upon those who are here this night. If I am a man, I am responsible as such; being fallen and sinful, this will end in judgment. If I am a Christian, I am responsible according to that position and privilege. My responsibility is defined by the place in which I am found. If I am a mere man, a sinner, the end of that is (for responsibility is not like power, destroyed by sin) the eternal judgment of God. If I am a Christian, I acquire a new kind of responsibility. My business is to act consistently with the new place in which grace has put me. Let us never confound the two.

One of the most dangerous errors in Christendom is, that these two things are lumped together. The truth is the distinctive boon and mark of Christendom. There is now much confusion of things that differ; and so, more or less, error runs through the whole of it in all its parts; but I know not anything more ruinous than this. The most difficult thing in Christendom is for people to know what it is to be Christians, and to take this place by the faith of Christ themselves. That is, the most simple and most obvious truth is just the last thing a man thinks about. And no wonder. What Satan aims at is, that people should not count themselves what they are, and that they should be always slipping into what they are not. The result of this is, that neither God has His place, nor they. All is confusion. Christ is forgotten.

But then there is another point of exhortation too; and surely we ought not to forget that there are not only the common links of love, and the willingness to succour one another, as we see, beginning with a most extreme case and ending with a general one; but still further, “Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things;” and not only that, but also the general responsibility of the saint and in a solemn manner. It is not only that we are put now where we can be the witness to grace in all its outgoings, but, besides that, we are where flesh might show itself. And this is a universal principle. If I sow to the flesh, I shall of the flesh reap corruption; if I sow to the Spirit, I shall reap life everlasting. Eternal life is beyond doubt the gift of divine grace; but, besides, the eternal life that I have now by pure and simple faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is what I find at the end of my course as well as at the starting. There is such a thing as, by patient continuance

in well doing, to seek for eternal life. Eternal life is spoken of in this double way in scripture (Rom, 6:22, 23); and I also press this as a truth of no small importance and but too much forgotten.

Then, further, attention is drawn to another topic — his own writing of this letter. It was a very unusual circumstance. The apostle, as far as I know, wrote no other letter to any one of the churches of the saints. To the Galatians there was an exception. If he wrote to the Romans;, it was transcribed, or at any rate written, by another. He signed ordinarily, putting his subscription at the end, i.e., his own name, to verify it; but he did not write it. Writing was a somewhat laborious task in those days, and it was a kind of profession to be a writer or scribe, before printing, of course, was known. Now the apostle in writing to the Galatians was so moved in love, and so yearned over them in their danger, that he actually wrote the epistle with his own hand. He draws particular attention to this fact ere he closes: “You see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand.” Thus it was the ardour of love and grief; it was the earnestness of his purpose that could not bear in this instance to employ an intermediary. Just as he had shown that God in His love to man had given the promise direct, so the apostle Paul acts in his care for the saints of God where all the foundations were endangered.

Finally, he concludes by putting the sentence of death, if I may so say, on circumcision, and all such as might adopt it. He intimates also how vain a thing is legalism, because those that were pleading for circumcision in no case carried out their own principle. Bring in one part of law, and you fall under the authority of the whole. You

are bound to carry it out consistently. This they never thought of doing. The enemy had ensnared them by crying up circumcision, in order to betray them into a link with Judaism; but they had no thought of bearing the real burden of the law. As for himself, he gloried only in the cross. “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.” Along with the cross goes a new creation. How blessed, and how all-important for our souls! The cross has sentenced the world; and this very sentence of the world is our deliverance from the world. We are crucified unto it by grace, as the world is crucified unto us by judgment. For the world there is nothing yet executed, any more than the great results of grace for the saints as yet appear in their fulness. The solemnities of Christ’s judgment await men in the day of the Lord. But the whole matter is decided before God. And this is of immense moment to remember. Christianity brings everything to a climax; it also settles all questions. The Christian by the cross of Christ has terminated his connection with flesh, with the world, with the law. He is brought into another condition. And what is this? He is a new creature in Christ. Therefore, no wonder that he says, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

At the same time it is shown to be, not what it might seem, a negative power only, but along with it is the new creation into which grace forms us. “In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.” Gentiles might boast in their freedom. What ground is there for boasting in this? In Christ alone, in His cross, let us

boast, and in the new creature which is by Christ. Therefore the apostle adds,,And as many as walk according to this rule [that is, the rule of the new creation], peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God." Those that walk according to this rule would be saints in general. The "Israel of God," I apprehend, would mean, that the only part of Israel whom God owns now consists of those that really are of faith — those that.received Jesus. It is not a vague general expression for all saints, but implies that fleshly Israel was nothing now. If any of them believe in the Crucified, they were God's Israel. Soon all will believe in Christ, and all Israel be saved. But this is a future prophetic vision not touched on here. The new creation is a present blessing that the soul already enjoys. It is an actual result of the cross of Christ. Consequently we have no allusion to the Lord's coming in this epistle to the Galatians. It is all devoted to the deliverance of the saint from this present evil age by the cross of Christ, and his consistent maintenance of the new nature and position of grace — of the new creation in Christ Jesus.

May the truth of God sink into our hearts! Thus all things fall into their place, and the Spirit connects us in heart with that which God is doing and will do for the glory of Christ. The apostle had heard enough of circumcision: it was repulsive to him henceforth. It was his to bear in his body a very different brand" the marks of the Lord Jesus," the scars of the only warfare that is precious in the sight of God the Father. Lastly, he desires for his brethren, that "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" might be with their spirit. Nothing more in keeping with the wants of those addressed, who had so

soon turned aside from the grace of Christ to a different gospel.

Ephesians

In this epistle we have the unfolding of the grace of God in all its fulness, not merely the application of His righteousness to man's need on His part, but God from out of Himself, and for Himself, as the adequate motive and object before Him, even His own glory. Hence it is that righteousness disappears in this epistle. We have had the gospel thus in all the epistles that have gone before. In Romans, in 1st and 2nd Corinthians, and in Galatians righteousness was largely used. It was developed in a positive and comprehensive way, as in Romans. It was brought in either to convict the Corinthians of their utter departure through the spirit of the world, the flesh taking that shape, or it was brought in triumphantly on their restoration. Again, by it the apostle, writing to the Galatians, vindicated God's ways with man, and set the Christian outside the law.

But in Ephesians the aim is of a much more absolute and direct character. It is not the wants of man in any sense, either positively or negatively. Here God from Himself and for Himself is acting according to the riches of His own grace. Accordingly the very opening brings before us this astonishingly elevated manner of presenting the great truth with which the apostle's heart was filled. "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God." (Eph. 1:1) It was pre-eminently for this that he had been chosen as an apostle; and he represents his apostleship not here as a question of calling, but "by the will of God:" everything in this epistle flows from the will of God; — "to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus."

Although about to show us what the church is in its heavenly blessing, that is, in its highest associations, he always begins with the individual. This was peculiarly needed. The tendency is ever to set aside what is personal for that which is corporate. The epistle to the Ephesians truly understood will help none so to do. It may be perverted to this or anything else; but so far is our corporate place from being put in the foreground that we do not hear one word about the assembly as such till the close of the first chapter. Only in verse 22 is the church even named for the first time, where it is said God has given Christ "to be the head over all things to the church." But up to this the saints are contemplated as such. The moral order of this is exceedingly beautiful. In the admirable wisdom and grace of God it is the direct setting aside of that which is found in all earthly systems, where the individual is merely a portion of a vast body which arrogates to itself the highest claims. It is not so in the word of God. There the individual blessing of the soul has the first place. God would have us set thoroughly clear and intelligently appreciating our individual place and relation to Himself. Where these are made and kept right, we can then safely follow what God will show us in due time, but not otherwise.

As usual the apostle salutes the saints with the best wishes for their blessing. "Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ." Then, without delay, the next verses introduce a general view of the glorious topic that occupied him. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." It is God in His proper nature, and in His relationship to Jesus. He is the God of Jesus; He is the Father of Jesus. But the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ "hath blessed

us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." It is not carnal blessing such as was in measure given under the law to Israel, and will be under the new covenant by and by; it is spiritual blessing. The earth is their sphere; it is there that Israel looks to be blessed, and the Gentiles somewhat farther off, but all in the ordered blessing of the Most High God. Altogether differently here "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" has blessed us where Christ is on high. There is no place good enough for Christ the Son but heaven. There it is God Himself displays most His own glory; there He displays Christ Himself to all the heavenly hosts, delighting to put honour on that Man whom He raised from the dead and set at His own right hand. it is there not merely that He means to bless us, but that He has blessed us already. Such is the character of our blessing, and such its seat. The character is spiritual, the seat heavenly; and as the whole is given by the God and Father of our Lord Jesus, so it is secured in Christ.

In the next verse the apostle opens out that which is move particularly connected with "the God of our Lord Jesus 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." If "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" has blessed us with every spiritual blessing above in Christ, this is the first need — to have a nature capable of communion with His God, to have a condition that would do no dishonour, not only to the highest sphere, but to the holiest form and sphere in which God has ever made, Himself known. This is the nature that is given to the believer now. But it is not merely a thing imparted. The special point before the apostle's mind is that this was the choice of God

before the world, in which we are brought to know the infinite blessing. It was entirely unconnected with the world. Far different was Israel's case, however favoured as a nation. They were chosen in time. Not only were they called in time as we have been, but they were chosen in time, which we were not. The choice of the saints for heavenly blessedness was before the creation of the universe, before the foundation of the world.

This gives a very peculiar character to our blessedness. It is altogether independent of the old creation, of that which might fail and pass away. It was a choice of God Himself before there was any creature responsible or dependent. God made known His choice, not when the creature was to be proved, but when it had failed to the uttermost; but the choice itself was decided on by God Himself before the creature came into being. It is the moral answer to what was shown in Christ, — "that we should be holy and without blame before him in love." Indeed, these are the very qualities of God Himself. He is holy in nature, and blameless in His ways. Man may cavil and murmur now in unbelief; but God will vindicate them every one when man shall be silent for ever. Besides, there is love, the activity, as well as, the moral qualities, of His being. Love it is which, as it were, puts all in movement that belongs to God. It is not something extraneous that acts on God as a motive, but His own love flowing out from Himself according to His holy nature, and in perfect consistency with His character and ways.

This is the moral nature which God confers on us who are born of Him. This and nothing less or else is what He chooses us to be before Him — chooses us to be in Christ in His own sight, and therefore with the fullest

certainty that it shall be according to His own mind. It is not merely in the presence of an angel, still less before the world. Angels are not adequate judges of what pertains to us; they may be witnesses, but not judges. God Himself is acting for His own glory and according to His own love. But then the possession of a nature capable of communing with God did not and could not satisfy. He would have something more. What could this possibly be? Is He not satisfied with giving us a nature like His own? No, not even so, and for this reason — God has relationships, and these relationships are shown in Jesus just as much as His nature is. If we want to know what the holiness, and blamelessness, and love of God is, we must look at Him; but in the same way also, if we desire to know what are the relationships into which God puts those He loves, where shall we find the highest? Certainly not in the first man Adam. Israel's was at best a mere creature relationship, though, no doubt, having a special place in creation. Of all the creatures that live and breathe, man is the only one on earth that became a living soul by the breath of the Lord God, who, as it is written, breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. That is, there is a creative connection between God and man which is the source of man's moral relations with God, and the reason why man, and man alone of all creatures on the earth, shall live again and give an account of himself to God.

But in that which comes before us in our epistle, it is not a question even of the highest creature on earth — one that was called to have dominion on earth, and be the image and glory of God here below. God had in view One infinitely above man; and yet He was a man. It was Jesus; and Jesus stood in what was altogether peculiar —

in a relationship that was perfectly according to God's counsels; but more than that, according to a relationship that was peculiar to His own person. There was counsel, but besides there was intrinsic glory altogether independent of any plans of conferred honour. In other words, the Son of God never was made the Son, He is never even called the child (τέκνον) of God.1 To us, to be called children of God is more intimate than to be styled His sons; but it would derogate from the Lord. Jesus is never called a child in the sense in which I am now speaking He has His own relationship to the Father eternally. To us it is more to be born of the very nature of God, than to be sons adopted into the family of God. There might be an adopted son without the nature. One might be altogether a stranger to him that adopts. But in Jesus, the Son of God, there was this character of Son in His own title and being from everlasting. Need I say that this is altogether above human comprehension? Yet nothing is more certain than that God so speaks to our faith. Were there an interval of one instant between the Father and the Son, did the Father exist in any respect before the Son as such, all the truth of God as revealed in the Bible perishes. He to whom I look up, by and in whom alone I can know God and the Father, is God Himself Let the notion of time come into the conception given of Godhead and of the persons — Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and all would be falsehood and confusion. The Son would be a creature — not self-subsisting, not therefore truly God. For if God, He is as such not less truly God than the Father; for there can be no difference as to Godhead. As the Father is everlasting, so is the Son. The relationship in the Godhead has nothing to do with the question of time; and the great mistake that has been wrought by all human philosophy is from

introducing notions of time where time can have no place whatever.

Thus in the Godhead there are the relationships of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. But I confine myself now to the relationship of the Son to the Father from everlasting. And God, having these counsels before Him from everlasting, deigns to have a people, not only capable of enjoying Him as having the very same nature as His own, without which they could not enjoy glory; but, besides, if He has us in His presence, He would have us in the highest relationship into which grace could bring us. Now, the highest being that of the Son, we accordingly are brought into that relationship, though not, of course, in the sense in which He was eternally so. To us it could be but eternal purpose, to Him eternal being; to us pure grace, but to Him His own indefeasible right. But the Son being before the Father as His supreme object of love and delight from all eternity, to bring us as sons before Him was as much a part of His counsels as to make us partakers of divine nature. Thus nature is the subject of verse 4, as relationship is of verse 5. Hence in the latter we find, not exactly choosing, but predestinating us: “Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.”

It is well to mark the difference. To be before Him without having His own nature would be impossible; and therefore it is not stated as a matter of predestination, but of choice. He might have been pleased to choose none; but if we are to be brought into His presence at all, it is impossible to be there without having the divine nature, in a moral sense (and, of course, one only speaks

of this). It is not the impartation of Godhead: none can be so foolish as to think of such a thing. But the divine nature is given to us in its qualities of holiness and love. On the other hand, we find that the predestination is "according to the good pleasure of his will," because no necessity operates in this. There was a moral necessity for a nature suitable to God, if we were to be in His presence at all; but there was none for this special relationship. He might have put us in any degree of relationship He pleased. Angels, for instance, are there; but they have no such relationship. His grace has predestinated us to the very highest relation — that of sons unto Himself by Jesus Christ "according to the good pleasure of his will." And the apostle concludes the whole of this part of the matter "to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved." All this wondrous scheme is to the glory of His grace. He uses therefore the highest terms in order to express it. Grace alone would not suffice, glory alone would not serve, but both. It is "to the praise of the glory of his grace." Meanwhile it is again presented to us in this new fact, that we are brought in as objects of His perfect favour in the Beloved. Such is the measure, if measure it can be called, of the grace wherein we stand.

But then those in respect of whom God the Father had such thoughts were in point of fact sinners. The next verse shows that this is not forgotten, for account is taken of the fact, and it is provided for. The same "Beloved" who accounts to us for the counsels of God has brought in redemption. In Him we enter into favour, "in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of offences," not exactly according to the praise of his glory, "but according to the riches of His

grace.” It is a present thing in every sense, though, of course, needed for heaven and eternity. Hence the expression does not go beyond the riches of God’s grace. Thus is touched, incidentally, the need of our souls as offenders against God, but only so far as to show that it was in no way overlooked.

Next the apostle turns to the boundless scene that lies before us, as in the preceding verses he had looked at what is behind us. And why is all this? Clearly God has a purpose, a settled and glorious plan to gather the whole universe under Christ as its Head. Are those that He has brought into a share of His own moral nature and the relationship of sons to be left out of this? In nowise: even now He has abounded toward them “in all wisdom and prudence.” These words do not attribute to God all wisdom and prudence, which certainly would be nothing new; but they intimate that He has now conferred on His saints all wisdom and prudence. It is truly an astonishing statement. The contrast is with Adam, who had a knowledge that was suited to his own place and relationship. Accordingly we hear in Genesis 2 how he gave names to all that was put under him. And as to his wife, he instantly understands, though he had been in a deep sleep while she was being formed. But when presented to him, he knows all that it was meet for him to know then. He knows instinctively that she was part of himself, and gives her a name suitably. Such seems to have been the measure of Adam’s wisdom and prudence. As being the image and glory of God on earth, he is the one that gives names to his companion, or to the subject creation. It is not merely that he accepts names given him by God, but God delights in putting him in this place of lordship, and to a certain extent also of fellowship —

lordship to that which is below him, and fellowship as regarded his wife. Thus, then, Adam acts and speaks.

But the saints, now being made the objects of these heavenly counsels of God, have a wisdom and prudence of their own, quite peculiar to the new creation in Christ, and its proper relations: God puts no limits to it. In point of fact, He looks for the expression and exercise of it, be assured, from all of us, though no doubt according to our measure. It is no use merely taking it up as a name or barren title. Our God and Father does look for the display of the mind of Christ in us, so that we should be able to form a judgment according to Himself, and to express it about whatever comes before us. For if we are in Christ, we have a vantage ground which makes all things clear. Christ is not darkness but light, and puts all in the light; He makes us to be children of the light, that so we may be able to judge ourselves, not discerned by man as such, but capable of discerning whatever claims our attention. Such is the place of a Christian, and a wondrous place it is, flowing from the nature and relationship which we possess by the grace of our God.

But the connection is important. God has “abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; having made known unto us [what is the special proof of it] the mystery of his will.” This does not yet appear; for there is nothing to indicate to mankind what He purposes to do. It is an absolutely new thing; and this new purpose is “according to the good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: 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, 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," etc.

Here the apostle repeats that high, large, and blessed phrase already so familiar to us, "that we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ; in whom ye also [trusted]." It was not confined to those that had their hope founded on Christ while the nation refused Him. Paul was one of those; and there were others at Ephesus, as we well know — in point of fact the first nucleus of the assembly there. The first saints and faithful in the city of Ephesus, as Acts 19 shows, were persons who had been baptized with the baptism of John, and afterwards brought from Jewish to Christian ground by the apostle Paul. Hence he says, "that we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ," referring to himself and any other saints who had been chosen from the people of the Jews. At the same time there is no exclusion of Gentile believers, but the reverse. "In whom ye, also [trusted], after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation." For the mass subsequently brought in were Gentiles, and the gospel of salvation they forthwith received, without going through the intermediate steps that the others knew. The Jews, or those who had been under Jewish teaching, had been for a while in an infantine state, or an Old Testament condition; but the Gentiles by faith passed simply and directly into the full Christian blessing. "In whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with the holy Spirit of promise, who is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory."

It cannot have escaped observation that there are two great parts in that which has come before us. The first is nature; the second is relationship. The Holy Ghost is here viewed according to these two. Connected with nature, He has sealed us, as it is said here and elsewhere; and connected with relationship, He is the earnest. For “if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.” The Holy Ghost thus takes a corresponding part. Just as Christ is the sample and model whether of nature or relationship, so the Holy Ghost is not without His own proper place in bringing the saint into the reality, knowledge, and enjoyment of both. The Holy Ghost gives us the certainty and joyful assurance of our place as saints; the Holy Ghost at the same time gives us the foretaste of the bright inheritance of God that lies beyond.

Then follows a prayer of the apostle — the first of those he pours out for the Ephesian saints. Naturally this prayer grows out of the two great truths he had been urging. He prays for the saints “that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory [for this is what his mind connected with it], may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.” These are the two former points. The “hope of his calling” is the bright prospect of the saints themselves, as they are in Christ before God. “The riches of the glory of his inheritance” embrace, of course, that vast scene of creation which is to be put under the glorified saints. He prays accordingly that they might enter into both, realizing the holy peaceful atmosphere of the one, and

the glorious expectations that were bound up with the other; for clearly the future is before his mind. But then he adds a third point, which was not given in the previous part of the chapter; namely, that they might know “what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead.”

This last was of all-importance to the saints, and the rather as that power had already been put forth. It shines in full contrast with Israel. If the latter enquired how God had interfered most conspicuously for them, no doubt they were reminded of the power that brought them out of the land of Egypt. This was always their comfort in the midst of disasters and troubles. The God that divided the Red Sea, and brought them across Jordan, was equal to any difficulty that might ever assail them again. In the prophets this too remains always the standard, until God exert His power in another way, when He shall be no longer spoken of as Jehovah that brought them out of the land of Egypt, but out of the north country into their land, where He shall settle them for ever. Thus Israel stands in the permanent remembrance of power that redeemed them from the land of Egypt, and in the anticipation of a still greater manifestation that will eclipse whatever had been seen of old.

But the Christian is even now himself, with his fellow-saints, the object of the very same power which never can be outshone — the power that raised up Christ from the dead. We wait for nothing greater nor its match; we await the results of this glorious power for the body and the creation; but we look for no new putting forth of

power which can enter into competition with that which God has already shown in Christ. The moment that Jesus presents Himself as the answer to what has been put forth already, the saints rise or are changed in the twinkling of an eye. Besides, it is not merely that the body will immediately respond to the call of the Lord Jesus, but even now the very same power Acts wrought toward us in making us Christians which “wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.” Such is the power that has wrought now — wrought toward us even while we are in this world.

Accordingly, in Ephesians 2, the apostle pursues this train, and shows that it is not another exertion of power, but a part of the very same work of God which raised up Jesus from the dead. In other words, Christ was not raised up as an insulated individual, severed from all others by His glory and their sin and shame. The gospel of God’s grace proclaims the very reverse. He was raised up as the great manifestation of divine power for effectuating God’s counsels as well as redemption. Not only was His resurrection this manifestation, but also whatever God put forth toward us was in virtue of that display of His energy — was, so to speak, morally included in that power which raised up Christ from the dead. This clearly is of the deepest possible interest to the saints. Throughout the epistle all the secret is just

this — God would associate us with Christ (that is, of course, in everything that is consistent with the maintenance of the divine glory). Whatever could contribute to it, whatever fell in according to it, everything that God Himself could do to bind us up with Christ, sharing with us all that is glorious in Christ His own Son, even to His holy nature and relationship with the Father, as far as this could be conferred on a creature, is no more than God had in His heart — yea, is what God has given us now, and will display in heavenly Places ere long.

So the apostle says, “You hath he quickened, who were dead in offences and sins;” for now we can bear to learn anything, however humiliating, and He can speak of anything, no matter how exalted or holy. God had never so spoken of man before. In Romans the sinner is regarded as alive in sins; and death, the death of Christ, is the means of deliverance. In Ephesians death is the very first place where we find even Christ. Not a word is said of sending Him into the world, or of His life and labours there, any more than of our doing this or being that. The first place where Christ is seen is in the grave whence God according to the mightiest action of His almighty power raised Him up. It was an absolutely new thing: never was seen one so glorious, never can there be another so triumphant, as the power there put forth. Man, Satan, yea, the judgment of God that had gone forth against Him because of our sins, had no force to detain Him in the grave. That judgment had fallen on Him necessarily and unsparingly; but in the face of everything calculated to hinder, God’s power broke up the last stronghold of the enemy. There was Jesus lying in the grave; and from that grave God raised Him, and

set Him on the highest pinnacle of heaven's glory — not only of that which then was, but that ever shall be. Such is the very power that has taken you and me up in divine grace, and wrought toward us. The very power that brought you out of the world and of your sins is the power that raised up Christ from the dead, set Him in the heavenly places, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of that glorious Head to whom it is united.

This is pursued then first with reference to the Gentiles, for now the order is reversed. In Ephesians 1 he began with the Jews, and then showed the Gentiles brought in; but now he begins with the outer circle where the Gentiles were. "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in offences and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." What can be conceived more dreadful than such a condition, positively without spiritual life, dead in offences and sins! Not only so, but they had walked according to the course of that which is most of all offensive to God — "of this world, according to the prince of the authority of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience;" for indeed they were, one as much as another, children of disobedience. "Among whom also we all," etc., for he does not let slip the Jews, but turns round on their estate, equally lifeless as the Gentiles. They might otherwise think themselves more or less superior. He had spoken of the poor idolatrous Gentiles and their awful condition; but "we all," says he, — putting himself along with them, — Jews as we were, children of the covenant and what not, were none the

less dead in offences and sins. “Among whom also we all had our conversation in time past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved), and raised us up together.” Now he unites both in this place of richest blessing; for He has even “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.” In truth it is His grace to the full, and for heaven (not earth), though given to us to know here before we get there; “for by grace are ye saved.” The whole work is thus presented in its completeness from first to last; nevertheless, it is only “through faith” as yet. This is and must be the medium, as far as the saints are concerned, grace being the spring on God’s part: “and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship.”

It is clearly not a question of righteousness here, or consistency with any known standard of judgment. God would frame a new sort of workmanship worthy of Himself; and therefore all question of antecedent measures disappears. Righteousness supposes a claim in the first place, however met; even though it may be God’s righteousness, still it is God acting in consistency with Himself and His own claims. But in Ephesians we are in presence of a new creation in Christ, where claim is out of the question. Who would demand of God to make the objects of His mercy like Christ the Son? Who could, before He revealed His purpose, have so much as

conceived such a dealing possible? Even now, though plainly made known in this epistle and elsewhere, how few Christians there are who rest in it as their assured portion! So totally and absolutely is it outside the range of human thought and feeling that the difficulty is to drop self, to cut all the strings that bind us to human nature and the world, to see all ended even now that is connected with the present course of this age, so that we may be simply occupied and filled with that heavenly blessedness which God unfolds to our souls.

However this be, “We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works,” — a peculiar kind of good works, suited to the relationship in which we stand. This is the great point to seize always throughout Scripture. There never can be spiritual understanding, unless souls let in this after all plain principle, that the suited good depends on the relationship in which we are placed, whether to God, or to any other. The, good for an Israelite, for a Gentile, for a man, is wholly different from the good for a Christian, because their relationships are not the same as his. Now we are Christians; and this decides the character of the duties we have to pay, or of the good works which He has before prepared that we should walk in them; for “we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus” for this very purpose. It is not at all put as a question of command according to the law; but “God had before prepared,” as a part of His wonderful scheme, “that we should walk in them.” He merely now touches on the principle, as he had before let us see not merely God’s counsels from before the foundation of the world, but the manner and means of their application through Christ our Lord to us in time. Hence the condition in

which we were found here below came into view; and, as we have seen, it was total ruin, whether Jew or Gentile be looked at.

But now from Ephesians 2:11 the apostle enters into particulars, and shows that the bringing down from God's own heights of these glorious counsels and making them thus manifest in man here below, completely sets aside the Jewish system, or rather supposes the setting aside of all Jewish elements. Hence, being "Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; [the apostle bids such remember] that 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." And what had God done now? Had He brought the Gentiles into the place that Israel once occupied? The Jews had rejected their own Messiah. Of old they had forfeited every claim according to the law, and were spared and kept in God's mercy and faithfulness. But now they had consummated their rebellion by refusing the Christ of God. What was to be done? Would God send out and bring in the Gentiles to fill their place? Another plan discloses itself. The Jews who believe are taken out of their former place, as much as the Gentiles, who had no place. Both are now introduced by grace into an entirely new and heavenly place in Christ, which was not so much as heard of before. Accordingly not only does he enforce the truth first presented in the end of chapter 1, the church which is the body of Christ, but he also still more qualifies it as a "new man," and as "one body;" because, in treating of the two objects of grace, and component

parts of the church, Jews and Gentiles who believe, he shows that God does not purpose to form two societies of these saints, but one body. It is not a mere aggregate of Gentiles into the well-known line of old blessing, but one new man, not merely fresh in time, but of an absolutely new order, never seen or experienced before. It is not again a simple question of a new nature, but of a new man: the first Adam, with all remedial or corrective dealings in him disappear, and one new man comes before our view.

Here again the apostle brings in the relation of the Holy Ghost to the new things. The consequence is that we find the Spirit of God, now sent down from heaven, not only putting the saints into relationship with the Father, but, besides, dwelling in them and making them God's habitation through the Spirit.

Thus we have at last the church developed in its two main characters. It has its heavenly association as the one body of Christ; it has its earthly place and responsibility as the "habitation of God through the Spirit." All this, it will be observed, is consequent on the cross. The one was not at all, nor was the other in such sort before. God had a dwelling-place of old in Israel; but it was a house made with hands, however magnifical, that followed the tabernacle of witness in the desert, in both of which the Shechinah, or visible sign of His glory, deigned to dwell. Such is not the character of God's dwelling now. It is neither the tabernacle, nor the temple, but His habitation in Spirit. It is not, of course, a display of glory before men's eyes; yet is it most real — a proper dwelling of God on earth, answering to, though not necessarily coextensive with, those who are constituted the body of Christ glorified on high. Not that

the body is there yet, but that the body of Christ is heavenly in its character, although in fact on the earth now. Besides, as we have seen, the church is the dwelling-place of God through the Holy Ghost's presence here below.

This leads to Ephesians 3, in which the apostle unfolds things parenthetically. It is a revelation of God that comes in at the time when the Jews have, at least temporarily, lost their place altogether. The very structure of the chapter, as has been noticed, is a sort of confirmation of this. The chapter itself is a parenthesis. "For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, if ye have heard of the dispensation [administration or stewardship] of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: how that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery (as I wrote afore in few words; whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ); which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed." Observe, therefore, that what was the first in counsel is the last in revelation.

Accordingly, when all was complete in the communication of God's plans in the Bible, there was one subject that was left a blank. Paul was the chosen witness to fill up that blank. He wrote in few words no doubt, but he has written with divine perfection, and clearly enough for those by God's grace made competent to understand, let the words be ever so few. Many wonder that such truths as these should not have more words used in communicating them. But profound truths are for those who have spiritual understandings; and such do not require many words to comprehend them. When persons are only learning the elements of

truth, the grace of God provides precept on precept, line on line, for those who want it. If He is showing needy souls how they may be forgiven of God, He displays it in a thousand forms; if the need of righteousness, He repeats it over and over again. But it is not so with the revelation of the mystery. There is a certain spiritual competence supposed, — a due preparation not only of heart, but also of knowledge; or, as the apostle said, “we speak wisdom among them that are perfect,” Here no lengthy exposition would be wanted about it, because they were not so infantine as to suppose that the truth of God depends on the number of times that a thing is asserted. Once is enough for the intelligent.

God therefore has not been pleased in the heights of divine truth to repeat words in the same way as His grace leads Him to do when He is helping the babes. Hence the apostle Paul, in what is by no means the simplest utterance he has given, writes in few words. He could condescend. We know how he would bend down and be as it were a; Gentile to one without law, and a Jew to one under law, to do good to souls.

But now he speaks briefly. He was not constrained to enter into a full or long explanation. But as he said that by revelation it was made known to him, so he would from God communicate it to them. “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.” It is remarkable that the mystery, though revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the power of the Holy Ghost, was not revealed by them. It was revealed by Paul alone. Revealed to all the apostles and prophets of the New Testament, to one as much as another, it never seems to have taken such a hold of the

others as of Paul. In point of fact, from his conversion right through, the revelation of the mystery was involved. That which comforted his soul was Christ in heavenly glory far above all things. As the light that shone then was brighter, than the sun at noonday, so in the vision the truth about to be learnt was entirely outside and superior to the present or the past. It was grace in its deepest character and in its highest form, and so the apostle Paul was the suited vessel that God employed to instruct others, — not merely the one to whom the revelation was made, but by whom the revelation was to be communicated. It is revealed to us here.

We must carefully remember that the mystery does not mean the church merely. It is the mystery of Christ emphatically; and the part about Christ is the higher of the two. The church is but a consequence; and we bless God for this, and bless Him also that we know the church is but the complement of Christ. One might distrust a mystery, if it centred in the church. Who that knows what man is, and God, as Christ has made both known, would dare to rest in any one person or thing which did not find its brightest form in Christ Himself? And the reason is simple; so inadequate is the creature, so untrustworthy is the first Adam, that one might well be certain the true meaning of the Bible was lost to him who judged otherwise. Such an one must have only got the lower end of the line, and not the full truth in its own native purity and freshness from God. Impossible that the Head should not be there as well as the body; and the apostle speaks as to Christ yet more than as to the assembly.

God then brings out His own secret, after having kept it hidden from all past ages and generations, though, of course, it has been before Him from the beginning. If God reveals it now, the idea of man — of ourselves — being the first and main object in the mind of God is impossible. It is the mystery of Christ; and this is what secures the blessing in its fulness and purity for the church of God. Therefore we need never fear, no matter what the blessing and the privilege may be. If it be illustrated in Christ, if it be bound up with Him, fear not to trust simply and to believe implicitly. Enter boldly into the sweetness of His grace and fulness of His glory. We never can go astray, if we follow the path of the Lord Jesus.

Though it is the mystery of Christ, it is not exclusively about Christ. So in Ephesians 5 he says, “This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.” Is there not good reason for saying that the church is but a consequence? The church follows; and as it belongs to Christ, so it is a part of Him. Hence, to make the mystery to be the church is a very serious moral as well as doctrinal mistake.

The apostle adds that it was now revealed of the Spirit, “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. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints” — there is nothing like this truth, where it is learnt from the Holy Ghost, for humbling the soul, were it even the greatest of the apostles, — “is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and make all see what is

the fellowship [rather administration] of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in, God, who created all things [by Jesus Christ to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God."

God had something more to teach those who are the natural denizens of heaven. They had to learn what they had never known. They had seen creation, and sung at the sight. They had seen the ways of God with man, and with Israel; and surely they had entered into the glory of God that was involved in all His ways. Nevertheless, whether it was creation, whether man or favoured Israel, there was so much the more painful a declension that portended the judgment of God upon them. Thus there were dark shadows, and lowering clouds. But now appeared something altogether new. Latest of all, God divulged His wonderful scheme in which the man that came from above, the Son that became a man, the Word made flesh, had gone down to the very lowest in order to make good the glory of God morally in the scene where He had been most put to shame. But now, consequent on His resurrection from the dead, and of the place given Him in heaven above all, there was made known to these very principalities and powers "the manifold wisdom of God," — made known to them before it came to pass, the sure deliverance of the whole scene of creation, of man, of Israel, as well as of the earth. But not merely this. That man who came down but was found alone to the end of His earthly course would now be alone no more; He would have a new and suited body, believing Jews and Gentiles fellow-heirs and of the same body. Most wholesome blessedness! for who should be more above

the feelings of jealousy than those who delight in that which shows the greatness, and the glory, and the perfect goodness of God in His greatest work? This, then, was what was needed for the principalities and powers, and this is what they behold in the church of God.

The apostle accordingly is now led at the sight of the mystery of Christ into another prayer, in which he asks "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ [for now he takes up the other relationship,], of whom the whole [rather, every] 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; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; being rooted and grounded in love, that ye may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye may be filled with all the fulness of God."

Here the prayer is not, as in the first chapter, that they might know the power that had wrought toward them; it is now that their hearts might be in the secret of His grace according to the power that works in them. That is, he looks at the inner source, not merely at the glorious results. Here he prays to the Father of our Lord Jesus, not simply to the God that had raised up the Christ from the dead, and was glorifying Him on high. It will be observed that the desire is not merely that they might be enlightened as to the special glory of their standing, but that their hearts might be filled with the love of Christ, and this too as a present thing filling them to overflowing, though surely not to cease in the ages to come. "Unto him that is able to do exceeding

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." This is not a question therefore of the place or standing of the Christian, but rather of his condition or state, which the Spirit would have in unison with the love of Him who alone made either possible. Consequently here it is not an energy already put forth, but he pleads that Christ might dwell by faith in their hearts. It is not a conferred position, however blessed, but practical enjoyment — even that Christ Himself might be habitually the object before them, now that all question of deliverance and blessing was settled in their favour. It was all a known thing that they were blessed by — yea, with — Christ, forming a part of Christ, expressly fellow-heirs, and of the same body. But now, founded on this, the apostle prays thus for them, that the Holy Ghost would so act in the inner man that there might be no hindrance to Christ, and that they might know, not the Holy Ghost (for this they did not doubt), but Christ dwelling there by His power constantly.

Unquestionably the Spirit of God does evermore dwell in the Christian, though I am not aware that He is ever said to dwell in our hearts. He may shed abroad the love of God therein; but He is rather said to dwell in us, making the body God's temple. Here the apostle would have Christ to be more the satisfying object of our affections. This is the point. Far be it from us just to know that He loves us through the word of God, as a security to us, like a dry parchment deed of gift that we quietly keep in a strong box. Rather is the very gospel to the sinner free and full, that, having the certainty of the divine fulness of our blessing, our hearts may be now

open to enjoy Christ, and be occupied with His love. “That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith;” not that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, but “rooted,” etc., that ye “may be able to comprehend with all saints.” It is not here deliverance, let it be ever so complete; it is not the knowledge of our position in Christ as in Eph. 1; but rather the converse — Christ dwelling in us by faith, and the heart entering into the positive excellency of the Son, the only adequate object of the Father’s own delight. Hence it was that they might “be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and. height; and to know the love of Christ.” It is not only the full extent of glory, but the sole satisfying spring, Christ thus dwelling in our hearts in the consciousness of His love — “to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.” He is the ultimate blessedness with which we are filled, the One in whom we most confide, being the Son, in whom dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.

Thus, having Him who is the centre of all glory dwelling in our affections by faith, we enter into, and become established in, the grace which is the secret of it all. In communion with the objects of it, we go out into the resulting scenes of glory on every side; knowing Christ’s love though unknowable, and filled into God’s fulness though infinite. The apostle concludes his prayer with an ascription of glory to Him in the Church unto all generations of the age of the ages, able to do far above all we ask or think according to His power which works in us. It is thus seen to be founded on the great facts and standing privileges mentioned at the end of Eph. 2; but it is the desire that the saints should know God’s present

power to an indefinite extent working in them in spiritual enjoyment, through the Holy Ghost's power, giving us to have Christ the definite and constant object of the heart.

Ephesians 4 begins the proper exhortatory portion, and here, first of all, urges a walk in view of such a calling as is ours, diligently keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Then the diversities are brought before us. "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love." The very truth which, learnt and enjoyed in the Holy Ghost, conduces to all lowliness and meekness, as it calls for mutual forbearance in love, flesh would abuse to all pride and vain-gloriousness, to high-minded contempt of others, and bitter self-confidence. Than these nothing less becomes those so blessed. Oh that we might have grace to walk in communion with such grace! But if we are to walk thus, let us not forget the prayer for the state of our hearts which precedes these exhortations. Knowledge of standing and a, state answering to Christ's love, are the basis of a walk worthy of our calling. "The unity of the Spirit" seems to be the general name for that great fact which is now established — that unity of which Christ is the chief, and to which we all belong. The apostle treats it as our business diligently to observe it. It is impossible for flesh to be true to it. This is as it should be. An easy path could not be divine, as men and things are on earth. We need, but we have, the Holy Spirit who is surely all-sufficient, if looked to. It is impossible to exaggerate the snares and difficulties of Christendom.

But what are difficulties to the Spirit of God? This is the great want — simple, genuine faith in the Holy Ghost. He is equal to all, and, would have us count on His presence and power answering to the name of Christ. What has all the confusion of men to do with the glorious reality that God has established — His unity, of which we all form part by the power of His Spirit? What does it matter about times, persons, or circumstances, if the Spirit abide to enable us, according to Scripture, diligently to keep His own unity? Numbers are of small account here. The Lord might be where there are only two gathered together unto His name. If but two acted accordingly, they ought to be and would be an expression of the unity of the Spirit. What is the value of any other unity? It can never rise above its human source. Evidently also, it is no essential matter for present practice of faithfulness, whether few or many see and feel it: this is a question for God's will, who will act for His own glory, whether by many or by few. Let this then rest in His hands. Be it our part with diligence (for this is needed) "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Then we hear the particulars, and in a very orderly manner. "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling." This verse states the intrinsic unity that never passes away, beginning with the fact of "one body;" then the efficient power, one Spirit; and lastly the cause of it all in the calling of grace. Nothing touches these.

In the next verse we have that which has been justly designated the unity of profession, where all things may come in to mar. Hence it is said, "One Lord," which is precisely that which is owned in the common creed of

Christendom. And as there is one Lord, so “one faith.” It is neither “faith” nor “the faith.” That is, it may not be sincere, nor even doctrinally the truth that is held; but we hear of lone faith” in contrast with Judaism on one hand, and with Paganism on the other. Hence “one baptism” follows, which the context shows to be the plain initiatory rite of Christian profession, and nothing else. In the verse before the apostle had spoken of the “one Spirit,” and hence it would be superfluous to introduce the statement of His baptism here, even if the adjuncts did not exclude the idea.

Thus we have had, first of all, the great spiritual reality which is always true of Christians, and of none else. They, and only they, have “one Spirit” dwelling in them. They only have the “one hope of their calling.” But the moment you come to the “one Lord,” this city, yea every city in Christendom, is a witness to a wide-spread profession of His name. As He is outwardly called on, so there is everywhere the “one faith,” which does not mean (alas! we know too well) saving faith necessarily, but the faith of Christendom; and accordingly “one baptism” is its mark, because thus they are put on or take the ground of professing the one Lord and one faith.

Lastly, “one God and Father of all.” Here we come to what is universal. Each circle hitherto was getting larger and larger. First there was the true company that had divine life and the Spirit of God; secondly, the circle of profession very much more extensive; and thirdly remains the universal unity, which embraces not Christendom only, but all the creatures of God included under their one God and Father — whatever derived its being from God, the God that created all things, as we

were told in Ephesians 3:9. He consequently is the lone God and Father of all," not merely of all believers, for this is a mistake of its force, but of all absolutely; just as we were told in verse 15 of that same chapter, that of Him every family in heaven and earth is named. No matter whether Jews or Gentiles, principalities or powers, every family is derived from this universal source of existence — "One God and Father of all, who is above all [there we find His supremacy], and through all [there we find His permeance, if one may so say, as the support, of the whole universe], and in you all" [His intimacy with the saints]. The moment the apostle comes to inward relationship, he leaves the universality of phrase and speaks only of the saints of God — "in you all." No statement can be conceived more exact.

Now we must turn to the diversities. "But to every [each] one is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ." And as the unity flowed from the power of the Spirit sent down from heaven; so now when we come to gifts, it is expressly connected with Christ in glory. "Wherefore he saith, when he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended." Yes, but He did not go up as He came down from above. He came a divine person filled with love; and He went a man also, triumphant not with love only but in righteousness and power, to give effect to all the glorious counsels of His Father, which unjudged sin would have for ever frustrated. He went up after all the working of evil had been really defeated and destroyed in the sight of God. Satan is allowed to go on for a little while longer,

because God is gathering out the joint-heirs, while the evil develops itself in a new form Man had been shown to be the enemy of all righteousness, and now betrays himself the enemy of all grace. As the end of the latter will be incomparably worse than the former, so judgment will be commensurate with man's apostasy from grace; for the Lord must come from heaven, "in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and on them that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Meanwhile, before a blow is struck at man's failure in the presence of righteousness, or at his apostasy from grace, that blessed Saviour, the only begotten Son in the bosom of the Father, the Son of man who is in heaven, went down to the very uttermost, and (having exhausted the powers of evil, and blotted out all that could rise against the objects of God's grace,) was raised and seated by God in heaven. He takes His place there, of course always the Son; but, wonderful to say, humanity makes an integral and everlasting part, so to speak, of that divine person, the Son of God. And here is the key, and that which accounts for the astonishing display of what God is now doing in man. How could it be otherwise, seeing that He who sits on His throne, tar above every creature in God's presence and in all ages, is a man, but withal the very Son of God? The Son is as truly man as God, and as such gives gifts to men. Angels are not the object. They had a distinguished place before the Son became man. Since then it is not so much they that have lost, but man in and by Christ that has gained such a place as they never had nor could have. Never were they to reign; never will they be one with Christ

like the saints. They are “ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation.”

But Christ at the right hand of God gives gifts unto men; and, as it is said here, “He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;” — bringing in both the highest gifts and also those ordinarily requisite for the good of the saints. I say “requisite,” simply in view of Christ’s love towards the church. It is not a question of rendering a testimony of the power of God working in man and dealing with the first creation. In Corinthians we have this, and properly in its place. There we have tongues, miracles, etc.; because all that is connected with man in the flesh and in the world is a sign to unbelievers, showing them the goodness of God, and the defeat of that wicked power which governs human nature as it is.

But in the epistle to the Ephesians we have none of these dealings with the first man, but that which forms and nourishes the new creation. Hence we have those gifts alone which are the expression of the grace of Christ toward the saints that He loves, for ministerial work, for the building up of His body. In this order He gave them — the body to be edified, and ministry carried on, but always the individual first. The building up of the body is the fruit of God’s blessing the individual saints. It cannot be otherwise. It is in vain to look for the church’s prosperity, if saints individually do not grow up unto Christ. And so these gifts are given, as it is said, “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: 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, which is the head, even Christ."

Then we have in the centre of this chapter no longer the unity or the gifts differing, but the moral walk of the saints. And what is the first lesson of the truth as it is in Jesus? This; — not only that we hear of the one body, and that saints compose this body, but that a new man is seen. Introducing this great practical truth, he reminds them of what they had been, but also tells them what they are now. Our duties flow from what we are, or are made. And what then is the truth as it is in Jesus? Our having put off the old man, and our having put on the new man. Such is the truth, if indeed we have learnt the Christ as God teaches Him. Anything short of this is not the true Christian measure. Jesus could occupy Himself in divine love. Self would have hindered; had there been a particle, it would have ruined both His person and His work; but this is not the truth as it is in Jesus. He came so as to be left absolutely free to occupy Himself in love for God's glory and our desperate need. And now, in Him who is dead and risen, the Christian has put completely off the old man, is being renewed in the spirit of his mind, and has put on the new man, which according to God is created in righteousness and holiness of truth.

Not only is there this new man that God has created after the image of Christ in contrast with the first Adam, but this is the ground why all moral evil is to be judged, beginning with deceit and falsehood. "Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another. Be ye angry, and sin

not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: neither give place to the devil. Let the stealer steal no more." How solemn to learn what the old man is in its most detestable forms, against all which the Christian is warned! Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers."

But, besides the new man which lives in dependence, we need to guard against losing power according to God. "Grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." Thus the great basis of all our walk is, that the old man has been judged in Jesus, and the new man we have already put on; but, moreover, the Holy Ghost is given, and we are sealed by Him. Thus we have a new nature which hates sin, and the Holy Ghost which gives power for that which is good.

Then he adds the great exemplar and spirit of it all, according to the forgiveness with which God met us in Christ. "Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ hath forgiven you." But there is yet more. To forgive another's wrongs is not enough for a Christian. No doubt it is a giving up of self, and therefore the fruit of divine grace. But in Ephesians God cannot but have us imitate His own ways as they have shone in Christ. He Himself is the measure of the walk of the new man, and the manifestation of it is Christ Himself. Nothing short of this suffices. What has God done? He has forgiven you in Christ; and you are called to do the same. But was this all? Was there only this? Was there not positive love, far beyond forgiveness? And what is the manifestation of love? Not the law, but Christ. "Be ye therefore followers

of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour."

Do you think this devotedness too much? yea, impossible? Not so. Take a passage in 2 Corinthians (2 Cor. 8:5), which has been before us only a short time ago: "And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God." How blessed is the character and the spring of Christian service! Think of their giving themselves first to the Lord, then to us by the will of God. It is just the answer to the grace of God in Christ. Nor is there full Christian service, except in proportion as it is according to this pattern and in this power. In Christ it was, of course, absolutely perfect: He did give Himself for us. But this was not enough. He might have given Himself ever so truly in pity for us; but it would not have been perfection, had He not "given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour." And so accordingly all that is acceptable takes this shape. "But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once.named among you, as becometh saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking [even light words dishonour the Christian, as being contrary to Christ], nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God."

But there are other elements. God is not only love but light; and inasmuch as this epistle reveals how fully God associates us with Christ according to His own nature, so having first shown us the privilege of loving, as He

Himself loved us in Christ, now it shows that we are made “light in the Lord.” But it is not said that we are love. This would be too strong, yea, false. Love is God’s nature, but it is a sovereign prerogative in Him. In His own actings it has no motive or spring except in Himself. This could not be true of us. We need both motive and object, and hence could not be said to be love; because not we, but only God acts from Himself, as much as for Himself. Impossible that the creature could be or do so; and therefore the creature is never said to be love. But there is love after a divine sort in the new nature, which is said to be light, because this is the necessity of the new nature. Impossible that the new nature could countenance sin; the very essence of it is rejection and exposure of what is contrary to God. It is sensitive about sin; detects and detests it thoroughly. Hence we are said to be “light in the Lord,” and we need to shake off the things of death that encumber the light, and hinder it. And so Christ gives us more light. For the word is, “Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.” But just as before, in the walk which shuts out hatred, and anger, and so on, we were warned against grieving the Spirit of God; so the power of the Holy Ghost asserts itself here. Here it is not merely “Grieve not the Holy Spirit.” He goes farther, and says, “Be filled with the Spirit.” “Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but 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.”

And is this all? It is not. There has been the full unfolding of God’s love, and the answer to it in the saints here below in their nature, and in the ways that

manifest the new nature. But, besides, we have relationships; and now we have God manifesting Himself in each of our positions, and showing us that these are meant to give us opportunity of glorifying God by the good works that were before ordained of God. Accordingly he brings in the most important of them, first, the wife and the husband; then, children and their parents; and, finally, servants and masters.

All through these then we have, but more particularly in the first, the interweaving of the duty with the manifestation of God's grace: "Christ also loved the church." It is not now either sovereign love, or love of complacency. There was the sovereign love of God in Christ forgiving us; there was love of complacency, inasmuch as we were to love according to that love with which we were loved, as shown us in the matchless love of Christ. But now there is love of relationship as well; and here too Christ appears, who is the pattern and perfection of grace in every respect. "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." Just look into this revelation of His love. How everything is connected with Christ! He gave Himself for us. What was it for? "That he might present it to himself [not merely to the Father, but 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." More than this; for "no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church." Everywhere Christ Jesus Himself is intermixed with every portion. He Himself is the beginning, He Himself the end, He Himself all the way

through. He gave Himself as the beginning; and He presents it to Himself as the end. Meanwhile He tenderly cares for the church. “He that loveth his wife loveth himself;... for we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.” “This is a great mystery,” he adds at the close; “but I speak as to Christ and as to the church.”

Then we have the children, who are called to obey their parents in the Lord. It was not a question of the flesh: how could this be trusted? Let them obey in the Lord. To honour one’s father and mother was both an obligation and had a special promise under law. And if children that had a relationship with their parents in the flesh and under law did so (for it was indeed right), how much more did it become Christian children to pay them reverence?

This is followed up by an exhortation to parents: “And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” Thus is the Lord ever presented as the pattern. Then come the slaves similarly. He was privileged to do all as unto Christ; as the master again must remember that he had his own Master in heaven. This also answers to the grand doctrine of this epistle.

Then the apostle introduces us to another topic. It is not the source of the blessing (Eph. 1); nor the place into which we are now brought as being made one with Christ (Eph. 2); nor the objects to whom we are bearing testimony. (Eph. 3) The closing theme shows us where and with whom are our true conflicts as Christians. As such we have not properly to fight with flesh at all, any

more than to fight with the world. All other combats are outside the calling of a Christian.

I do not deny but that a Christian may slip elsewhere. But as long even as he is merely in conflict with his own nature, he can hardly be said to be on Christian ground at all. He may be a converted person; and God may be truly dealing with him in the way of gracious action. A really awakened soul may still have a great many unsettled questions in agitation within him. He has not come to God consciously. Now the very baptism of a Christian man is the confession of the truth, that God has in Christ judged flesh root and branch. Is not this the meaning of the institution? How far the person has realised it is another matter; but such is the meaning of baptism. Judging what I am, I confess that all my blessing is in the Saviour, who did not merely come to bless me as a living man in the world, but died and is risen again; and 1, confessing Him who is thus dead and risen, have part in His death. The conflict of the Christian is not therefore with flesh, still less is it with the world, but with Satan, and with his power, viewed as interposing and hindering our enjoyment of our heavenly blessing.

Is not this the meaning of the combat as described here? The wrestling is not with flesh and blood, “but against principalities, against powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against spiritual wickedness in heavenly places.” The English translators did not know what to make of the apostle, and so they changed it to “high places,” which was an unwarrantable liberty, and gives the most perverse meaning. This has misled many beside the poor Puritans, who fancied they were called of God, as a Christian duty, to strive against kings and

all in authority, when not satisfied with their ways or measures. I mention this, because it is a striking proof that an error imported into Scripture leads even right-minded men into sad evil. It is expressly not against any powers that were living and acting in the world. The conflict is against Satan and his hosts. Just as the Canaanites tried to keep the Israelites out of the land which God assured Moses the tribes were to have for their possession, so Satan's great effort is to hinder the saints of God from realizing their blessedness in heavenly places.

But for this the most careful provision is laid on us. The first thing is to "be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." That is, all our strength is to lean on another, even the Lord. The next thing is that we take "the whole armour of God, that we may be able to withstand in the evil day, and, having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth [inwardly applied, and thus bracing us morally], and having on the breast-plate of righteousness." The internal state is the great point here. Carefully remember this. Our standing is quite another matter, which itself could not avail here. The panoply is against Satan and not God. It is a question not of acceptance before God, but of resisting the enemy who would take advantage of loose ways and a bad conscience. The breast-plate means the practical righteousness of the saint himself. "And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace." So should our walk be. Besides, take "the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one." It is the confident trust of the heart in the favour of God in which we stand, not the remembrance of our first subjection to

the gospel. Finally, “receive the helmet of salvation, [there the head is lifted up, not in presumption, but with none the less joy and courage,] and the sword of the Spirit,” which is expressly said to be the word of God. The defensive comes before the offensive; and all should follow dependence on the Lord. The sword must be the real intrinsic power of the word wielded in the Spirit, which does not spare anything. Thus, first blessed, strengthened, and enjoying the grace and truth of God in Christ, we can then go out with the sword of the Spirit to deal with what is contrary to His nature, which Satan would use to obstruct our realization of our heavenly privileges.

Finally, there is the activity now for others, just as before there was dependence for ourselves. “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints; and for me [as the apostle blessedly adds], that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel” — (what a gracious way of encouraging and strengthening saints, giving them a feeling of the value of their prayers, both in the sight of God, and in fellowship with the most blessed apostle that God ever gave the church!) — “for which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.” He felt his need and that of the work. Also he counted on their loving desire to know his affairs as well as to have their hearts comforted through Tychicus.

1 The Lord Jesus is repeatedly called

παῖς, translated “son” and “child” in the English version of the Acts of the Apostles, but more properly God’s servant as Messiah.

Philipians

There is no epistle in the New Testament which gives so little space to the development of. doctrine as this to the Philippians. Need it be said that it has not the less its own proper office on that account? And what is this but the unfolding of the truth in the heart and in the ways of the Christian? Hence it is that, although doctrine is sparse, if not almost excluded, nevertheless what little appears comes in as ancillary to the main purpose. It is interwoven with practical appeal, and indeed the chief development of doctrine (namely, in the second chapter) forms a ground of exhortation.

Accordingly, from the very starting-point, we are prepared for a difference of tone and character. The apostle drops entirely his official status in addressing the saints at Philippi. He associates Timothy with himself, — not merely, as elsewhere, himself apostle and Timothy in some other relation, but here conjointly “Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ.” He thus takes a common place with his beloved son in the gospel. This place throughout is one of promoting, enlarging, deepening, and purifying the experience of the saints themselves in that which filled his own heart with joy in the Lord. We shall see the importance of this elsewhere. It is what enabled him to look at the saints, as he called them to look at one another, esteeming others, as he says, better than themselves. Had it been a question of his apostolic dignity, this could not have been; but an apostle even could, and did, and loved to, take the place of one that served others whom he viewed directly in their relationship to Christ. His own

place toward them was but to serve them in love. Such did, such was, Christ. There is nothing so high as that which we all have been made in our blessed Lord.

So here at the beginning he simply takes the place of servant with Timothy, owning all the saints as well as the officials in their place: “To all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons.” This last is but a confirmation of the same truth. It is not at all a question of ecclesiastical order, in which naturally the chief guides would have front rank. The apostle is here contributing to that which shall never pass away, and hence begins with the “saints in Christ Jesus” as such. These Philippians will not be less saints in heaven, where there can be no such charges as “bishops or deacons.” I do not say that the fruits of the loving service of any one of them will be forgotten there; nor that even glory will not bear the impress of that which has been really of the Holy Ghost here. Nevertheless there is that which is suited only to the conditions of time; there is that which, given here, survives all change. The apostle loved to give God’s place and value to everything; and here it is the mingling of Christ with the circumstances of every day. It is the forming of the heart with the affections and the judgments of the Lord. It is the imbuing of the Christian with that which is life everlasting, but the life that he is now living by “the faith of the Son of God, who loved him and gave himself for him.” Hence he at once begins, not with a doctrinal preparation after the introduction, but the introduction brings us as usual into the general spirit if not special object of the epistle. “I thank my God for my whole remembrance of you,” says he, after his

usual salutation and wish, “always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy.”

There is no epistle that so abounds in joy. This is the more remarkable because it is so intensely practical. For we can all understand joy in believing; we can readily feel how natural is joy to the Christian who dwells on his eternal portion. The trial is to keep that joy undimmed in the midst of the difficulties and sorrows that every day may bring. This epistle treats of daily sorrows and difficulties, yet does it manifestly overflow with joy, which all the dangers, sufferings, and trials only made the more triumphant and conspicuous.

So he brings before them another remarkable feature of it — their fellowship; and this fellowship too with the gospel. Their happy and bright state in Christ did not dim their fellowship with the gospel. But whatever might be their own proper joy, whatever might be their delight in that which God works in the church, they had full and simple-hearted fellowship with His good news. It had always been so, as the apostle gives us to learn. It was not some sudden fit, if one may so say, nor was it the influence of passing circumstances. It was a calm, fixed, cordial habit of their souls, which indeed had distinguished them from the first. This was now among the last outpourings of the apostle’s heart, as he himself had almost arrived at the end of his active labours, if indeed it was not absolutely their end. He was in prison, long shut out from that which had been his joyful service, though in constant toil and suffering for so many years. But his spirit was as bright as ever, his joy perfectly fresh, deep, and flowing. And now he would have them looking to Christ, that no damp should gather round their hearts from anything that might befall him,

— that nothing which happened, whether to themselves, to other saints, or even to the apostle, should interfere for a moment with their unclouded and abounding confidence in the Lord. So he tells them that he always thus remembered them for their “fellowship with the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this very thing, that he who hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.”

There is not even the allowance of the possibility of their turning aside from the bright career both of possessing a Saviour they knew, and of enjoying Him increasingly. He had no theory that first love must necessarily wane and cool down, but the very reverse. Himself the striking witness to the contrary, he looked for nothing less in the saints he so dearly loved. Indeed that which had drawn out the epistle was the proof that the trying circumstances of the apostle had but called out their affections. His being out of sight rather made the remembrance of his words and ways the more distinct, and imparted a chastened earnestness to their desires of pleasing the Lord. “Being confident,” he therefore says, “of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work will perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ, even as it is meet for me to think this of you all.” It is not one who cherished a trust in the Lord’s fidelity spite of what was visible. This counting on the Lord the apostle might have even where things were wrong. It was so as to the Corinthians; nay, it was not wholly wanting for the Galatians, though that which they allowed imperilled the foundations of grace and faith. But the practical ways and spirit of the Philippians were the living evidence not only of life, but, so to speak, of vigorous health in Christ. So it was right for him to anticipate good and not evil,

not as in the authorized version and other translations, because “I have you in my heart,” which would be no ground of assurance for them, but because “ye have me in your heart,” which showed their spiritual feelings to be true and sound. This seems to me the real meaning, which the margin gives rightly.

It is a thing more important in practice than many suppose. There is no more common device of Satan than to seek the destruction of the power of testimony by the allowance of evil insinuations against him who renders it. Of course, the enemy would have desired above all and at any cost to lower such an one as the apostle Paul in the loving esteem of God’s saints, more particularly where all had been sweet and happy; but, notwithstanding every effort, grace hitherto had prevailed, and these saints at Philippi felt the more for the apostle when he was a prisoner. When God does not interpose, men are apt to allow reflections and reasonings. Not seldom do they begin to question whether it can be possible that such a one is really of value to the church of God. Would God in this case let His servant be so long kept away from the gospel or the church? Surely there must have been something seriously wrong to judge in him!

It was not thus that the true-hearted Philippians felt; and spiritual feeling is worth more than all reasoning. Their affections were right. Reasonings on such matters are in general miserably wrong. Their sympathies, drawn out by the afflictions of the apostle in his work, were the workings of the Holy Spirit in their souls — at least the instincts of a life that was of Christ, and that judged in view of Him, and not according to appearances. They had him in their heart, as he says,

“Inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers with me of grace,” or “of my grace.” “For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ.” For his was a heart deeply sensible of love, and consequently he was not one that had sought either to make the saints dependent upon him, and still less did the apostle depend on the saints for anything that was the fruit of grace in them. He desired not anything for himself, but only what should abound to their account in the day of Jesus Christ. This he must wish for them, if he wished them well. Accordingly he prays for them, that as they had shown this true and unabated love for himself as Christ’s servant, so their love might abound yet more and more, and this too in knowledge and in all judgment.

This is the great value of Christian experience. It is not love growing less but more, and this abounding in intelligence and knowledge, which could not be looked for in saints just beginning their career. There is no necessity — and where is the epistle that more thoroughly disproves the thought of any necessity? — that a saint should decline. To abound in love is far from declension. To “abound yet more and more,” — to have that love tempered by divinely given wisdom and divinely exercised judgment, — is the very reverse of going back. Their true and constant progress was what the apostle had before his own soul in prayer for them, instead of coolly giving up the saints, as if the new nature must grow feebler day by day — as if the things of the world must overcome faith, and the things which are seen outweigh those which are unseen and eternal.

Is this your measure of the love of Christ? Is He really so far from any of those that call upon Him?

Thus, then, he prays for them, and to this end, — not that they might become more intelligent merely — not that they might grow more able to discourse of divine things, though I doubt not that there would be growth in these respects also; but all here has an eminently practical form, — “that ye may approve things that are more excellent; that ye may be pure and without offence till the day of Christ.” Such is the thought that the apostle had before his soul of that which became the Christian. He would have one who begins with Christ to (so on with Christ, have nothing but Christ before his eyes, and pursue this path without a stumble till the day of Christ. It is a blessed and refreshing picture even in thought. Oh that the Lord might make it true of His own! This is certainly what the apostle here puts before these saints. “Filled,” says he, “with the fruit of righteousness, which is by Jesus Christ;” for it is all supposed to be fruit, not isolated fruits here and there, but as a whole, which adds greatly to the strength of it. It should be “the fruit of righteousness, which is by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.”

Then he turns, not to doctrine after this opening, but to circumstances, — to circumstances, however, illumined with Christ The most ordinary details are taken out of their own pettiness (though it is really a little mind which counts them petty), and are made simple and genuine, and this through Christ Jesus intermingled with them. Oh, it is a blessed thing, that in the midst of the sorrows of this world, the Holy Spirit knows how thus to blend the name of Christ, as the sweetest balm, with the sorrow, however bitter, and to make the very memory of

the grief pleasant because of Christ, who deigns to let Himself into it all. It was this that so cheered the apostle's heart in his loneliness often, in his desertion sometimes, when the sight of a brother would have given fresh courage to his heart. Looking to the Lord, as it is the life-breath of love, so it adds to the value of brotherly kindness in its season. Thus we know how on approaching Rome Paul was lifted up and comforted, as he saw those who came to greet him. But there he was soon to experience the faltering of brethren; there he was to see not one standing by him in the hour of his shame and need. He must be conformed to his Master in all things; and this was one of them. But out of the midst of bitter experience he had learned Christ, as even he had never known Him before. He had proved long the power and the joy of Christ for every day, and for every circumstance of it.

It was such an one, truly the servant of Jesus Christ, and so much the more their servant because His, even their servant for Jesus' sake — it was such an one that wrote from Rome to the tried saints at Philippi. Nor was he in that which he was about to write without deep feeling; but he had learned Christ for all; and this is the key-note of the epistle from the first, though only uttered distinctly at the last. He had learned practically what Christ is, and what He does, and what He can enable even the least to do, (as he says himself, "less than the least of all saints,") and so much the more, because the least in his own eyes.

Thus then he writes, telling them, "I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel." He knew well how much they might be tried

by the report of his own imprisonment, and no deliverance coming as yet. But he had himself gone through the trial; he had weighed it all; he had brought it into the presence of God. He had put all, as it were, into the hands of Christ, who had Himself given him His own comfort about it. “I would, then, that ye should understand, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel.” Once you are right about Christ, you are right about everything while He is before you. There is nothing assuredly right, on the other hand, where Christ is not the object of the soul. With Him you will be right about the gospel, right about the church, right about doctrine, walk, and service. There is not one of these things but may in itself become the veriest snare; and so much the more dangerous because each looks fair. What looks and sounds better than the saints of God? what than the ministry of Christ? what than the testimony for God? Yet there is not one of these things that has not become the ruin of souls; and there are none that ought to know this better than those I am addressing this night. Who have had more mournful proofs of the danger of putting saints practically in the place of Christ? Who have had more palpable witness that service may become the object rather than Christ? Has it not been the rock on which many a gallant bark has made shipwreck?

But now the apostle was shut out from every labour apparently. Surely he, most of all, must have felt the change — the heart that took in the Gentiles, that swept the circle of lands from Jerusalem to Illyricum, that yearned over Spain, ever going out farther and farther, boundless in his desires for the salvation of souls. He

was for a considerable time a prisoner. He is at Rome, where he desired to be, no doubt, but which he had never expected to visit as one in bonds. And that he ever was anything but a prisoner there, man at least cannot say. A prisoner he was; and such is all that Scripture tells about him there. We may see the moral harmony of that lot with his testimony, and how suitable it seems that he, who was above all men identified with the gospel of the glory of Christ, should be a prisoner, and nothing but a prisoner in Rome. At any rate, such is the picture that the Holy Spirit gives of him there. And now as he had Christ before his soul, in this way the gospel itself, he can feel, is only promoted so much the more. Far from him was the vanity of being the man first to preach Christ in the great metropolis. He forgot himself in the gospel. His desire above all was that Christ's name might go forth. This was very dear to him, let God use whom he would. The things that happened to him he could therefore judge calmly and clearly. What seemed to some the death of the gospel was in point of fact distinctly for the furtherance of it.

The manner, too, in which these things happened seemed to make all as remote as possible from furthering the gospel; but here again he brings in Christ. This disperses all clouds from the soul. This filled Paul with sunshine; and he would have others to enjoy the same bright light which the name of Christ cast on every object. And mark, it is not the anticipation of light with Christ in heaven, but His light now while He is in heaven shining on the heart, and on the circumstances of the pathway here below. He says that they had happened rather for the furtherance of the gospel, — "so that my bonds in Christ are manifest;" for this is the way in

which he looks at it — “my bonds in Christ.” Oh, how honourable, how sweet and precious, to have bonds in Christ! Other people would have merely thought of or seen bonds under the Roman emperor, the bonds of that great city that ruled over the kings of the earth. Not so Paul. They were bonds in Christ; how then could he be impatient under them? How could any murmur who believed they were really bonds in Christ? “My bonds in Christ,” he says, “are manifest in all the palace.” Strange way of God! but so it was that thus the gospel, the glad tidings of His grace, should reach the highest quarters. They were “manifest in all the palace, and in all other places; and many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by, my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.”

Blessed is this confidence in Christ, and wondrous are His ways! Who would have expected that the timid man Nicodemus, and the honourable councillor Joseph of Arimathea, would have been brought out at the very time when even the apostles themselves had fled trembling with fear? Yet they were the witnesses of Christ whom God had put forth at the close; for it was manifestly of Him. God never can fail; and the very trials that would seem to crush all hope for the glory of Christ on the earth are the precise occasions in which God proves that after all it is He alone who triumphs, while man always fails even if he be an apostle. But the weakest of saints (how much more this greatest of the apostles!) cannot but be conqueror, more than conqueror, where the heart is filled with Christ. There was victory to his faith by the grace of God. And so, too, he could now read and interpret all things in that bright light around him. Had he occupied himself with the

persons that were so preaching the gospel, how disconsolate he must have been! What might you and I have thought of such? Is it too much to say that many a groan would have gone forth from us that are here? Instead of this a song of joy and thanks comes from the blessed man of God at Rome; for, as he says here, “Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will. The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely,” — nor was this all, but — “supposing to add affliction to my bonds.”

Not only was an utterly wrong spirit indulged in the work itself, and toward others engaged actually in it; but even as to the apostle, shut out from such service, a desire to pain and wound was not wanting. “The one preach Christ of contention supposing to add affliction to my bonds: but the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel. What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached.” Christ is the sovereign balm for every wound; and it was the apostle’s joy, whatever men’s spirit might be, not only to enjoy Christ himself, but that His name was being proclaimed far and wide by many lips, that souls might hear and live. Whatever the motives, whatever the manner, the Lord would surely deal with these in His own day; but, at any rate, Christ was now preached, and God would use this both for His own glory and for the salvation of souls.

Hence, says he, “I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice. For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Christ Jesus.” We must carefully remember throughout all this epistle that “salvation” never means acceptance. If this be borne in mind a large part of the difficulty that

some have found completely disappears. Impossible that anything done by other saints should turn to one's acceptance any more than what is done by himself The apostle uses salvation throughout his letter to the Philippians (nor is it confined to this scripture only) in the sense of the complete and final triumph over all the power of Satan. Hence it may be remarked that in the epistle to the Philippians it is not a question of lusts of the flesh; the flesh is not so much as named here, except in a religious way; not in its gross sins, as man would judge, but in its pretensions to religion. See for instance Philippians 3. Hence the conflict is never with internal evil, but rather with Satan. For such conflict we need the power of the Lord and the whole armour of God. But that power displays itself not in our strength, or wisdom, or any conferred resources. The supply of the Spirit of Christ Jesus shows itself in dependence, and this expresses itself therefore in prayer to God. And observe, too, that the apostle felt the value of others' prayers. They contributed to his. victory over the foe. How lovely that even such a man should speak, not merely of his own prayers, but of theirs, turning all to such account. "This shall turn," says he, "to my salvation through your prayers, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ." There is nothing so unaffectedly humble as real faith, and, above all, that character of faith which lives on Christ, and which consequently lives Christ. Such was the apostle's faith. To him to live was Christ.

"According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed." If he desired for them that they should be without one stumble till the day of Christ, it was the purpose to which grace had girded up his own loins. But "that in nothing I shall be ashamed."

What a word, and how calculated to make us ashamed! It is not a question of acceptance in Christ. No; it is practical. It is his state and experience every day, as to which his hope was that in nothing he should be ashamed; “but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ. shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death.”

And what is it that gave such a hope to one that owns himself the chief of sinners and less than the least of all saints? There was but one spring of power — even Christ. And, let me observe, it is not merely that Christ is my life. Sweet and wondrous word to say that Christ is our life; but the question is, how are we living? Are we living out that life which we have? Is this the life that is practically exercised? or are there mingled ways and mixed motives? Is there the struggle of the old with the appearance sometimes of the new? Does this content our hearts? Or is it, on the settled judgment of the old as altogether and only self and sin, that we are habitually manifesting Christ? Have we that one blessed person as the hope, motive, beginning, end, way, and power of all that occupies us from day to day? It was so with the apostle. May it be so with us! “To me,” may each say truly, “to live is Christ.”

Habitually, indeed throughout this epistle, we find the word “me,” and a very different “me” from the “me” of Romans 7. There it was an unhappy “me,” though distinct from the flesh: “O wretched man that I am” Here it would be, O happy man that I am! He is one who has his joy exclusively from and in Christ. When first he tasted it, he found it so sweet that he cared for none other. And thus it was the power of the Spirit of God that gave him to look out in the midst of all that he passed

through day by day, that all, whatever it might be, should be done to Christ, and so too all by Christ, the Holy Ghost working it, so to speak, in his soul to give him simply and settledly in everything that occurred an opportunity of having Christ Himself as the substance of his living and serving, no matter what might come in the course of duty. “To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” In any case, indeed, to the Christian, death is gain; but he could best say it who could say, “To me to live is Christ,” who could say it not merely as the faith of Him, but as a matter of simple, unconstrained, spontaneous enjoyment of Christ in practical ways.

Now he proceeds to give his reason. It is his own personal experience; and this is the reason why we have “I” so often here. It is not legal experience, for which you must turn to the chapter spoken of in Romans 7, the only bit of a saint’s experience under law, as far as I know, that the New Testament affords (certainly in the epistles). But here is the proper experience of a Christian. It is the apostle giving us what his heart was occupied with when he could not go forth in the activities of work, and when it seemed as if he had nothing to do. Now we all know that when a man is carried on the top of the wave, when the winds fill the sails and all goes prosperously, when hearts are gladdened in sorrow, when one witnesses the joy of fresh deliverance from day to day, it is a comparatively easy thing. But to one cut off from such work it was, in appearance at least, a heavy burden and an immense trial; but Christ changes all for us. His yoke is easy, and His burden light. It is Christ, and Christ only, that thus disposes of grief and pressure. And so accordingly His

servant says here, “If I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour.”

It is needless to recount the comments on these words. They really mean, this is worth my while, a well-known phrase in Latin too. He puts it as a matter left for him to judge of and decide by Christ. “if I live in the flesh, it is worth my while.” But if not, what then? Why, it was gain. As far as he was concerned, therefore, why could he choose? In a certain sense too he could not, and in another he would not choose. Christ was so truly before his heart, that in fact there was no self left unjudged to warp the choice. This is what brings him, if one may so say, into the dilemma of love. If he left this world, he would be with Christ; if he lived longer in this, world, Christ was with him. In short, he was so living Christ, that it was only a question of Christ here, and of Christ there. After all it was better for Christ to choose, not for him. But the moment he has Christ before him thus, he judges according to the affections of Christ, and he looks at the need of saints here below.

The question is at once settled as a matter of faith. Though he wist not to choose what between the two before, when the need of souls rises before him, he says that he shall live, and is not yet going to die. Through the wonderful sight of the love of Christ, this answered the question to his faith, leaving all circumstances entirely aside. Witnesses, prosecutors, judges, emperor, everybody, became, in point of fact, nothing to him. “I can do all things,” as he says elsewhere, “through him that strengtheneth me.” So he could settle now about his life and death. “Therefore,” says he, — though I am in a strait betwixt two,” as he had said before, “having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far

better: nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you. And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith; that your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again."

Only he desires that their conversation should be as it became the gospel of Christ. It was not merely their calling in Christ, their being Christians, that was before him, but a walk as it became the gospel of Christ. It is not at all as the objects of the gospel, but as having fellowship with it, their hearts bound up and identified with all the trials and difficulties that the gospel was sustaining in its course throughout the world. "Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ." Thus fervour of desire for others is the happy index of this whenever coupled with adequate knowledge of ourselves. But how can this be unless the heart is perfectly at ease as to itself? "Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ." Let me press this, because alas! there is no small tendency whenever people know the gospel well, if this be all, to settle down, thinking they have nothing more to do with the matter. It was not so with the Philippians. They had so much the more to do because Christ had done all for their souls. They were coupled with the gospel in all its conflict and progress. It was not because of their own personal interest, though this was great and fresh, but they loved that it should go forth. They identified themselves, therefore, with all who were declaring it throughout the world. Hence he desired that their conversation should be as became such zeal; "that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with

one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; and in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God."

This is the more important, because such fear is the main weapon of Satan. It is always the power of Satan that is in view here. He is regarded as the true adversary, working, of course, by human means; but none the less is it his power. It may be remarked here, that from an expression often misunderstood in Philippians 2 it might seem as if the apostle wished somehow to weaken their confidence. So unbelief interprets, but most assuredly it is wrong. The apostle does call for "fear and trembling" on the part of the saints in that chapter; but there is not an atom of dread or doubt in it. He would have them realize the solemnity of the strife that is going on. He desires for them, not anxiety about the issue of it, but true gravity of spirit, because of feeling that it is a question between God and the devil, and that we have to do with that struggle in the most direct way. We need to draw from God, the spring and the only supplier of power that can resist the devil; but, at the same time, that we have the devil to resist in His power is a conviction that may well demand "fear and trembling;" and this, lest in such a conflict we should let in anything of self, which would at once give a handle to the devil. In Him, we, know, who was the perfect model in the same warfare, which He fought single-handed, conquering for God's glory and for us, the prince of this world came, and had nothing in Him, absolutely nothing. With us it is far otherwise; and only as we live on Christ do we remove, as it were, from the

enemy’s hand that which would furnish him abundant occasion.

In rich measure did the apostle live thus himself — it was the one thing he did; and he would have the saints to be living in it too. “In nothing,” says he, “terrified by your adversaries [this is the other side]: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God. For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.” Thus the very suffering which unbelief might interpret wrongly, and regard as a severe chastening, and so cause the heart to be cast down, instead of taking comfort before God, the suffering for Christ’s sake is a gift of His love, as much a gift as the believing in Christ for the salvation of the soul. For, in point of fact, through this epistle salvation is seen as going on from first to last, and not yet complete, being never viewed as such till the conflict with Satan is altogether closed. Such is the sense of it here. Hence he speaks of the conflict which they once saw to be in him, and now heard to be in him.

Next, not only did he exhort them not to be terrified by the power of Satan, which is itself an evident and solemn sign of perdition to those that oppose the saints of God; but he calls on them to cast out the sources of disunion among themselves; and this he does in the most touching way. They had been manifesting their mindful love for the apostle, who on his part was certainly not forgetful of its least token. If, then, they really loved him, — “If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if there be any comfort of love, any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies,” — he would venture to seek another proof of it. That there

was all this abundantly in these saints he did not doubt; they had just shown him the fruit of love personally. Did he want more for himself? Far from it. There was another way which would best prove it to his heart; it was not something future secured to Paul in his need, which would be the way of nature, not of love or faith. Not so: Christ is always better; and so says he, “Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vain-glory.” There is always danger of these, and the more so where there is activity among souls. There was evidently energy among these Philippians. This commonly is apt to give occasion for strife as well as vain-glory. No saints are outside the danger.

Nothing, then, would the apostle have done in strife or vain-glory; “‘ but in lowliness of mind each esteeming other better than themselves.” Let me look at another as he is in Christ. Let me think of myself as one that is serving Him (oh, how feebly and failingly!) in this relationship, and it is an easy thing to esteem others better than myself. It is not sentiment, but a genuine feeling, thus “looking not each at his own things, but each also at the things of others.” Now the saint that has Christ Himself before him looks abroad with desires according to the activity of divine love.

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself.” There are two chief stages of His humiliation flowing out of His perfect love. First of

all He emptied Himself, becoming a slave and a man; and having thus come down, so as to take His place in the likeness of men, He, found in figure as a man, humbled Himself, becoming obedient even to the lowest point of degradation here below. He “became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

It will be observed that there is no such thing in the first instance as “to the glory of God,” when we hear of all bowing in the name of Jesus. To the confession of His Lordship is added “to the glory of God the Father.” The reason is, in my judgment, perfectly beautiful. “Jesus” is His own name, His personal name. Jesus is Jehovah, although a man; consequently the bowing in that name to the glory of God the Father does not occur to the apostle. Why, then, is it so in the next instance? Because he looks at Jesus, not in His own personal right and glory, where necessarily all must bow, but rather at Him in His official place as Lord — the place He has righteously acquired as man. This is wholly distinct from His own intrinsic eternal glory. He was made Lord and Christ. The moment you look at what He is made, then it is to the glory of Him who thus exalted Him. It was God the Father that made Him Lord and Christ, but God the Father never made Him Jehovah. He was Jehovah, equal with God the Father. Impossible that He could be made Jehovah. Reason and sense are out of the question, though reason must reject a creature’s becoming God.

Such a notion is unknown to scripture, and revolting to the spiritual mind. Hence we see the great importance of this truth. All error is founded on a misuse of a truth against the truth. The only safeguard of the saints, of those that love the truth and Himself, is simple subjection to the word of God — to the whole truth He has revealed in scripture.

Evidently, therefore, two glories of Jesus are referred to here. There is His own personal glory; and this first. The other is what suits it, but a conferred position. If Jehovah so served, it was but natural that He should be made Lord of all, and so He is. It was due to His humiliation and obedience; and so it is here treated.

Thus, in both parts of the history of Christ, presented to us in no obscure contrast with the first Adam, we have first of all His own glory, who humbled Himself to become a servant. The very fact, or way of putting it, supposes Him to be a divine person. Had He not been God in His own being and title, it would have been no humiliation to be a servant, nor could it be indeed a question of taking such a place. The archangel is at best but a servant; the highest creature, far from having to stoop in order to become a servant, can never rise above that condition. Jesus had to empty Himself to become a servant. He is God equally with the Father. But having deigned to become a servant, He goes down lower still. He must retrieve the glory of God in that very death which confessedly had brought the greatest shame on God outwardly. For God had made the world full of life; He “saw every thing that He had made, and, behold, it was very good,” and Satan apparently won the victory over Him in it. All here below was plunged under the

sentence of death through Adam's sin; and God's word could but seal it till redemption.

The Lord Jesus not only comes down into the place of servant in love among men, but goes down into the last fortress of the enemy's power. He breaks it completely, becomes conqueror for ever, wins the title for God's grace to deliver righteously every creature, save only those who, far from receiving Christ, dare to reject Him because of that very nature which He took on Him, and that infinite work on the cross which had caused Him suffering to the utmost in working all out for the glory of God. Oh, is it not awful to think, that the best proof of the love of Christ and of His glory is the very ground which the base heart of man turns into a reason for denying both His love and His glory? But so it is; and thus the food of faith becomes the poison of unbelief. But the day is coming when every knee shall bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth." Not that all shall be delivered and centred in Him, but that all must bow. All who believe shall surely shine in His glory; and the universal creation, which, belonging to Him as His inheritance, He will share with His own, shall be reconciled and delivered in due time. But there are the things, or if you will, the persons under the earth which can never be delivered. Yet these shall bow, no less than those in heaven, or on earth. In His name all must bow. Thus the difference between reconciliation and subjection is manifest. The lost must bow; the devils must bow; the lake of fire must own the glory of Him who has power to cast them there, as it is said, "unto the glory of God the Father." But all in heaven and on earth shall be in reconciliation with God and headed up in Christ, with whom the Church shall

share the unbounded inheritance. (Compare Eph. 1 and Col. 1) But all, even these in hell, must confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

But now the apostle turns to the use that he makes of so blessed a pattern, “Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence.” It was the exact reverse in good of what the Galatians were in evil, for they had been cordial and bright when the apostle was with them; but directly his back was turned, their hearts were alienated. Even he who knew them well marvelled that they were so soon shifting, not only from him, but from the gospel, after he left them. But with the Philippians there was increased jealousy for Christ. They were more obedient in his absence than in his presence. Hence he calls upon them, as one that could not be with them to help them in the conflict, to work out their own salvation. Such is the force of the exhortation. This epistle is therefore eminently instructive to those who could not have an apostle with them. God was pleased, even whilst the apostle was alive, to set him aside and to prove the power of faith where he was not.

Hence he says, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” It is not the dread of losing the Saviour of their souls, but because they felt for His name; “for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.” Therefore he intreated them to “do all things without murmurings and reasonings, that they might be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, — in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom they shone as lights in the world; holding forth the word of life.” It is a description that might almost do for Christ himself, so

high is the standard for those that belong to Christ. Christ was surely blameless in the highest sense, as His ways were harmless, — “holy, harmless, undefiled,” as it is said elsewhere. Christ was Son of God in a sole and supreme sense. Christ was “without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation.” Christ shone as the true light in the world — the light of life. Christ held it forth; nay, more, He was it. For what believer would deny that, however close the conformity, there is always that dignity and perfection which is proper to Christ, and exclusively His? Let us uphold the glory of His person, but, nevertheless, let us not forget how the apostle’s picture of the saint resembles the Master! Like, another apostle (2 John 8) he does not hesitate to blend with all this an appeal to their hearts for his own service in their well-being.

“That” (says he, after he had exhorted the Philippians thus to stand,) “I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain. Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith.” How truly he accounted himself less than the least of them! How gladly would he be a libation upon the sacrifice of their faith! He esteemed men better than himself. He too in love still keeps up the servant-character, and gives them as it were the Christ-character. This is the unfailing secret of it all — the true source of humility in service. “For the same cause also do ye joy and rejoice with me. But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort, when I know your state.”

And now there is the most lovely picture of Christ again; for it is always Christ here, and this again practically. Timothy was very dear to him, and was then with him;

but he is going to part with the one that was so much the more valued by him in his solitariness and sorrow because of his circumstances at Rome. Indeed he esteemed others better than himself. He is just about to send Timothy from himself that he might know about them. “For I have no man like-minded, who will naturally care for your state.” Timothy shared the unselfishness of the apostle’s heart. “For they all seek their own.” It might have been thought that so much the more would Paul need his love and services. Whatever he needed, love is never itself but in unselfish action and suffering. I speak of Christian love, of course. “For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ’s. But ye know the proof of him, that, as a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel. Him therefore I hope to send presently, so soon as I shall see how it will go with me. But I trust in the Lord that I also myself shall come shortly. Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellow-soldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants.”

He loves, we see, to couple with the relationship to himself what was related to them. Epaphroditus was his fellow-servant, and indeed more than that — “my brother, and companion in labour, and fellow-soldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants. For he longed after you all, and was full of heaviness.” Why? because he. himself had been sick? No; but “because that ye had heard that he had been sick.” How lovely that this it was that pained him — unselfish love! the love of Christ everywhere! “For indeed he was sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him.” Was this all the apostle had to say? Not so. “And not on him only,

but on me also," (what a difference is made when love interprets!) "lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. I sent him therefore the more carefully, that, when ye see him again, ye may rejoice, and that I may be [not rejoicing here, but] the less sorrowful." He did feel it. Love feels acutely — nothing so much; but it triumphs. "Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness; and hold such in reputation" (he would turn it again to practical profit as to others): "because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me."

This chapter then looks for the working of the gracious feelings of Christ Himself in the Christian individually, showing us, first, the fulness of them all in Christ in contrast with the first Adam. But it gives us also the effect of Christ in the saints eventually — of Paul himself, of Timothy, of Epaphroditus, and indeed of the Philippian saints. It shows us grace practically in different measures and forms. But the (trace of Christ wrought in them all; and that was the great joy and delight of the apostle's heart.

In Philippians 3 it is not the display of intrinsic affection in Christ, or the gracious dispositions of Christ in the saints. Not the passive side of the Christian as being in the world, but the active comes before us. Accordingly, this being not so directly the subject of the epistle though a Very important part of it, it comes in parenthetically in a large measure, not now in any wise as a question of truth or development of the mystery of Christ, as we saw in Ephesians 3, but, nevertheless, as a parenthesis; for he resumes afterwards the internal side again, as we shall see in Philippians 4. Energy is not the best or highest aspect of Christianity. There is real

power, there is strength from God that works in the saint; but the feelings of Christ, the mind of Christ morally, is better than all energy. Nevertheless, energy there is, and this assuredly judges what is contrary to Christ.

Here, accordingly, it is not the outgoings of love, but the zeal that burns indignantly as to what dishonours the Lord. This is one of the main features of our chapter. “Finally,” says he, “my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe. Beware of doers.” In Matthew 23 we have woe upon woe pronounced upon scribes and Pharisees, and so it is here. As it was a true though distressing part for Christ to judge religious evil, something akin could not be absent here; but at the same time it was by no means a prominent characteristic of Christ’s task here below — far from it. It was a necessary duty sometimes as things are on the earth, but nothing more; and so it is still. “Beware of evil workers; beware of the concision.”

“For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.” This is the only allusion, as far as I know, to flesh in this epistle, but it is flesh in its religious form, and not as a source of evil lusts and passions. It is all judged, and its religious form not least, by Christ “Though,” says he, “I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other” — carrying on the same thought of the flesh — “if any other man thinketh that he hath matter of trust in the flesh, I more. Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal,

persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." And what did the apostle do with all this roll of fleshly advantages? It was seen laid in the grave of Christ. "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ." Will it be said that this is what the apostle felt, and did, and suffered in the freshness of his first acquaintance with Christ? It was also what he carried up to the moment of writing to the Philippians as ardently as ever. "Yea," said he, "and I count all things but loss." It is not only his reckoning in the first fervour of love for the Saviour. "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord."

Such experience is both a real and a precious boon. Let us not mistake in this; let us not be driven from it by a too common misuse. That which men call by this name is really the trial of what flesh is under law much more than experience of Christ. But let us not be turned aside, and think that it is merely a question of believing and of knowing our place secure; but let us live of that very Christ who is our life. This is what he did, and accordingly this is the source, not merely of a firm faith and confidence as to the issue, but of present joy and all-overcoming power. This is what gives force to our affections, and rivets them on Christ. This is, accordingly, what flows forth in praise from himself, and in calling out praise from other hearts. So he says here, "For the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung." Thus the two things are repeated — the past judgment and the present power: "and do count them but dung, that I may, win Christ." This will be, no doubt, at the end of the journey: the

faithful win Christ where He is. For it is not meant looking to Him now, or having Him as one's life: to win Christ means having Him at the other side. He always looks there in Philippians.

It is not at all a question of what one has here. This has its most weighty place elsewhere; but when it is a question of experience, the end cannot be here. There is the present joy of Christ; but this does not content the soul. The more one enjoys Christ here, the more one wants to be with Him there. "That I may win Christ," therefore he says; "and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law." This was precisely what he desired when a Jew. Now, having seen Christ, if he could even bring his own righteousness into heaven, he would not. It would be mere independence of Christ if he could have stood without a single flaw, as blameless, in fact, as in a certain sense outwardly he was under the law, until the Spirit of God gave him to see what he was in God's mind. Then he found himself a dead man — condemned and powerless. But supposing it possible to be clothed with the righteousness of the law, he would not have it now. He had got a better righteousness, and he desired nothing so much as to be found in Christ, having that which is through faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith. Nothing but the righteousness that was of God as its source satisfied him. It is the only place in Scripture where the phrase means, not simply the righteousness of God in point of character, but the righteousness of God in point of source. Such is the meaning here. Elsewhere it is God's or divine righteousness. Here the object seems to be to make its difference from legal

obedience more felt — the contrast with the law more complete.

“That I may know him.” Now here we have what is present; so that the passage presents some difficulty to souls because of intermingling the present with the future. Thus easily do we fall into error, because the human mind likes to have either one thing or another, and thus avoid all difficulty in Scripture, having each squared according to our notions. But it is not so that God has written His word. Nevertheless, God will surely teach His own, and knows how to clear up what is hidden from them. He has written His word not to perplex, but to enlighten. Thus the true bearing of the passage is, that from the first the eye of faith is fixed steadily on the end of the journey. “That I may win Christ, and be found in him” — where not a vestige of self remains, but all will be Christ, and nothing but Christ. This is the righteousness whose source is in God; it is also by faith of Christ, and not through the law, which, of course, would have man’s righteousness if it could.

But now he adds, “That I may know him” (speaking of entrance by faith into communion with Christ)” that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection.” This is open to the heart now. “And the fellowship of his sufferings” — again and certainly a present thing, not relating to heaven. “Being made conformable to his death:” — this too is clearly in the world now. “If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection from the dead.”1 Clearly we here look out of the world and into a state to come, when we have the consummation of our hopes and the end of the journey. This is what he calls

“salvation.” It cannot be till the Christ is risen according to the pattern of Christ Himself.

Dr. S. T. Bloomfield indeed (Addit. Annotations in loc.) admits that the external testimony is quite in its favour, though it is hard to see what he means by the internal evidence being in this case denied; for he suggests himself that τὴν ἐκ may have been a correction proceeding from those who thought that the sense which the context requires, “the resurrection from the dead,” could not be extracted from ἐξαν. τῶν νεκρῶν. The critical reading he owns has force and propriety; but he does “not see why ἐξανάστ. τῶν νεκρῶν should not of itself have the same sense as that conveyed, with more propriety of expression (and for that reason likely to be adopted in the early Uncial MSS.), ἐξαν. τὴν ἐκ νεκρῶν. Little probable is it that the reading, ἐξανάστ. τὴν ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν should have been altered to ἐξ

τῶν νεκρ. There is great reason to think that the

ἐξ arose from those who thought it necessary to the sense, and did not see that it could be fetched from the ἐξ in ἐξανάστ. Hence I am inclined to retain ἐξαν. τῶν νεκρ. as a popular and familiar mode of expression (suitable to the persons addressed), according to which the expressions ἐξαν. τῶν advert — as at Rom. 4:16, and elsewhere — to the state of the persons in question, that state or kind of resurrection unto life of those who have died in the Lord, and whose resurrection will be a resurrection unto life and glory, their bodies being raised incorruptible, and both body and soul united for ever with the Lord. See 1 Thess. 4:6-18.”

I have transcribed this note at length, because it is a fair sample of Dr. B.’s critical, scholastic, and exegetic

manner. Enough has been already said above, before I even knew of his reasoning, to prove how unfounded it is in every point of view. The internal evidence (i.e. the scope of the context) is as decidedly for τὴν ἐκ as the weightiest external witnesses. How the text got gradually changed from the most correct form (not correction) in the early Uncials has been explained. When the distinction of the resurrection of the just from that of the unjust got lost in Christendom, and all were merged in the error of one general indiscriminate resurrection, one can understand that people would not feel the impropriety of substituting τῶν for τὴν ἐκ (for as to τὴν ἐκ τῶν, of which Dr. B. speaks, it exists in no document whatever). There is therefore not the slightest ground to countenance the rather dangerous idea, that the apostle did not employ a phrase analogous to the correct one which is found elsewhere in the New Testament, and adopted "a popular and familiar mode of expression," i.e. a really inaccurate mode. And why should our Lord adopt a correct form to the Sadducees (Luke 20 repeated in Acts 4), and Paul an incorrect one to the Philippians? Who can understand why it should be "suitable to the persons addressed," on Dr. B's showing? Of the two, the converse would be more intelligible; but my conviction is that both the Lord and His apostle used similar and correct phraseology, as did the Holy Spirit elsewhere. And as to Rom. 4:17 (which was probably meant rather than 16), it has no bearing on the matter, as it is there merely a question of God's power displayed in quickening the dead, and calling things that are not in being as in being, and in no way distinguishing the resurrection of life from that of judgment. When the state or kind of resurrection is meant to be expressed, the anarthrous form is requisite, as we see in verse 24 of

this very chapter, and regularly so. (See Rom. 1:4.) I believe, therefore, that ἐξανάστασιν, especially if ἐκ be supposed to be fetched (as Dr. B. says) from ἐξανάστ, is incompatible with τῶν νεκρῶν, the one conveying the notion of a selected company, and the other of the dead universally. Modern editors of value, however differing in their system of recension agree in the ancient as against the received reading; so Scholz, Lachmann, Tischendorf, Ellicott, Alford, Tregelles, Wordsworth, etc.

Thus we see here the power of a risen and a heavenly Christ, not now treated doctrinally as in 1 Corinthians 15 or 2 Corinthians 5 and elsewhere, but as that which bears on the Christian for the constant experience of every day. Hence that which judged and put aside religion after the flesh, righteousness after the law, all that was now left completely and for ever behind, and the saint is set on the road that nothing can satisfy him but being in the same glorious condition with Christ Himself. Hence he says, “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind.” This, carefully remember, does not mean forgetting sins. Far from losing sight of our past ways, it is a very wholesome thing indeed to remember them: we are never safe in forgetting what we are and have been. What he means by forgetting the things that are behind is, that we should not think of any progress we may have made in following Christ, — that we should lose sight of everything calculated to give us self-satisfaction. This were to spoil all, because it would please the flesh.

It is our progress then that we are to forget. Let us be humbled on account of our sins. Self-judgment, where grace is known, is a most wholesome exercise of soul; and we shall have it in perfection even in heaven itself before the judgment-seat of Christ. One of the elements of heavenly happiness will be the calm and settled knowledge of all that we have been here below. This will not detract for an instant from the perfect enjoyment of Christ, but rather promote it so much the more, making it more evidently and always pure grace even in glory. Thus “forgetting those things which are behind” refers to the progress that we may make. True experience is still the great theme which the apostle has in hand here as well as in his own personal history. He was too much bent on what was before to be occupied with calling to mind what was behind him; it must have impeded him in the race. “Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise [i.e. differently] minded, this also will God reveal to you.” Differences there may be among the saints, and especially when we come to the question of experience. But in truth it may betray itself in doctrine and practice in various shapes.

And what is the true divine rule? Is it agreeing to differ? This is but a poor human resource, as unworthy of the saints as of the truth of God, who would not have us to wink at any mistake. It is no rule, but an evasion. There is, however, a sure and only divine standard: as far as we have attained, our call is to walk in the same path. And this is true from the first moment of our career as God’s children. For, let me ask, what is our title to communion? What is it that brings us into the blessed fellowship that we enjoy? There is but one title, there

can be no sufficient ground but the name of Christ — Christ known and confessed in the Holy Ghost; and where He is simply before us, the progress is most real, if not always easy and sensible. It is not meant that there are no difficulties, but that Christ makes the burden light and all happy to the praise of God's grace; whereas any other means or measure detracts from His glory and draws attention to self.

Supposing, for instance, we mingle with Christ knowledge or intelligence about this truth or that practice, does it not give a necessary prominence to certain distinctive points, which so far must make Christ of less account? Even, therefore, if you could have (what is impossible) ever so much real spiritual knowledge along with Christ, who would so much as notice these acquisitions in comparison with Christ? Let us merely take up a single point of the primary ground of fitness for fellowship, which is often a difficulty with the saints. Yet the truth as to this abides, not only at the starting-point, but all the way through. What is there that you can rightly plead but Christ's own name? And this ground is one which always brings in the strength of the Holy Ghost, as it is based on God's mighty work of redemption. If right here, we are at one, so to speak, with His present purposes. What is the Spirit now doing? He is exalting Christ. It is not merely exalting His work, or His cross; it is not so much His blood, as Christ Himself. The name of Christ Himself is the true centre of the saints; unto this the Spirit gathers. As he had said elsewhere before, so he says here, "Be followers together of me, and mark them which walk — so as ye have us for an ensample. For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they

are the enemies of the cross of Christ." Thus, as at the beginning of the chapter, there was the energy that went out against the evil workers, with a religious mind after the flesh, so now there is the energy that bursts forth against those that were misusing Christianity, making it an earthly system, setting their mind on things here below, under the name of the Lord Jesus; and between the two, is set forth the positiveness, if one may so speak, of Christ Himself.

It is plain, then, that in Philippians 2 the great spring of power is the love and the glory of Him who came down; who, even when He did so come, went down still lower, where none could accompany Him. Yet we may follow, and seek conformity unto His death; but there was that in His death on the cross which could be His alone.

In Philippians 3 there is no coming down from glory in the power of divine love, resulting in His exaltation by and for the glory of God the Father after a new sort. Here we see One who is in glory, and on whom the eye of the believer is set; and accordingly the judgment of evil is from the side of heaven. The one thing that suits is to pursue the glory before him, till he is in the same glory along with Christ. This is the object set before us in Philippians 3. The one therefore, I say, is the passive side of the Christian; the other is his activity. The passive shines in Christ coming down; the active is realized by the eye that is fixed on Christ, who is actually in glory. This separates from all, and judges the best of man to be dung, as the former conforms the heart after His love.

Philippians 4 is founded on both. The apostle takes up, no doubt, the sweet affections of chapter 2, but then

they are strengthened by the energy that Christ seen in glory imparts, as in chapter 3. Hence he thus opens, “Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown.” One cannot overlook the amazing strength with which he speaks even of his affections. “My joy and crown,” “my dearly beloved.” Not that there were not difficulties; there were many. “I beseech Evodia” (we may just notice the true form in passing; Euodias sounds like a man’s name, whereas here it is really a woman). “I beseech Evodia, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord. Yea [not and], I entreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which labour with me.” According to the true meaning it is not others, but those very sisters that he commends to Epaphroditus in desire for their blessing, “which labour with me in the gospel [or seeing that they shared the conflict of the gospel with me].” “Laboured” gives a wrong sense. Many hence have wrongly gathered that they were preachers. There is really no reason to suppose that they preached at all. What they did seems a much more proper thing, in my judgment, for a woman. They shared the conflict of the gospel; they partook of the reproach that covered those who preached it. This is lost in the idea of labouring in it. We must think rather of the conflict of the gospel: there was often for all concerned disgrace, and pain, and scorn.

Let nobody suppose me to insinuate that a woman is not in place when exercising, according to the Scripture, any gift God has given her. Women may have gifts as well as men. We are not to suppose that, because we are men, we monopolise all the gifts of Christ. Let us see to it that we walk according to the place which God has given us. At the same time, God’s word is to me plain as

to the manner in which the gifts are to be exercised. And is there not evidently a path of unobtrusiveness (for the veil or sign of power on the woman's head is no vain figure) which most befits a woman? I believe that a woman shines most where she does not appear. Hers is a more delicate place than that which becomes the man, and one which a man attempting it would awkwardly fill. But while a man is quite unfit to do a woman's work, can it be doubted that a woman brings no honour to herself, or to the Lord, by attempting to do a man's task? The Lord has laid down their places respectively with distinctness. It is ignorance and absurdity to answer such scriptures by the text, that in Christ there is neither male nor female. We do not speak of standing in Christ now, but of their allotted services. In this we hear of difference; and scripture does not obliterate but contrariwise asserts it, and treats the practical denial of it as a scandal brought in by Corinthian headiness. No doubt the new creation is essentially neither male nor female; it is not a race perpetuated in a fleshly way; but all things are of God and in Christ. Notwithstanding, it has been already explained that the man has a relative place as the image and glory of God, being set in a remarkable position between God and the woman in matters of outward decorum.

Returning, however, to the women Evodia and Syntyche, they had devoted themselves to an exceedingly happy and prized service. They joined with those who preached the truth and partook of their obloquy. They helped them, and in that sense "laboured" if you will. At any rate they endured the conflicts of the gospel in its earlier days at Philippi. Why should women expose, themselves? Why go in the way of crowds of soldiers or

civil officers? Why should such as they face the unmannerly officials that took advantage of the imperial government to treat with injury those identified with the gospel? Love does not calculate these costs and dangers, but goes calmly forward, come what will, trouble, scorn, or death. No wonder the apostle was grieved to think of differences among such women as these. “Help them” (says he) “with Clement also, and with my other fellow-labourers, whose names are in the book of life.”

Finally, he calls them again to rejoice, and now with more emphasis than ever. “Rejoice in the Lord alway.” in sorrow? Yes. In affliction, in prison, everywhere. “Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice.” He did not make a mistake. He did not forget, but meant what he said. “Again I say, Rejoice.” Let your moderation go along with it, because along with this joy there might be a certain enthusiastic spirit that would hinder calm judgment. But this is not the character of Christian joy. “Let your moderation be known unto all men;” that is, the meekness and gentleness which bends to the blow, instead of resisting it in the spirit that ever asserts its rights and fights for them. Have rather that spirit which counts nothing as a right to be claimed, but all one has as gifts of grace to be freely used in this world, because one has Christ in view. “Let your moderation be known unto all men,” strengthened by this consolatory truth, — “the Lord is at hand.”

And this nearness of Christ I take simply to be the blessed hope here made a practical power. It is not the Lord at hand to succour one now and here from time to time. No one denies this, which is, or ought to be, no new thing for a Christian. He means the Lord, really,

personally, at hand; as he had said in the end of the last chapter, that this was what we look for. “Our conversation is in heaven; from whence we wait for the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour” — for this is the true meaning of it. And this puts the doctrine, as far as there is doctrine in the epistle, in a very clear light. There is no looking at Him as Saviour on the cross merely; but when He comes for us, there will be in the filial sense (as ever in our epistle) “salvation.” Thus he anticipates the removal of the last trace of the first Adam; he looks for our being brought fully, even as to the body, into the likeness of the Second Man, the last Adam. This is salvation in truth. Hence he says, “We look for the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour: who shall change our vile. body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself.” It does not matter how unlike they may be, or how opposed; it does not matter what vessels of shame and misery they may have been now; “He is able to subdue all things unto himself.”

Then, as to our practical every-day expectation, “the Lord is at hand.” And, accordingly, why should one be a prey to care, if this be really so? “Be anxious [or be careful] for nothing; but in everything” — this is the resource — “in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.” Better not make them known to men; it is a dangerous snare. By all means let them be made known unto God. There is something which ought to be made known unto men, namely, the not fighting for your rights. “Let your moderation be made known unto men.” “Let your requests be made known unto God.” It is not that you have failed, perhaps, or broken down in some

particular. Certainly this is painful and humbling. But it is better for you to lose your character, than for Christ through you to lose His; for you are responsible to display the character of Christ. “Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.” “Let your requests,” whatever they may be, “be made known unto God;” and not only so, but “with thanksgiving.” You may be perfectly sure of an answer when you make known your requests: therefore let it be with thanksgiving. And what is the result? “And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus,” — feeling, judgment, everything, guarded and governed by this precious peace of God. The peace which God has in everything He will communicate to keep you in everything; and not only so, but the heart, being free from care, will enter into what pleases Him. And therefore, “whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.” Instead of occupying oneself with all one hears that would cast down, now that we have committed all. that is miserable to God, we can go on delighting in the goodness of God, as well as in its fruits. In God there is ample supply. All we want is, that the eye of faith be a little open; but it is only Christ before the eye that keeps it open.

Then he turns to what had drawn out the epistle. “I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity.” So tender, so delicate is his sense, that he would not spare what was needful if there had been any want of thought, but at the

same time he hastens to make whatever apology love could suggest. “Not,” says he, “that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am,” — this is the great design of the epistle; it was not truth that was made known simply, but experience that was grown into — “I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through him who strengtheneth me.” At the same time he intimates his value for their love, and takes care that his was independence founded on dependence, — an independence of circumstances which finds its strength in simple and absolute dependence upon God.

So the apostle lets them know that he owned their hearty love; “not,” he says, “because I desire a gift.” For no personal end did he mention their grace; “but I desire fruit that may abound to your account.” It was not that he wanted more. We know well that as men have sarcastically said, gratitude is a kind of fishing for fresh favours. There was the very reverse in Paul’s case. As he tells them, fruit that might abound to their account was all that his heart really yearned after. Their gift to him was “an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God.” What a God is ours, so to treat that which, connected with the world, Christ Himself calls “unrighteous mammon!” His goodness can even take this up and thus make it fragrant even to Himself. “But my God shall supply all your need.” How rich and full he was of the goodness of the God he had proved so long and could recommend so well! And there is not now merely His riches of grace, but he looks forward into the

glory where he was going, and can say, “My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”

Thus with salutations of love he closes this most characteristic and cheering even of Paul’s epistles.

1 There is no reasonable doubt that the received text is wrong, followed by the Authorised Version (“of,” instead of “from” the dead). The Alexandrian, Vatican, Sinai, Clermont, and St. Germain Uncials, supported by some ten cursives, very many versions, and the chief Greek and Latin ecclesiastical writers read τὴν ἐξανάσταιν τὴν ἐκ νεκρῶν. Codd. F and G, by manifest error, read τῶν ἐκ, and this seems to have been corrected (or rather corrupted) in order to make sense into τῶν (omitting ἐκ) in K and L and the mass of cursives. But in my opinion the sense, and even the Greek, seems bad; for on the one hand both ἐξανάστασιν and the drift of the argument point to a resurrection of favour and blessedness, not to that in which the unjust must rise to judgment; while on the other hand τῶν νεκρῶν would imply the dead, i.e. all the dead, as a class. Hence I cannot but consider it a surprising error in Griesbach that he edited the received text in this place. Alter and Matthaei followed according to their plan the manuscripts before them; but the latter was too good a scholar not to feel the difference, though he appears to impute it to a corrector for the sake of elegance in his second edition. Long before them, Mill had given his judgment in favour of the more ancient reading; and Wetstein repeated it apparently with approval. Bengel hesitated; but Dr. Wells in this, as in many other instances, showed his sound judgment and quiet

courage in rejecting the common text, and adopting that which has by far the best authorities.

Colossians

The most cursory reader discerns at once that the epistle to the Colossians is the counterpart of that to the Ephesians. They are in nowise the same, but may be viewed each as a supplement to the other. The epistle to the Ephesians develops the body in its rich and varied privileges; the epistle to the Colossians brings before us the Head, and not only this, but the glories of Him who holds that relation to the church. There was no doubt a suitability for each line of truth in the wants of the saints respectively addressed; nor do I think it can be intelligently questioned that the condition of the Ephesian saints was better than that of those at Colosse.

To the former the Holy Ghost could launch out into the fulness of our blessing in Christ. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is our God and Father; and He has blessed with every possible blessing, and in the highest sphere and on the best ground. There was no hindrance to the flow of the Spirit in unfolding the truth. To the Colossians the Holy Ghost has to speak about their state, and along with this to present the truth of Christ as a remedy for it; not so much as the centre of blessedness and joy in the communion of the saints, but as supplying the true and only divine corrective to the efforts of Satan, who would drag them down into tradition on the one hand, and into philosophy on the other, the too common snares of human nature, and the latter more particularly for cultivated and reasoning minds. It is evident, therefore, that to enter on the privileges of the church, the body of Christ, would have in nowise met the evil which the enemy was seeking to

inflict on the Colossians. They needed to be drawn away from every theme and object but Christ Himself. They needed to learn especially the vanity of all that man's mind delights in. They needed to know, I will not say, that Christ suffices only; but that there is such fulness of blessing and glory in Christ as utterly to eclipse and condemn all that flesh would glory in. Hence, too, a main part of the difference between these two epistles. There are many nice shades in detail; but I have referred now to that which is the principal point whence the two lines of truth diverge. It is, however, evident from what has been remarked, that the two letters do in the most remarkable manner correspond to each other; the one presenting the Head, the other the body. Thus they have a closer connection than any others in the New Testament.

We may proceed to trace now the course of the Spirit of God in this deeply instructive epistle. The apostle addresses the Colossian Christians in terms substantially similar to those which are addressed to the saints at Ephesus. Here he gives prominence, it is true, to their being "brethren." Of course the Ephesian saints were so; but here it is expressed. It was not so unmingled an address as where he views them simply as they were in Christ. The expression "brethren," though of course flowing from Christ, brings forward their relationship by grace to each other.

Next we enter on the apostle's thanksgiving. It was not so in the Ephesian epistle, where one of the richest developments of divine truth precedes any particular allusion to the saints in that city. Here he at once addresses himself, after the thanksgiving, to their condition and of course to their need First, as usual, he

owns what they had of God. “We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints, for the hope which is laid up for you in heaven.” It is not, as in the Ephesian epistle, the riches of the glory of God’s inheritance in the saints, but closely resembles a comparatively lower line of things which comes before us in the first epistle of Peter. It need hardly be said that they were equally true, and each in its place most appropriate, but not all equally elevated. The hope laid up for us in heaven supposes a position on the earth. The epistle to the Ephesians views the saint as already blessed by God in heavenly places in Christ. In the one they are waiting to be taken to heaven in an actual sense; in the other they belong already to heaven by virtue of their union with Christ.

Yet it remains true, that “the hope is laid up for you,” as he says, “in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel; which is dome unto you, as it is in all the world: and bringeth forth fruit and groweth, as also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth.” All momentous and blessed, but nevertheless by no means the same fulness of privilege of which he could discourse at once in writing to the Ephesians. “As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellow-servant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ; who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit.” This is the only allusion to the Spirit, as far as I remember, in the epistle. It does not present the Spirit of God as a person down here, though He is a person of course, but rather as characterizing the love. The love was not natural affection; it was love

in the Spirit: but this is very far from the rich place given to His personal presence and action elsewhere.

On the other hand, the epistle to the Ephesians abounds with such allusions. There is not a chapter in it where the Holy Ghost has not a most important and essential place. If you look at the saints individually, He is the seal and the earnest. He is also the power of all their growth in understanding the things of God. Only through Him are the eyes of the heart enlightened to know what God has wrought and secured for the saints. So again by Him alone do all, Jews and Gentiles, draw near to the Father. In the Spirit are both built together for God's habitation. He it is who has now revealed the mystery that was kept hid through ages and generations. He it is who strengthens the inner man to enjoy through Christ all the fulness of God. He only is the constitutive power of the unity that we are exhorted to keep. He it is who works in the various gifts of Christ, welding them together, so that it may be truly Christ through His body. He it is, the Holy Spirit of God, who we are warned not to grieve. He it is who fills the saints, guarding them from the excitement of the flesh, and guiding into that holy joy which issues in thanksgiving and praise. For the Christian and the church must sing their own psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. He it is finally who gives vigour for all the holy conflicts we have to wage with the adversary. Thus it matters not what part of Ephesians is looked at. We have now traversed the varied contents of the epistle, and it is evident that the Holy Ghost forms an integral part of the divine truth unfolded in it from beginning to end.

This makes it so much the more striking, the epistle to the Colossians being the complement of an epistle so full

of the Spirit, that there should be in the former so marked an absence of Him, that He is only referred to once, and only as characterizing the love of the saints. It may be added that what is said of the same truth is in Colossians attributed to Christ, or that life which we have in Christ. To the Ephesians, the Holy Ghost is treated as a divine person acting for the glory of Christ, but this in the saints and in the church. Also the reason seems obvious. When men's eyes are turned away from Christ, the doctrine of the Spirit might add to the danger and delusion, as it has wrought in all ages to puff up men not established in Christ. For inasmuch as the Spirit does act in the church — in man, if the eye be not on Christ and only on Him, the action of the Spirit, whether in the individual or the church, gives importance to both. In such a state dwelling on it would detract from Christ's glory; whereas when Christ alone is the object of believers, they can bear to know and to dwell upon, and to enter into, and understand, the various operations of the Spirit, which turns so much the more to the glory of Christ.

Another reason is this, that the presence of the Spirit of God, both in the individual and in the church, is a most essential part of christian privileges, while, for the reasons already alleged, it was not for the well-being of their souls that it should be unfolded here. The whole point therefore of this epistle is a recall to Christ Himself, because of what had crept in through Satan's wiles. The needed and only remedy was to turn the eyes of the saints from other objects, even their own privileges, and to fix them on Christ. Hence, though the Holy Ghost is really on earth, dwelling in the saint and in the church, yet under such circumstances, to occupy

the mind even with the blessed Spirit, would clearly have interfered with His own great aim in glorifying Jesus. Therefore, as it seems, does He call away undividedly to Christ. When the soul has been in peace weaned from all else, and found all its joy and boast in Christ, it can then hear more freely. Not that there may not be danger even then; save that as long as the eye is on Christ there is none, because what is inconsistent with His name is refused. The Spirit, having secured His glory, is more at liberty as to every other topic.

In the next place, we have the apostle's prayer: "For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and growing by the knowledge of God." It is plain that however blessed this is, still it supposes wants, and a measure of weakness, and this for the ordinary walk of the Christian; that they might "walk worthy of the Lord," says he. He could not say in this epistle "worthy of your vocation," as in writing to the Ephesians. He does not even say worthy of Christ, but "of the Lord." That is, he brings in His authority, for there can be no mistake for the Christian more profound than to suppose that the presentation of the Lord as such is the more elevated for the saint. It is most true in its place; but it addresses rather the sense of responsibility than the communion of affections of the children of God. If a man does not own Him to be Lord, he is nothing whatever; but one may bow to Him as Lord, and yet be painfully insensible to the higher glory of His person, and to the depths of His grace. Alas! multitudes have so failed, nor is anything

more common at this present moment, even as it was always so.

The Spirit of God, as in the Acts of the Apostles, began with the simplest confession of Christ's name. This is habitually His way. That which brought in thousands on the day of Pentecost and afterwards was the preaching and the faith that Jesus was made Lord. But not a few of those that were baptized from early as in later days turned out untrue to the glory of Christ. We can readily understand that the Spirit did not bring out the fulness of the glory of Christ then, but as it was needed. Nor is it denied that some souls enjoyed a remarkable maturity of intelligence, so that from the beginning they saw, believed, and preached Jesus in a deeper glory than His Lordship. There is no one that rises before our mind's eye more readily and strikingly in this respect than the apostle Paul himself. But the apostle was singular in this; for even those who did know that Christ was the Son of the living God, in the highest and eternal sense, seemed but little to have preached it, at any rate in their earlier testimony. As the withering evils of Satan came in, the value of that which their hearts clung to formed an increasing part of their testimony, until at last the full, undiminished, and even brightening truth of His divine glory was brought out in all its fulness. True, and known to some from the first, the Spirit would brook no hiding of it in order to meet the daring of men and the subtilty of the enemy, who were taking advantage of the lower glory of Christ, so as to deny all that was higher — His deity and eternal Sonship.

It appears to me then that, in writing to the Colossians, the terms employed by the Spirit of God afford clear evidence that their souls at Colosse rested on by no

means the same firm and lofty ground as that which the epistle to the Ephesians contemplates; and the apostle consequently could not appeal in their case to the same mighty motives which at once rose, by the Holy Ghost's inspiration, in the apostle's heart in writing the kindred epistle. "That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing," urges he, "being fruitful in every good work." For Christianity is not a mere thing of doing this or not doing that; it is a growth, because it is of the Spirit in life and power. If, as men have fabled, spiritual beings sprang forth ready armed, as well as in fulness of wisdom and vigour, it would not be Christianity. Babes, young men, and fathers: such is in grace as in nature the divine way with us. God has been pleased to call the church a body; and so in truth it is. As also, looked at individually, the Christian is a son of God, so there should be a growth up to Christ in all things. There is scarce anything more offensive than a child who looks, talks, and acts the old man. Every right-minded person revolts from it as a lusus naturae, and a piece of affectation or acting. So, in spiritual things, the mere taking up and repeating thoughts, deep and high but unproved experience, cannot be the fruit of the Spirit of God's teaching. Nothing more lovely (whether spiritually, or even in its place naturally) than that each should be just what God has made him, only thenceforth diligently seeking increase of inward power by the operation of God's grace. There is then a healthful progress in the Lord. While there is no doubt that which requires to be cut down or pruned on every side, there is a gradual development of divine life in the saints of God; and this, as being through the Spirit's use of the truth, by no means can be all at once. In no case indeed is it really so.

Thus it is then that for these saints the desire is that they should steadily advance. In material science it is not so, in schools of doctrine it is not so: there is something altogether circumscribed, in known limits, and definite enough to satisfy the mind of man. All that is to be got in certain provinces may be acquired after no long study. The Spirit of God applies the truth of Jesus Christ, which resists all such thoughts as human. The Colossians from their dabbling with tradition and philosophy were in danger on this side. So, says he, "being fruitful in every good work, and growing (not exactly in, but) by the knowledge of God." But still there is growth supposed. How could it be otherwise if by the knowledge of God? He is the only divine source, sphere, and means of real growth for the soul. But there is far more than growth in knowledge, or even by the knowledge of God. There is not only the contemplative side but the active, and this makes the saint truly passive; for if we are strengthened, it is mainly not to do, but to endure in a world which knows not Christ. Thus we are "strengthened with all might, according to the power of his glory, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness."

How good as well as vast the mind of the Spirit of God! Who could ever have combined with God's glory such a place for man too? No man, I will not say anticipated, but approached in thought such a portion for souls on earth. See how and for what the apostle gives thanks again. Although there were difficulties and hindrances, how much, he feels, there is for which to praise our God and Father: "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet" (and observe well, it is not merely for the certainty that He will, but in the peaceful assurance that

He has made us meet) “to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.” Human words fail to add to such a thought. His grace has qualified us now for His glory: such, as far as this goes, is the clear meaning of the Holy Ghost. He looks not at some advanced souls at Colosse, but at all the saints there. There were evils to be corrected, dancers to be warned against; but if he thinks of that which the Father has in view for them, and of them in view of His glory, less he could not say, neither could he say more. The Father has made them meet already for the inheritance of the saints in light; and this, too, fully taking into account the awful state of the heathen world, and their past personal wickedness when drawn to God in the name of the Lord Jesus, “who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love: in whom we have redemption [through his blood, is added to the Ephesians] even the forgiveness of sins.”

At this point we come to one of the main and distinctive objects of the epistle. Who and what is the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption? Little did the Colossians conceive that their endeavour to add to the truth of the gospel was in reality to detract from His glory. Their desire, we may be sure, was as well meant as any mistake can be. Like others, they may have reasoned that if Christianity had done such great things in the hands of fishermen, tax-gatherers, or the like (who could be of no great account in the world’s scale, or in the schools of men), what might it not accomplish if it were but arrayed in the wisdom of philosophy; if it possessed the ornaments of literature and science; if it went forth on its career of victory with that which

attracts the feelings and commands the intellect among humanity? The Holy Spirit brings in that which completely judges and sets aside all such speculations. No one, no thing, can add to Christ's power, lustre, or value in any one respect. If you knew Him better, you would feel it yourself. Infinitely vainer is the thought for any man to impart fresh worth to Christ, than for David to have met Goliath in Saul's armour. Indeed, the trappings which men so cry up are a positive hindrance to Christ; and in the precise measure in which they are prized, they reduce their votaries to slavery, and the faith they profess to zero. Judge these same things, and they may become of some account to the glory of God. But treat them as means desirable to attract the world, or as objects to be valued for their own sake by Christians, and as they are intruders, so they will prove to be aliens, and enemies of the glory of Christ.

Christ is the image of God, in fulness and perfection; He only showed out the invisible God. Tradition never manifested the true God. Philosophy, on the contrary, made matters worse, as indeed did the resources of human religion. Christ, and Christ alone, has truly represented God to man, as He alone was perfect man before God. And as He is the image of the invisible God, so is He the first-born of all creation; for the Holy Spirit here brings together a kind of antithesis as to Christ in relation to God, and in relation to the creature. Of God He is the image, not exactly in an exclusive, but assuredly in the only adequate sense. Others may be — as the Christian is — we know, and man even in a certain and real way as a creature. But, as truly and fully making God known, there is none but Christ. He is the truth; He is the expression of what God is. This is the

fountain of all true knowledge, and so Christ is the truth as to everything and every one. In this phrase, however, all that the apostle asserts is in relation to the invisible God. Utterly impossible that man should see Him who is invisible: he needed one to bring God down to him, and display His word and ways, and Christ is that one image of the invisible God.

Besides, Christ is the first-born of all creation. Not, of course, that He was the earliest on the earth like Adam. In point of time the world had grown comparatively old before Jesus appeared. How then could He that came and was seen in the midst of men four thousand years after Adam was made, — how could He be in any sense first-born of all creation? We have not to imagine a reason, for the Spirit of God has given His own, and this will be found to set aside all others. Every thought of man is vain in the presence of His wisdom. Jesus is the first-born, no matter when He appeared. Had it been possible, consistently with other plans of God (which it was not), for Him to be the last (in point of fact) born here below, He had been the first-born all the same. Impossible that He could be aught but the first-born. And why? Because He was the greatest, the best, the holiest? For none of these reasons, though He was all this, and more. Still less was it because of anything conferred on Him, whether of power or office. On no such ground, nor on all together, was He the firstborn. The word of God assigns one greater than all, which is the true and only key to the person and work of Christ: “For by him were all things created.”

Oh, what majesty, as well as adaptation to need, in the truth of God! It has only to be heard by a heart touched by grace to carry conviction. But alas! there is in fallen

man, as such, a will that hates the truth, and despises the grace of God. Does it not prove both by being jealous of the glory of Christ? It remains, however, that He is the first-born of all creation, because he is the Creator of all things, above or below, material or spiritual: “For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible.” It is not a question of the lower ranks of creation only, but takes in the highest — “whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him.” Do you say, Yes, but why not God create by the highest as an instrument? There is more said even here to maintain the full glory of Christ. All things were created by Him, no doubt; but they were created for Him also — not by Him for the Father. They were created by Him, and for Him, equally with the Father. And as if this were not enough, we are farther told that He is before all things, and by (ἐν) Him all things consist. He is the upholder of all creation, so that the very universe of God subsists in virtue of Him. Without Him all sinks at once into dissolution.

Nor is this all. He is the Head of the body — one of the chief topics of this epistle. Such is His relationship to the church. And how is He the Head of the body? Not because He is the first-born of all creation simply, nay, nor because He is the creator of all. Neither His headship of all creation as the Heir of all things, nor His creatorial rights, would in themselves give a sufficient title to be the Head of the body. In it is another kind of blessedness and glory; for it a new order of existence appears; and not least of all beings we ought to understand this difference. Who can be so deeply concerned as the Christian? for if we have any part or

lot in Christ, if we belong to the church of God, we ought clearly to know the character of our own blessing. Christ it is who determines this, as all else. But the distinctive character is that He is “the beginning, the firstborn from the dead” — not merely the firstborn of, but the first-born out of. He is the first-born from among the dead, as well as the Head and firstborn Heir of all subsisting creation. Thus it is that He rises into a new condition, leaving behind that which had fallen under vanity or death through its sinning chief, the first Adam. He has annulled the power of him that had the power of death — that word so terrible for the heart of man, and most surely foreign to the mind and heart of our God and Father, but a stern necessity that came in through rebellion.

Where sin brought man, grace brought Christ. And the glory of His person enabled Him in grace and obedience to go down into depths never before fathomed; and out of the whole scene, not of a rejecting guilty world only, but of the realm of death (and such a death!) Jesus emerged. And now He is risen from the dead, the beginning of a new order of existence altogether; and as He is the Head, so the church is His body — founded, indeed, on Christ, but on Him dead and risen. As such — not born merely, but risen again from the dead — He is the beginning. All question, therefore, of what existed before His death and resurrection is at once excluded. He who believes this would understand that it was still an unrevealed secret during Old Testament times. The dealings of God were not only not on the principle of a body on earth, united to a glorified Head, once dead and risen, but incompatible with such a state of things. Thus whoever by faith receives simply the intimation of this

verse, as of a crowd of other scriptures, has all this very needless controversy closed for him; he knows and is sure by divine teaching that Jesus was not merely the highest of that creation which had been already, but the beginning of a new thing and its Head. This He was pleased to begin in resurrection from the dead. It was in no wise the old thing, elevated by the glory of Him who had deigned to descend into it, but a new state of things, of which the risen Christ is both the Head and beginning; as it is said, “Who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the pre-eminence.”

As this gives us the new estate, and position, and relation in which stands the glorious person of the Lord Jesus, so next we have a view of His work suitably to the object of the epistle: “For all the fulness was pleased in him to dwell.” I take the liberty of rendering the verse correctly, as is well known to most of my brethren now present. There are few here, it is to be supposed, who are not already aware that to put in “the Father” (as is done in the Authorized Version in italics) is to take away from the Son without warrant and dangerously. It was not the Father, but the Godhead. It pleased the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. So the fulness of the Godhead was pleased to dwell in Him. Yet even this did not reconcile man to God, but the very reverse rather; it proved that man was irreconcilable as far as he was concerned.

If a divine person was pleased to appear here below, and to bring in unimagined goodness and power, dealing with every need and every one with whom He came in contact, and who sought or even accepted His gracious action, it might have been supposed that man could not

resist such unhesitating love and unmeasured power. But the actual result demonstrated beyond doubt that never before Was witnessed such hearty, universal, and causeless hatred as against Jesus the Son of God. There was, there could be, no lack of the attractiveness of love and power in Him who went about doing good; yet miserable hearts did not turn to Him, save where the grace of God the Father drew them to the only adequate expression of Himself. None could pretend that He had ever refused a single soul; none could say that they had gone empty away. Their motives were far from good sometimes. They might come for what they could get; but at length they would not have Him or anything He had to give on any terms. They had done with Him, and, as far as will was concerned, they had done with Him for ever. The cross terminated the awful struggle and heartbreaking sight of man thus manifestly led captive of the devil at his will.

And what was to be done? Ah! this was the serious question, and this it was which God was waiting to solve. He meant to reconcile man spite of himself; He would prove His own love to be the conqueror of his hatred. Let man be unmendable, let his enmity be beyond all thought, God, in the calmness of His own wisdom, and in the strength of His unwearied grace, accomplishes His purpose of redeeming love at the very moment when man consummates his wickedness. It was at the cross of Christ And so it was that, when all seemed to fail, all was won. The fulness of the Godhead dwelt in Jesus; but man would have none of it, and proved it above all in the cross. Yet the cross was the precise and only place where the foundation that cannot be moved was laid. As he says, “having made peace through the blood of his

cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether it be things on earth or things in heaven."

First the apostle brings in all things as a whole, the universal creaturehood, earthly and heavenly; thus giving us an adequate notion of the perfect triumph of God at the time when it seemed as if Satan had completely succeeded through man against the counsels of God. But is this all? Is it merely that all the universe has thus, in the cross of the Lord Jesus, a foundation laid for their reconciliation? There is a present witness of the victory of Jesus. The universe goes on as before, the lower creation at least subject to vanity; but God (and it is like Him) hastens to use His victory, though not yet as far as outward things are concerned. This remains for the day of Christ's glory, and will fill a most important part in the purposes of God. But God has even now a far greater purpose at heart. What could be more vast than the reconciliation of all things in heaven and earth? The veriest victims of Satan, the open enemies of Christ, the fiercest — powerless let them be, but the fiercest in their will of opposition against God — are precisely those that God has already reconciled to Himself; and this where Satan had but just appeared to conquer in leading them to crucify Christ., In that field of blood where His ancient people joined the idolatrous Gentiles, and indeed incited them to plant the cross for their own Messiah — there it is that God's grace has established a righteous deliverance for such as He has reconciled.

Satan is allowed apparently to go on as if he had won the final victory; but God brings the truth of what He has done into the heart where Satan had most of all deceived before. "You that were sometime alienated and

enemies in your mind," says he (for the full truth is brought before them as to their condition), "enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death." While He lived, this work was wholly unaccomplished. The incarnation, blessed and precious as it is, never reconciled man to God. It presented to us the person of Him who was to reconcile; in itself it was thus a most important step towards the reconciliation; but, in fact, there was no reconciliation yet for a solitary soul: the cross of Christ wrought it all. "In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreproveable in his sight." What a change!

But he adds: "If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled;" and we must not weaken this. It is not at all, "since ye continue." Scripture must not be sacrificed rudely to our seeming comfort. Besides, when men, thus slur over its true force, and would extract consolation where God intends warning, it is a proof not of firm but of weak faith. For assuredly God is not trusted where there is so much as a desire thus to alter or turn aside a single word, for one's own convenience or any pretext whatsoever. Yet there is nothing more common; it is precisely what men, and sometimes Christians to no small extent, are doing now very generally; and what have they gained by it?

A father's stroke that chastises the erring is a mercy. To receive it as the faithful blow of our best friend in His own word may not seem the readiest way toward comfort; but the comfort that we get in the end from Him who thus smites is both real and stable, and rich in profit to the soul. But the apostle meant not so much to administer consolation to these Colossian saints as to

caution them. They needed rather reproof, and they are warned that the course on which they were entering was slippery and perilous. The pursuit of tradition or of philosophy, as a graft on Christianity, continually tends to bring in that which poisons the springs of truth, and grace is always annulled by either. Therefore he might well press, “If ye continue.”

All the blessedness that Christ has procured is for those that believe; but this of course supposes that they hold Him fast. Hence it runs: “If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven.” The language does not in the smallest degree insinuate that there is any uncertainty for a believer. We must never allow one truth to be either shut out or enfeebled by another; but then we need also to remember that there are, and have always been, those that, having begun seemingly well, have ended by becoming the enemies of Christ and the church. Even antichrists are not from without in their origin. “They went out from us, because they were not of us.” There are no enemies so deadly as those who, having received enough truth to over-balance them and to abuse to their own self-exaltation, turn again, and would rend the church of God, wherein they learnt all that gives them power to be specially mischievous. The apostle could not but dread the slide on which the Colossians found themselves; and the more so as they themselves had no fears, but on the contrary thought highly of that which had attracted their minds. If there was danger, certainly it was love to admonish them; and in this spirit he therefore says, “If ye continue in the faith, grounded and settled.”

As for the apostle he lays before them another point. He was a minister both of the gospel, and, as is said a little later, of the church — two very different spheres, seldom united in the same individual. He was minister of both, and of the latter, it would seem, in a peculiar and weighty sense: not merely as ministering to the church, but as the instrument that God has employed to make known to us its character and calling more than any other. Indeed we may say that Paul presents the gospel as the display of divine righteousness beyond all, while he alone develops in his epistles the mystery of Christ and the church. This may seem a strong statement, and I wonder at none feeling surprised, till they have rigidly examined it with the scriptures; for probably no one could believe it unless he had proved its truth.

But I must repeat that there is not a single apostle who so much as speaks of being justified by faith, except the apostle of the Gentiles. James notoriously presents what many think hard — in my judgment quite reconcilable, equally inspired of God, and most important for man, but not the same thing, nor for the same end. It is somewhat startling at first sight to realize such a fact, but if it be a fact — as I unqualifiedly assert — is it not of great moment to understand it? Neither James nor Peter, neither John nor Jude, treat of justification before God by faith in Jesus. Who has done so? Paul only. I am very far from insinuating that Peter, James, John, Jude, and all the rest, did not preach justification by faith. But it was given to Paul, and to Paul alone, to communicate this great truth in his epistles; and he alone has used the well-known phrase. None of the others has touched on it — not one. They have undoubtedly taught that which is consistent with it and even supposes it. They have

pressed other truth, which is incompatible with anything else but justification by faith; he asserts it often and openly.

Thus the most perfect harmony reigns between all the apostles; but Paul was emphatically minister of the gospel, and minister of the church. Not only did he preach the one and teach the other (which the others no doubt did too), but he has committed to inspired writings the gospel as none other did; and he has, alone of all, brought out the church in the fullest way. He might well, therefore, say (and what a serious occasion for the Colossians that it was needful to say it as an admonition!) he was minister of both. Yet there were men not wanting then that denied him to be an apostle. The most honoured servants of God invariably stir up the keenest opposition from man. But woe to such iniquitous and ungrateful adversaries! and none the less because they name the name of the Lord. Some of old were not Jews nor Gentiles, but baptized men and women. It was they that yielded to these feelings of hostility. They might detract little or nothing as to his personal qualities; they might even affect to condescend and patronize. But that for which they were opposed to him was the very thing for which, most of all, they should have owned their debt under God. Satan knew well what he sought in alienating many a Christian from this blessed man of God, and in carping at his ministry, and the testimony he was given to bear.

The apostle, however, speaks of his service in these two respects: the gospel, which is universal in its aspect to every creature under heaven; and the church, which is a special and chosen body. As for the gospel, it is not a question whether every creature hears, but such is the

sphere; and doubtless if the apostle could have preached to every individual in the world, he would have gladly done it. At any rate this was his mission. There was no class under ban, nor was any individual refused the beams of its heavenly light. In its own nature like the rays from the sky, it was the sun not for one part of the world alone, but for every quarter. So to the church he says, “I rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body’s sake, which is the church: whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation [or stewardship] of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God.”

Space was left: a revelation was yet lacking. God had given the law; He had embodied His past ways in an inspired history of His people; He had given prophets to proclaim what was future. But for all that a gap was left on which, when filled up, types might more or less bear, wholly different from the history, and not more answering to the prophecy. How was it then to be filled up? Our Lord Himself marked the break in His reading of Isaiah in the synagogue at Nazareth. See the same thing in the famous seventy weeks of Daniel. You come to that space from time to time in the prophets. Paul was the one that God raised up to fill the gap. Not that others did not supplement this or that. As we know, the church is built on the foundation, not of Paul, but of His holy apostles and prophets. Mark and Luke, although they were not apostles, were surely prophets. The foundation of the apostles and prophets took in the New Testament writers in general. The apostle brings in his own special part. It was neither a gospel contributed, nor a sublime series of prophetic visions. His function

was to fill up the word of God, — “even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

Hence we learn, it may be seasonable to remark, that the shape given to the mystery here is not that Christ is exalted in heaven, and that the church, by the Holy Ghost sent down thence, is united to Him the Head there. This is the doctrine of the epistle to the Ephesians. Here we see the other side — Christ in or among you Gentiles, “the hope of glory.” In the epistle to the Colossians, glory is always that which we are waiting for. There is no such thing here as our sitting in heavenly places. It is heavenly glory that is waited for, but only in hope. Christ was now in these Gentiles who believed the hope of a heavenly glory in prospect for them. It is another aspect of the mystery, but as true in its place as what we find in Ephesians; not so high, but in itself precious, and not less differing from the expectation raised by the Old Testament. What we read of there is that, when Christ had come, He forthwith sets up His kingdom, in which the Jews are promised to be His specially favoured subjects. They are not indeed to reign with Him: this was by no man and at no time promised to them. But they are to be the people in whose midst the glory of Jehovah will take up its abode. Here the apostle speaks of another system altogether: Christ come, but the glory not yet apparent, but only coming. Meanwhile, instead of the Jews enjoying glory along with Christ in their midst, rejected by the Jews, Christ is in the Gentiles; and they who receive His name

are waiting for heavenly glory with Christ. It is a quite different state of things from what could be gathered from the Old Testament. Not a prophet, not even the smallest shred of any prophecy, reveals such a truth. It was an absolutely new truth, in contrast with the ancient and millennial order, yet altogether different from what is found in the Ephesians; nevertheless they both constitute substantive parts of the mystery.

Thus the mystery includes, first, Christ as Head above, we though here being united by the Holy Ghost to Him glorified. Secondly, Christ, meanwhile, is in or among the Gentiles here below. Were He among the Jews, it would be the introduction of the promised earthly glory. But it is not so. The Jews are enemies, and unbelieving; the Gentiles are specially the object of God's present ways. Having Christ among them, heavenly glory is their hope, even to share with Him that glory. This, then, shows Christ, in a certain sense, in the Gentiles here below; as, in the Ephesians, Christ is seen above and we in Him. There Jew or Gentile is all alike, and those who believe the gospel are by the Spirit united to Him as His body, Here the Gentiles in particular have Him in them, the pledge of their participating in His heavenly glory by and by. And as this was so blessed and novel a truth, the apostle states his own earnestness about it — "whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ."

There is no slovenliness here; no careless assumption that, because you are members of Christ's body, all else must be right, and may be left; for he who knew best the faithful love of Christ is none the less urgent individually with "every man." Hence his unflagging expenditure of

labour. Hence the spending of heart and thought that “every man” might be thus built up in the truth, and especially the heavenly truth of Christ, which was entrusted to his stewardship and ministry, “warning, every man and teaching every man, that we may present every man full grown in Christ.” This is the meaning of “perfect.” There is no reference to a question of evil within, but of arriving at maturity in Christ, instead of babes, resting merely in forgiveness. “Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily.” Thus the striving of the apostle was by no means only in the way of evangelizing. There was much more than this. It influenced him deeply and habitually in all the anxieties of love.

“For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh; that their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; in whom [or rather which] are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” The mystery is now revealed, even the relation of Christ and the church; the actual testimony of God’s counsels in Christ to those who compose His body. And as a rule, it is always what God is actually doing that is the urgently needed truth. Special wants may spring up and claim attention at particular moments; but since Christ was set on high, this is the truth for the saints, and for a very simple and sufficient reason — it is what God the Father designed for the day of salvation. It is of this Christ is the objective centre and Head. In this we have what the Spirit occupies Himself with as sent down from heaven.

Satan being invariably the personal and persistent antagonist of Christ, whatever is God's purpose in Christ becomes peculiarly the object of Satan's hatred and hostility.

Hence, as the apostle Paul was one on whom God set particular honour in developing the mystery, and communicating it in inspired words also, so he was more than any other called to suffer the consequences in this present evil world. His labours were not merely indefatigable, but accompanied by the sorest trial and anguish of spirit, as well as continual detraction with public hatred and persecution. Everything which could break the heart of a holy man from day to day he passed through. Yet, carrying out his ministry with continual tears, he looked before men as one whom none of these things moved. Nevertheless, he lets the Colossians know what he went through for their sakes and other saints who were before his heart, even though unknown in the flesh. "And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words. For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ." There was much that was blessed at Colosse; and the apostle loves to give full credit for it. "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving." In fact, this was their fault: they were not content with Christ and Him only. Not appreciating His glory and fulness, they did not see that the secret of true wisdom and blessing, is in going on to know more of Christ than is already possessed. Such is the only sure root of all blessing, and in this above all is real faith and

spirituality shown. Is the heart satisfied with Him? Do we feel and know that we can add nothing to Him? Is it all we want to draw from Him?

Then he brings in, accordingly, his first solemn caution. “Beware,” says he, “lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.” Here we have the mingling, I apprehend, of natural man’s philosophy, and religions man’s tradition. These things at first sight appear far apart, but they are not so in result. They may seem to be far as the poles asunder; but in point of fact, there is nothing that more shows an energetic spirit of evil at work in the world than the way in which he marshals and combines these two armies, that outwardly look enemies to each other. Have you not proved it? Somehow or another, freethinkers and superstitious men coalesce in reality. There is no feature of the present day more remarkable than the success with which Satan is massing as it were, his forces, bringing together at the very same point, where they are wanted, these two parties; that is to say, the heavier arms of human tradition, and the lighter ones of man’s philosophy. This is the reason why at each grave juncture you will find that ritualists will as a rule support rationalists, and rationalists will try to extenuate the proceedings of ritualists. They may wear the semblance of being altogether hostile to each other: they are both of them only hostile to the truth. They both are thoroughly and essentially ignorant of Christ; but the Christ that they ignore, for religion or reason, is that blessed Person not so much as He who here lived and laboured, as especially dead and risen. They use freely

His name; they in word and bodily exercise do Him no small reverence; but without faith all is vain.

Beloved, the Christ that we know gives no glory to the first man; neither does He put honour on ordinances or human priesthood. How He would have been exalted, if He had consented to shed the halo of His own glory on the race as such! But our Lord is the Christ who condemned the first man, Fallen humanity by Him was detected and judged root and branch. This cannot be forgiven by all who cleave to the first man, on the side either of ordinances or of philosophy. How can man brook that lie, and the world that he has built up since he lost Eden, should be made nothing of? it is impossible to look for it from human nature. He who probed it all cannot be endured. We must and do judge all things as they are. This is truth about them; and He who is the truth told it out. The cross of Christ is the death-knell of the world in all its pretensions before God. His grave is man's grave. Brethren, the Christ that God has made known to us is the Christ that man scorned, cast out and crucified. But He is the Christ that God raised from the dead and seated in heavenly glory. And this is the truth that is so offensive to flesh in every form. Never will it be received, either by the world's religion, or by its philosophy.

How vain and perilous — at least for themselves — was the effort of the Colossians! They were endeavouring to strike an alliance between Christ and the world. They had really themselves slipped away in heart: no such hope had found favour otherwise. It was not wonderful that he said in Colossians 1, "If ye continue in the faith rooted and grounded, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel." They had been moving away, not

perhaps so rapidly as the Galatians; in faith they had been infirm. And now the apostle would recall them: “Walk in him, rooted and built up in him.” Let them beware of philosophy and tradition; “for in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.” It is not to be found in tradition, still less in philosophy.

Philosophy is an idol of man or nature, a blind substitute for the knowledge of God. It is false and ruinous, whether it leaves Him out or brings Him in — whether it denies the true God, or makes everything a sham god. Atheism and Pantheism are the ultimate results of philosophy, and both in reality set. God aside. As to tradition, it invariably puts man as far off from God as it can, and calls this religion. The truth in Christ is not merely that God came down to man in love, but that man, the believer in Christ, is now dead and risen in Him. Is Christ in the glorious presence of God? The Christian is one with Him. Accordingly, he brings in now for this object the twofold truth: “for in him,” says he, “dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him.” How blessed! If He is, the fulness, you are made full in Him, “which is the head of all principality and power.” Away, then, with every pretence to add to Him; away with all possible expedients to give lustre to Christ! “He is the head of all principality and power: in whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the flesh [for so it runs] by the circumcision of Christ: buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen.”

Constructively, to my mind, this points to the great sign of His death. It is in baptism rather than in Him. Hence it seems to me not in whom, but rightly “wherein also ye

are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God." Thus baptism is not limited to signifying death. Yet it is never the sign either of life or of bloodshedding, but of a state of privilege beyond. When the apostle was told to wash away his sins, calling on the name of the Lord, blood does not seem to have been meant, but water. For this is the sign not so much of what would expiate as cleanse. But the cleansing as well as expiation is by the death of Christ out of whose side flowed both.

Here the doctrine carries one a little farther than either Romans 6 or 1 Peter 3. There is death and burial of all we were; but there is here at least resurrection with Christ — death and resurrection. In Romans the emphatic point is simply death, because the argument of the apostle in chapter 6 does not admit of going beyond the truth that the baptized believer is alive from the dead — not exactly risen, but alive unto God. In Colossians the argument requires that our resurrection with Christ, as well as death and burial, should be distinctly stated. And so it is. "Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who has raised him from the dead."

He applies the truth to the case in hand after this: "And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven us all trespasses; blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us." He does not say "against you," because, in truth, the Colossian saints had never been under the law and its ordinances; they had been Gentiles. But whereas he said, "that you, being dead," were now thus raised, so he says, "blotting it out against us;" for all that we, poor Jews, could boast — the

ordinances — were against us instead of being for us, and they are gone now.

“Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; and having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it. Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.” Thus is seen first of all, in virtue of the dead and risen Christ in whom they believed, that they were quickened and all their trespasses forgiven, — two things here strikingly united together. The very life that I have in Christ is a witness that my sins are forgiven. It is not merely the life of a Christ that lived in this world, but the life of Him that was lifted up on the cross, and bore my sins there. But now the work is done, and the atonement is accepted before that new life is given me in Him risen.

One cannot therefore be quickened together with Christ without having one’s trespasses, yea, all (for if not all, none) forgiven. The guilt which a broken law charged on the conscience is gone by an act infinitely more glorifying to God than the personal righteousnesses of all the men that ever lived, not to speak of the conscious pardon which is also secured to those who possess it. Had you to do with the law? The mighty work of Christ has entirely delivered from it. The sentence is blotted out; the power of Satan is spoiled openly; Christ risen triumphs over all. There is no new means of grace; there is no development, still less supplement to Christ. The one and same Christ it is who has settled everything.

As to the Jewish rites and feasts that some were endeavouring to re-impose, take for an instance the Sabbath, which is the stronger, because it was from the beginning of the first man, yet unfallen, and of course long before the Jewish people. “Let no man judge you” is the exhortation. They were shadows. Have you not got the substance? Why be found running from the substance after the shadow? “Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding the head.” Thus the fact of prying into that which God has not revealed, and man has not seen, — such as speculations about angels, — is the patent proof that the heart is not really satisfied with its portion. This is not holding the Head. He who keeps fast Christ thus, in conscious union with Him, could never be craving after angels. In Christ the saint is above them, and leaves them to God without anxiety or envy. We know well that God is making a good use of them, and that, in point of fact, if we meddle, it can only be to loss and confusion. “And not holding the head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.”

Next, the doctrine is applied still more definitely. “Wherefore,” says he, “if ye be dead with Christ “which is one grand part of his subject — “if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living [or alive] in the world, are ye subject to ordinances?” Of course it is not at all being dead to what a man had as a natural life in the world. Such is not the Christian life, which is really the life of Him that died

and rose again. He died — this is the point here — and therefore I am dead too. But if I am dead, what have I to do with those things that only affect men as long as they live? Certainly they have no relation to me now risen with Him. A man alive in the world is under these ordinances, and owns them. Such was the position of Israel. They were a people living in the world, and the whole system of Judaism supposed and dealt with a people in the world.

In moral truth, as well as literal fact, the veil, shadowing their state, was not yet lifted up from the unseen world. But the first characteristic result of Christ's work on the cross was the veil that shut up the holiest rent from top to bottom. Thus it begins, not with the incarnation (for sin was not yet judged, nor man brought to God), but with the cross, with redemption. There was no Christianity — i.e., no deliverance of man and setting him in the Second Man — before Christ became first-born from among the dead. Clearly, therefore, the whole character of the new system depends, first, on the Deity of the incarnate Saviour, and, secondly, on the glorious truths of His atoning death and of His resurrection. Thus we should hold Him fast, not only in other respects, but in this special relation of "Head."

So he says, "If ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances?" Then he gives a specimen of these: "Touch not; taste not; handle not." But this is not the character of Christianity, but of Judaism. It pertains to a life in this world to say, "Touch not; taste not; handle not." It is all well for a Jew, because he has got his abstinences and his restrictions. But this is not at all the divine way of dealing with the

Christian. We are not Jews; we have our place in Christ dead and risen, or are nothing. Such prohibitory commands had their day; but the time of reformation is come. It is a question now of truth and holiness in the Spirit — of Christ, in short. These restrictions dealt with meats and drinks, and such like things, which perish in the using. The Christian never stood on any such fleshly ground. He is dead with Christ; consequently he has passed out of the sphere to which such dealings apply. "Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will-worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh." Proud, fallen nature is satisfied even by these efforts to put down the body; whereas God would have the body to have a certain honour in its own place, and that of the Christian is the temple of the Holy Ghost. Thus in every way the ritualistic system is false, and a traitor to Him who died on the cross.

But there is far more than that: "If ye then be risen with Christ." Here we enter not merely what clears one out from the rudiments of the world, but what introduces us into the new thing. We need the positive as well as the negative; and as we have just had the latter, so the former now comes before us. Instead of letting the reins free now to run in the race of improving the world and bettering society, or any of the objects that occupy men as such, the saints of God should abstain altogether. Many who really love the Lord are in this quite misguided as to the duty of the Christian here below. "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God." And as if that were not precise enough, it is added, "Set your affection on things above." It is rather "your mind;"

for here, however important the state of the heart, it is a question simply of the whole bent and judgment. “Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.” It is not merely bringing the heavenly into them, so to speak; and decidedly not of joining the two things together. The Colossians, like others, would have liked this well enough; it is just what they were about, and the very thing that the apostle is here correcting. The apostle will not sanction such an amalgam, but refuses it; and we must remember that in these exhortations it was the Lord acting by the Spirit in His servant. “Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth; for ye are dead.”

Note well again that it is not here man striving to become dead, which is a notion unknown to the revelation of God, new or old. In fact there was not even the thought of striving to be dead before the death of Christ came; and when He died, the Spirit in due time revealed not alone that He died for us, but that we died in Him. Thus no room was left for striving to die. The Christian owns his death in his very baptism; and what is wanted is not effort to attain, but the Spirit’s power in acting on the truth by faith. This it is that always settles the difficulties in the great conflict that rages now as ever, and more than ever, between human religion and the truth of God. Since men have a certain knowledge of Christ’s death, they are striving to die. It is the law in a new and impossible shape. That is the meaning of all that seems good in the world’s piety. It is an effort to become dead to what is wrong; to cultivate what is felt to be glorifying to God; to avoid what is contrary to His will, and injurious to the soul. But does this so much as resemble the provision of grace for the Christian? Is this

the truth? Must we not first and foremost be subject to the truth? If I have Christ as a Saviour at all, instead of struggling to die in the sense meant, I am called to believe that I am already dead.

It is remarkable that the two well-known and standing institutions — I will not call them ordinances — of Christianity, baptism and the Lord's supper, are the plain and certain expression of death in grace. When a person is baptized, this is the meaning of the act; nor has it any true force, but is an illusion, otherwise. For the baptized soul confesses that the grace of God gives death to sin in Him who died and rose again. The Jew looked only for a mighty King Messiah; the Christian is baptized into the death of Him who suffered on the cross, and finds not alone his sins forgiven, but sin, the flesh, condemned, and himself now viewed of God as dead to all; for nothing less is set forth in baptism. Thus it is from the first the expression of a most needed truth, which remains the comfort of grace throughout the whole Christian career, and is therefore never repeated. Again, on each Lord's day, when we are gathered together to Christ's name, what is before us according to God's word and will? A substantially similar blessing is stamped on the table of the Lord. When the Christians unite in breaking bread, they show forth the death of Christ till He come. It is not a mere duty that has to be done; but the heart is in presence of the objective fact that He died for us, His body. As believing in Him, this is our place. Such is the basis of the liberty wherewith Christ has set us free. It is a liberty founded on death, displayed in resurrection, known in the Spirit. Having this in the soul, one is entitled to have it in the body also at His coming. Besides, we are one bread, one body.

Hence we find the glorious future display referred to here: “When Christ, who is our life, shall appear;” for we have both “ye are dead,” and “your life is hid with Christ in God.” We may be content to be hidden while He is hidden; but He is not always to be out of sight. The Christian will have all the desires of the new man gratified. Now he may have the blessed enjoyment of communion with Christ, but it is a Christ crucified on earth. His glory is in heaven. A man seeks to shine in the world now; it is a heedless if not heartless forgetfulness, that here He knew nothing but rejection.

Am I then false or true to the constant sign of my Master’s death? Am I to court the honour of those who refused Christ, and gave Him a cross? Am I to forget His glory in the presence of God? Ought I not, in my measure of faith, to be the expression of both? Ought I not to share my Master’s shame and dishonour here? Ought I not to wait to enter the same glory with the Christ of God? So it is said here, “When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.” Accordingly the path of Christian duty is grounded on these wondrous truths. “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry.” What a humbling consideration that those so blessed (dead, as we have said, and risen with Christ) are here told to mortify what is most shameful and shameless! But so it is. It is really what man is; and such is the nature which alone we had as children of Adam. These are alas! in the singularly energetic language of the Spirit of God here called the members of the man. “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth fornication, uncleanness,

inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: for which things' sake, the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: in the which ye also walked sometime."

It is no use denying the plain truth "when ye lived in them;" it is blessed to know that we are dead now. Let us hearken, "But now, ye also put off all these." Here we come not merely to that which is displayed in the forms of the corruption that goes on through things or persons outside us, as it were, but by inner feelings of violence: "But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth." Falsehood, too, is judged as it never was before, "Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him." Not Adam, but Christ is the standard — Christ who is God as well as man; "where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all." How blessed! — "Christ is all, and in all."

Thus the believer can look round full of joy upon his brethren; he can count up souls from every tribe, tongue, and station. Who has been overlooked in the comprehensive and active grace of our God? And what is he then entitled to see? Christ in them. And what a deliverance from self to see Christ in them! Yes, but Christ is "all" as truly as He is "in all." Oh, to forget all that which produces jealousy, pride, vanity, each and every feeling contrary to God and unedifying to man; to be comforted and to comfort others with such a truth — Christ is all, and Christ is in all! Such is God's word, and are we, or are we not, entitled to say so now? Sorrowful

circumstances may, alas! require us to pronounce on evil ways in order to look into this evil doctrine or that; but the apostle speaks now of the saints in their ordinary and normal manner. Does not this still abide true? Am I entitled, as I look upon Christians henceforth, to see nothing but Christ in any and Christ in every one? Yes, Christ is in all, and Christ is all. “Put on, therefore” (says he, in the enjoyment of such grace. Now comes the positive character to be borne) — “Put on, therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved.” How like the description is to Christ Himself! He was God’s chosen One in the highest sense; He was the holy and beloved. Who ever appealed in distress, and did not find in Him bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering? Then follows that which could be said of us alone. “If any man have a quarrel against any, even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.” Forgiving one another is fortified by His example who did no sin, neither was evil found in His mouth. Christ on earth was a blessed pattern of forgiveness and forbearance. “Even as Christ forgave you.” He now brings Him in openly, and to ourselves.

But there is a crowning quality: “And above all these things put on charity,” because this is, as nothing else can be, the fullest sign of that which God is Himself, the energy of His nature. His light may detect, but His love is the spring of all His ways. No matter what may be the demand, love is after all most essential and influential too. It lies at the bottom when we think of the wants of the saints of God here below. There is a figure especially characteristic of the divine nature morally considered — I need not say light, as we are told more fully in the epistle to the Ephesians. Yet above all the saints are to

put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness; “and let the peace of Christ rule,” for so it reads, not the peace of God, but the peace of Christ. Everything in our epistle is traced up to Christ as the head of all possible blessing.

So “let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts;” that is, the very peace which Christ Himself lived and moved in. Let His peace rule. He knows everything and feels everything. I may be perfectly certain, whatever may be my sorrow or travail of spirit about anything, Christ feels far more deeply (yea, infinitely deeper than any other) those that may excite any of us. Yet He has absolute peace, never broken or ruffled for an instant. And in us, poor feeble souls, why should not this peace rule in our hearts, to the which also we are called in one body? “And be ye thankful. Let the word of Christ” (it was God’s word, but still called the word of Christ here) “dwell in you richly in all wisdom.” There might be a word of God which was not in the same way the word of Christ. There are many portions of the scriptures that do not by any means suit or suppose the estate and path of the Christian. “And let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another.” It is not Christ Himself, as in Ephesians 3, the wondrous issue even now in us by the power of the Spirit; but, at least, in His word is found (what the Colossians needed) an active and most pure spring of instruction and counsel, and mutuality of help by it. Such is the fruit of His word thus dwelling in us. Nor is this all. “In psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” It matters little how well taught the saint may be, nor how he may know the moral beauty and the unfailing wisdom

of the word, if positive fruit be not increased: if the spirit and power of worship abound not, there is something altogether short, or wrong. “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.” Thus, even if there be not actually formal praise, the Lord looks for thankfulness of heart, as counting on love in everything.

After this follow particular exhortations, on which we need not at present dwell. We have wives and husbands, children and fathers, servants and masters, brought together successively up to the first verse of Colossians 4, which should, of course, close Colossians 3 rather than begin a new one.

Then come general injunctions. “Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving.” Neither completeness in Christ, nor joyful sense of heavenly relationship, nor heed to our own relations in this life, should weaken for an instant, but rather minister to an increased sense of the need and value of depending on God. Nor is continuance in prayer all; but vigilant watch in the same, which does not let slip the just occasion for supplication; and as all things were to be done with thanksgiving, so prayer also, which would assuredly not forget the need of those in the forefront of the spiritual warfare and toil of love. “Watch in the same with thanksgiving; withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds: that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak.” Nor is there to be unwatchfulness, but consideration in love of those without. “Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time. Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye

ought to answer every man." The fit time and suited speech, always in grace, not without faithfulness Godward, how good and needful they are!

Further, we see how Christian love delights to communicate and to hear. It was his confidence in their love; and this is shown not merely in his desire to hear about them, but in the conviction that they would like to hear about him. Can anything be sweeter than this genuine simplicity of affection and mutual interest? In a man it would be vain and curious: it is blessed in a Christian. No right-minded man, as such, could take for granted that others would care to know about his affairs any more than be theirs, unless indeed in case of a relation, or a friend, or a public and extraordinary personage. But here writes the lowly-minded apostle, in the full assurance that, though he had never seen them, or they him, it would be real and mutual gratification to know about one another from him who went between them. What a spring of power is the love of Christ Truly charity is "the bond of perfectness." "And my state shall Tychicus declare unto you, who is a beloved brother, and a faithful minister and fellow-servant in the Lord: whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that he might know your state, and comfort your hearts; with Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They shall make known unto you all things which are done here."

Then come allusions to his various fellow-prisoners and fellow-servants, particularly noting Epaphras, who laboured fervently in prayer for them. This, I am sure, should not be weakened, brethren. We know that there is danger on all sides. We may have proved how sadly everything of the sort has been perverted; but there is a

sense, and a most weighty one too, in which we cannot too much strengthen the links of love between the saints of God, and that too where there is a real holy ministry for their good. And this the apostle was doing, and particularly for one that came from them. We might well suppose that there was some hindrance to the full flow of affection an their part. But the apostle took every pains to, show how great was the love of Epaphras for them; for his faithful spirit knew some little of that which the apostle knew well, — that the more abundantly he loved, the less he was loved. “For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea.” His was by no means a love inactive or limited. There was no such notion as only caring for the saints in his own particular place. Paul narrowed himself to no local ties, nor should we allow such a thing for an instant. All the saints belong to us, as we belong to all of them. And so he mentions particularly others, even if some little felt this link. “Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas, greet you. Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, Nymphas, and the church which is in his house. And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans.” It is evident, therefore, that these apostolic epistles were meant to circulate among the saints. And perhaps this may be the key to what we are next told: “And ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.” The epistle to Laodicea is not said: so we have no sufficient reason to trouble ourselves about there being a lost portion of the inspired writings. There is no proof of the sort. I am aware that men have reasoned much about it; but this is a proof that evidence fails. Why should we heed conjecture? Had they prayed more, the result might have been to better purpose.

Possibly apostles may have written epistles that were not intended for the permanent instruction of the church; but that what was so intended is lost we may resolutely deny from all we know of our God. Whatever insinuates it denies that He has adequately provided for His church here below: this He has surely done in every form in His word. There is no imperfectness in that word, neither does any ground exist to suppose that any part of it has vanished away. No doubt we may detect the flaws of man's negligence, not knowing how to treat with becoming care the precious deposit of truth; but there is nothing more. That is to say, there may be a difference of reading here and there which impairs the full beauty and accuracy of the blessed word of God; but, as to the substance, the most timid may be assured that you have it in the worst editions of Christendom. Do not be uneasy at the talk of critics: it is natural for dealers to cry up their wares. They live in minute points and uncertainty.

As this epistle then is not said to have been addressed to Laodicea, we may gather that it was either from that church, or, if apostolic, going its round from one assembly to another. If the latter, it had got to Laodicea, whence the Colossians were to procure it in their turn.

Archippus was to take heed to the ministry he had received in the Lord. No doubt the hint is wanted by some of us still. May He make and keep us faithful!

First And Second Thessalonians

There is a special interest in examining the epistles to the Thessalonians, more particularly the first, because, in point of fact, it was the earliest of the letters of the apostles; and as the first on the part of Paul, so also to an assembly found in the freshness of its faith, and in the endurance of no small suffering for Jesus' sake. This has given a colour to the character of the epistle. Besides, the very truth which most strongly characterized the assembly there — the habitual waiting for the Lord Jesus — was that which the enemy perverted into a means of danger. It is always thus. Whatever God has specially given to the church, whatever He has caused to be brought out in any marked manner at any time, is that which we may expect Satan to sap and undermine with all diligence. We might have supposed, à priori, that any characteristic truth would be that in which the children of God would be more earnest, and strong, and united. Undoubtedly it is that for which they are specially responsible; but for this very reason they are the object of the continual and subtle attacks of Satan in respect of it.

Now these epistles (for both in fact show us the same truth, but on different sides, guarding it against a different means used by the enemy to injure the saints) present on their very face, in great fulness of application, the hope of the Christian, and that which surrounds it and flows from it. At the same time, the Spirit of God in no way limits Himself to that one subject in all its parts; but as we receive the truth in its fulness

in Christ, so we have the great elements of Christianity, as well as the attractive state of the believers in Thessalonica, formed by the hope which animated them, and by the truth in general seen in its light. The apostle writes to them in a manner to confirm their faith: “Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians, which is in God the Father, and in the Lord Jesus Christ.” He does not mean by this to set forth any great advance, any high standing on the part of the believer, as has been sometimes drawn from these words, but rather the contrary. It was the infantine condition of the assembly of the Thessalonians which appears to have suggested this mode of address from the apostle. Just as the babe of the family would be an especial object of a father’s concern — more particularly if peril surrounded it, so does the apostle cheer the church of the Thessalonians, by speaking of their being in God the Father, and in the Lord Jesus Christ. (Compare John 10:28, 29.) It is as children, not merely in the sense of being born of God, but as babes; and the Spirit of God views the assembly of the Thessalonians in this way. As a proof that this is correct, it may be noticed that there does not appear at this time to have been any regular oversight established in their midst. There is no hint of elders appointed here as yet, any more than at Corinth. There was no small vigour; but, at the same time, it had the stamp of youth. The fresh flow of affection filled their hearts, and the beauty of the truth had but just dawned, as it were, on their souls. This, and more of kindred character, may be traced very clearly. And we find here an instructive lesson how to deal with the entrance of error, and the dangers that threaten the children of God, more particularly such as may be comparatively unformed in the common faith.

1 Thessalonians

After his salutation the apostle, as usual, gives thanks to God for them all, making mention of them in his prayers, as he says: “Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father.” From the outset we find the eminently practical shape which the truth had taken; as indeed must always be the case where there is the care and activity of the Spirit of God. There is no truth that is not given both to form the heart, and to guide the steps of the saints, so that there may be a living and a fruitful service flowing to God from it. Such was the case with these Thessalonians; their work was the work of faith, and their labour had love for its spring; and more than that, their hope was one which had proved its divine strength by the power of endurance which it had given them in the midst of their afflictions. It was really the hope of Christ Himself, as it is said “patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father.” Thus, we see, all was kept in conscience before God; for this is the meaning of the words — “in the sight of God and our Father.”

All this brings them before the soul of the apostle in confidence, as being simple-hearted witnesses, not only of the truth, but of Christ the Lord. “For our gospel,” he says, “came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.” The apostle could unburden himself, and speak freely. With the Corinthians he could not so open his heart: there was such fleshly vaunting among them that the apostle speaks to them with no small reserve. But here it is otherwise; and as there was fervent love in

their hearts and ways, so the apostle could speak out of the very same love; for assuredly love was not less on his part. Hence he could enlarge with joy on that which was before him — the manner in which the gospel had come to them; and this is of no small consequence in the ways of God. We should by no means pass by a due consideration of the manner in which God deals either with individual souls, or with saints, in any special place. For all things are of God. The effect of a storm of persecution, accompanying the introduction of the gospel, could not have been without its weight in forming the character of the saints who received the truth; and, yet more, the way in which God had wrought — particularly in him who was the bearer of His message — at that time would not be without its modifying influence in giving such a direction to it as would be for the Lord's glory and praise. I doubt not, therefore, that the apostle's entrance among them, the notable accompanying circumstances of it, the faith and love that had been then tried — of course, habitually there, but, nevertheless, put at that juncture to the proof to a remarkable degree at Thessalonica — had all their source in God's good guidance; so that those that were to follow in the wake of the same faith, who would have to stand and suffer in the name of the same Lord Jesus at a later day, were thus strengthened and fitted, as no other way could have done so well, for what was to befall them.

The apostle, therefore, does not hesitate to say, "Ye became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost: so that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia." And this was so true that the

apostle did not need to say anything in proof of it. The very world wondered how the word wrought among these Thessalonians. Men were struck by it; and what impressed even people outside was this — that they not only abandoned their idols, but henceforth were serving the one living and true God, and were waiting for His Son from heaven. Such was the testimony, and an uncommonly bright one it is. But, indeed, simplicity is the secret for enjoying the truth, as well as for receiving it; and we shall find always that it is the sure mark of God's power in the soul by His word and Spirit. For there are two things that characterize divine teaching: real simplicity, on the one hand, and, on the other, that definiteness which gives the inward conviction to the Christian that what he has is the truth of God. It might be too much to expect the development, or, at any rate, a large exercise of such precision as this among the Thessalonians as yet; but. one may be sure that if there was true simplicity at first, it would lead into distinctness of judgment ere long. We shall find some features of this kind for our guidance, and I hope to remark upon them as they come before me.

But, first of all, take notice that the first description which is given of them, in relation to the coming of the Lord, is simply awaiting the Son of God from heaven. We do not well to fasten upon this expression more than it was intended to convey. It does not appear to me to mean anything more than the general attitude of the Christian in relation to Him whom he expects from above. It is the simple fact of their looking for the same Saviour who had already come, whom they had known — that Jesus who had died for them and was raised again from the dead, their Deliverer from the wrath to come.

Thus they were waiting for this mighty and gracious Saviour to come from heaven. How He was coming they knew not; what would be the effects of His coming they knew little. They of course knew nothing about the time, no soul does; it is reserved in the hands of our God and Father; but they were, as became babes, waiting for Him according to His own word. Whether He would take them back into the heavens, or at once enter on the kingdom under the whole heaven, I am persuaded they did not know at this time.

It seems therefore a mistake to press this text, as if it necessarily taught Christ's coming in order to translate saints into heaven. It leaves the aim, mode, and result an entirely open matter. We may find ourselves sometimes forcing scripture in this way; but be assured, it is true wisdom to draw from scripture no more than it distinctly undertakes to convey. It is much better, if with fewer texts, to have them more to the purpose. We shall find ere long the importance of not multiplying proof-texts for any particular aim, but of seeking rather from God the definite use of each scripture. Now all that the apostle has here in view is to remind the Thessalonian saints that they were waiting for that same Deliverer, who was dead and risen, to come from heaven. It is likely that as His coming is presented in the character of Son of God, it may suggest more to the spiritual mind, and probably did suggest more to them at a later day. I am only speaking of what is important to bear in mind at their first conversion. It was the simple truth that the divine person, who loved them and died for them, was coming back from heaven. What would be the manner and the consequences they had yet to learn. They were waiting for Him who had proved His love for them

deeper than death or judgment; and He was coming: how could they but love Him and wait for Him?

The second chapter pursues the subject of the apostle's ministry in connection with their conversion. He had not left them when they had been brought to the knowledge of Christ. He had laboured among them. "For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain: but even after we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention." The apostle had gone on in persevering faith, undisturbed by that which had followed. He was not to be turned aside from the gospel. It had brought trouble on him, but he persevered. "For our exhortation," he says, "was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile: but as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts. For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness, God is witness: nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ."

Here we see how entirely his ministry had been above the ordinary motives of men. There was no self-seeking It was not a question of exalting himself, or of earthly personal gain; nor, on the other hand, was there the indulging of the passions, either gross or refined None of these things had a place in his heart, as he could appeal to God solemnly. Their own consciences were witnesses of it. But, more than that, love and tenderness of care had wrought toward them. "We were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: so

being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us." What a picture of gracious interest in souls, and of this, not in Him who has the full expression of divine love, but in a man of like passions with ourselves! For if we must ever look for the perfection of it in Christ alone, it is good for us to see the life and love of Christ in one who had to contend with the very same evils which we have in our nature.

Here, then, we have the lovely picture of the grace of the apostle in watching over these young Christians; and this he presents in a two-fold form. First, when in the most infantine condition, as a nurse he cherished them; but when they grew a little, he pursued his course, "labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, preaching unto you the gospel of God. As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children." As they advanced spiritually, so the character of ministering to their need was changed; but it was the very same love in exhorting them as a father, which had cared for them as a nurse. This may be the beau idéal of a true pastor; but it is the picture of a real apostle of Christ, of Paul among the Thessalonians, whose one desire was that they should walk worthy of God, who had called them to His kingdom and glory. "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe."

Then follows a sketch of that suffering which faith entails, as sooner or later it must come; and as he had charged them to walk worthy of God, who had cheered them with the prospect of the unseen and eternal things so he would have them to prove by their constancy and endurance that it was God's word which so powerfully wrought in them, spite of all man could do. "For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews: who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets" — not exactly their own prophets, but the prophets — "and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men: forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles." What a contrast with the grace of God! The people who had the prestige of religion could not endure that the gospel should go to the despised Gentiles, their enemies. Yet why should they have been so careful of it, since they did not believe in it themselves? How came to pass this their sudden interest in the spiritual welfare of the heathen? Whence originated this unwearied zeal to deprive others of the gospel they themselves scorned? If the gospel were such an irrational and immoral and trumpery matter as they professed to consider it, how was it that they spared no pains to prejudice men against it, and to persecute its preachers? Men do not usually feel thus — do not set themselves so bitterly and continuously against that which does not prick their consciences. One can understand it where there is the sense of a good of which they are not prepared to avail themselves: the rebellious heart — vents itself then in implacable hatred at seeing it go to others, who peradventure would receive it gladly. It is man always the enemy, the

persistent antagonist of God, and more particularly of His grace. But it is religions man, as the Jew was, here and everywhere — man with a measure of traditional truth, who feels thus sore at the operations of God in His mighty grace.

But the apostle as he had shown us men the objects of the gospel, and the constant interest of grace in Christians, contrasted with those who hindered because they hated the grace of God, so he also lets them know the affectionate desire that was not weakened by absence from it, but rather the contrary. “But we, brethren, being taken from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavoured the more abundantly to see your face with great desire.” There is nothing so real upon earth as the love of Christ reproduced by the Spirit in the Christian. “Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us.” There is a reality for evil in Satan, the great personal enemy, as much in a certain sense as there is in Christ for good. Let us not forget it.

On the other hand, what is the encouragement to suffering love and toil along the road? “What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing?” It matters little what the circumstances maybe in regard to true ministry in the grace of Christ. Trial shows how superior it is to circumstances. Bodily presence or absence only tests it. Afflictions only prove its strength. Distance only gives room to its expression to those who are absent. The unfailing and only adequate comfort is the certain re-union of those who minister, and those who are ministered to, in the day when all opposition will vanish, and around the board where all the fruits of true ministry, whether of a nurse or of a father that exhorts

those who are growing up in the truth, will be tasted in the joy of our Lord. The apostles and their companions in labour were content to wait for the reward of loving oversight exercised among the saints of God.

But this did not in the slightest degree hinder the apostle's tender sympathy with those who were pressed down by any special sufferings. For Christianity is not dreamy or sentimental, but most real in its power of adapting itself to every need. It is the true deliverance from all that is fictitious, whether on the side of reason or of imagination in the things of God. Superstition has its perils; but quite as much has the dogmatism of mere intellect. Scripture raises the believer above both; yet the apostle shows what anxiety of feeling was his about the Thessalonians. He did not doubt the Lord's watchful eye. Nevertheless all his heart was in movement about them. He had sent Timotheus when he could not go himself; and he was rejoiced to hear the good account which he thus gleaned through him, for he dreaded lest they might be shaken by the great wave of trouble that was sweeping over them. No doubt they had been prepared for this in a measure; for he had told them, when with them, that they were appointed thereunto.

But now, how cheered was his spirit to find that the tempter had been foiled! Timotheus had come with good tidings of their faith and love. Spite of all, they had "good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us, as we also to see you." Love was still fervent, as in him so in them. "Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith: for now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord." But in the midst of thanksgiving he prays for them.

We may notice two prayers particularly in this. epistle. The first occurs at the end of 1 Thessalonians 3, and the second at the end of the last chapter. The first is more particularly a review of the entrance of the gospel among the Thessalonian saints and of his own ministry, which was no doubt meant to be suggestive to them of the true character and method of serving the Lord in dealing with all men. He winds it up with prayer to the effect: “Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you. And the Lord make you to increase and abound one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: to the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.”

Here at once we come to very distinct guidance for our thoughts; and this in more ways than one. He prays not that they may be established in holiness, in order that they might love one another, but that they might abound in love, in order that they might be established in holiness. Love always precedes holiness. It is true from conversion — from the beginning of the work in the soul — and it is also true to the last. What first raises the heart to God is some faint sense of His love in Christ. I do not say anything at all like the love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit given us. There may then be no power to rest on divine love; there can be no abounding in love in such a state. But, for all that, there is a hope of love — if it be the feeblest thought; if it be only that “there is bread enough and to spare” for the merest prodigal that betakes himself to the father’s house. If we look at God and Christ, and at the grace that suits the Father’s counsels and the Son’s work, I

admit all this is a scanty measure — a poor thing on their part, to give a servant's portion in such a house. But it was no small prize for the heart of a sinner, darkened and narrowed by selfishness, and the indulgence of lust and passion. And what is sin in every form but selfishness? We know how this shuts up the heart, and how it destroys every expectation of goodness in others. The grace of God, contrariwise, works and kindles, it may be, a very little spark at first, but still a beginning of what is truly great, good, and eternal. Accordingly, as we read, the prodigal starts from the far country, and cannot rest — though there was incomparably more earnestness on the part of the father to meet him, as well we know; for it was not the prodigal that ran to the father, but the father to the prodigal. And thus it is always. The same true working of love, however at first dimly seen, that wakes the sinner from his wretched bed of sin — for rest it cannot be called — this rouses him from the guilty dreams of death. On the other hand, it is the fulness of love which gives the heart to enter into the riches of grace towards us, shedding abroad, not an earnest of it, but itself in the heart. And this holiness, not in desire only, but real and deep, keeps pace with love.

It is not, of course, my present task to unfold the wonderful way in which that love has been proved to us. It does not come before me now, nor is it for me to leave my theme even to speak of its display in Christ, by whom God commends His own love to us, in that, while yet sinners, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, till we can joy in Himself through our Lord Jesus Christ. But I affirm that all practical holiness is the fruit of the love to which the heart has surrendered, and

which it receives simply and enjoys fully. This, then, is true of the soul that is only seeking to know the grace of God.

But here he earnestly desires their growth in holiness, and prays for them that they might “increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: to the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness.” And the manner in which this is connected with the coming of Christ here is very noticeable. He supposes it to be flowing out of love, and going on in holiness, proceeding unbroken, until the saint finds himself at last in the display of glory; not when Christ comes to take us up, but when God brings us with Him. Why (let me ask) is there not presented His coming to receive the saints in this chapter, as in the next? Because our walking in love and holiness is the question in the hand of the Holy Spirit; and this has the most intimate connection with Christ’s appearing, when we come with Him. And for this there is a simple reason. Where the walk comes in, we have clearly responsibility before the saints. Now the appearing of the Lord Jesus is that which will manifest us in the results of responsibility. Then we shall each see, when self-love can no longer darken our judgment of ourselves, or our estimate of others, when nothing but the truth shall remain and be displayed of all that his been wrought in us, or done by us. For the Lord will assuredly come to translate us to His presence; but He will also cause us, to appear with Him in glory, when He appears; and when this moment arrives, it will be made manifest how far we have been faithful, and how far faithless. All will be turned to His own glory. Accordingly then here in 1 Thessalonians 3 we see the reason why,

as it appears to. me, the Spirit directs attention to His coming with all His saints, not for them.

The next portion, or second half of the epistle, opens with practical exhortation. The early part insists on purity; then follow a few words on love. It might seem strange that it should be needful to guard these saints, walking as we have seen so simply and delightfully, against unclean offences even in the closest relations of life — that Christian men should be warned against fornication and adultery; but we know that so desperate is the evil of the flesh, that no circumstances nor position can secure, yea, even the joy of the blessing of God's grace, without * exercise of conscience and self-judgment; and hence these solemn admonitions from the Lord. It was particularly needed at that time and in Greece, because such sins were rather sanctioned than judged in the heathen world. Even mankind in later days have profited enormously by the change. They can now no doubt enrich themselves with truth, and talk largely about holiness; but how little they knew of either before they borrowed from Scripture! it is all stolen goods, every bit of real value. The men of whom they are the successors were unclean to the last degree. The Aristotles and Platos were really not fit for decent company. I admit our Grecians would scowl at such an estimate, or scorn it; but they lack the elements for forming an adequate moral appraisal, or they do not look the facts in the face, plain enough as they are. If knowingly they endorse or make light of such morals as Plato counted desirable for his republic, it cannot be doubted where they themselves are. Undoubtedly there were some fine speculations, but nothing more; for men thought that talking about morality would do as well as

the thing itself. It is Christ, and Christ alone, that has brought in the very truth of God in word and deed. It was unknown to man before: still more the ultimate proof in the cross that He is love. Christ first displayed absolute purity in the very nature which had revelled in lust and passion heretofore.

But the Thessalonians in general might not mated its importance fully, being young in the truth. There was doubtless good reason why the apostle in writing to them had to lay great stress on moral purity. The fact is, that it was a matter of course then for men to live just as they listed. There was no restriction, except so far as mere human vengeance or punishments of the law might deter them. Men indulged themselves in anything they could do safely. And so indeed it is to this day, except so far as Christianity or the profession of it prevents them.

After speaking of purity, the apostle treats of loving one another, and adds that there was no need to say much about it. They themselves were taught of God; they knew what they were called to in brotherly love. But he does exhort them to be quiet and to mind their own business, working with their own hands, as he not only commanded them when in their midst, but exemplified it from day to day himself. He had it deeply at heart that they should walk reputably toward those without, and have need of no one or thing.

But we come in the next place to a main topic of the epistle. They had fallen into a serious mistake as to some of the brethren that had fallen asleep. They feared that these departed saints would miss much at the coming of the Lord — in fact, that they would lose their part in the joyful meeting between the Lord Jesus and

His saints. This at once shows us that we must not estimate the Thessalonian believers according to that standard which these mistakes helped to elicit from the Holy Ghost. We have the advantage of the entire development of the truth, much of which was the inspired correction of evils and errors. The New Testament, you must remember, was not then written; a very small part — one gospel, or at most perhaps two, and not one of the epistles. Thus, except the teaching that they had received from the apostle during his comparatively short stay in Thessalonica, they had little, or no means of further instruction in the truth, and we know how easily that which is only heard passes away. We may learn from this the invaluable blessing we have, not merely in the word, but in the written word of God — scripture. However, at this time, for the most part, the New Testament books were not yet written. It was that part of scripture which most of all concerned these saints. We must not, therefore, wonder that they were ignorant of what had regard to their brethren who had fallen asleep. On the other hand, it is not meant that they entertained any fears of their being lost. This could not arise in the minds of souls grounded in what the apostle calls our gospel; and no charge is so much as hinted of any failure in this respect. Still a delay might have been conceived before they entered into full blessedness. One can understand their perplexity for want of light on what the Lord would do with them. They did not know whether they would then enter the kingdom, or how, or when. These were questions unsolved.

The Holy Ghost meets their difficulties now, and tells them to this effect: “I would not have you to be ignorant,

brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him." Clearly we hear again of the Lord coming, and bringing these saints with Him. It is not the Lord, however, receiving them to Himself, but bringing them with Him. That is, we have once more the Lord coining in glory with His saints already glorified. When that moment comes, at any rate, they will be with Him. Such is the first statement of the apostle. But this very truth, which made part of their old difficulty, raises another difficulty. How could the saints that had fallen asleep come with Him now? — How could all the saints appear in glory with Christ? They seem to have understood that when the Lord came, there would be saints here below waiting for Christ; and that these would somehow be with Him in glory. But they were utterly perplexed as to the saints that had fallen asleep. They did not know what to make of the interim — if indeed they suspected an interim. They did not know the process by which the Lord would deal with those that had died; and it is now explained.

"For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent [shall in no wise anticipate] them which are asleep." If they had remained alive, no difficulty had been felt in the case. Some in our day seem to feel a good deal surprised at such a difficulty as this; but the truth is that the sorrow of the Thessalonians arose from the simplicity of their faith, and men's feeling no difficulty now is partly owing to their lack of any genuine faith in it. Had they more faith, they might have their perplexities too, not at the end,

but, as usual, at the beginning. It was certainly so with the Thessalonians at this time. It is always the effect of faith at first. Newly-entered light gives occasion to the perception of much which we cannot solve at once. But God comes in to the aid of the believer, and in His own grace and time solves one difficulty after another. Then the apostle clears it up thus: “We which are alive and remain unto the coming [or presence] of the Lord,” etc. The word “coming” means the fact of being present in contrast with absence. “We which are alive and remain unto the presence of the Lord shall not precede them which are asleep.” I take the liberty of changing the word “prevent,” which is old English, into a phrase which gives the same meaning as “prevent” when the translation was made.

We “shall not precede them which are asleep.” Thus, suppose we are waiting for Christ to come, and that He comes, we shall not be before those saints that have departed previously. How can this be? It is answered in the next verse. “For the Lord himself,” says he, “shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together. with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” Thus it is evident that, if there be a moment of difference, it is in favour of the sleepers, and not of those which remain alive. Those that are asleep are first wakened up. Bear in mind, sleep is for the body; the soul is never said or supposed in scripture to be asleep. But those who are asleep in their graves will be wakened up by the shout (κέλευσμα) of the Lord Jesus; for the word means the call of a commander to his men

that follow, or of an admiral to his sailors. It is from one who has a relation to others under his authority; it is not a vague call to those that may not own his command, but to his own people.

It is evident, therefore, that the notion entertained by some, that this shout must be heard by men in general, is refuted by these words, as well as other facts. Men in general have no such relation to the Lord. It is a shout that is heard by those to whom it appertains. Not a word, therefore, includes — but, rather the contrary, shuts out — those to whom Christ stands in no such connection. In other words, it is the Lord's call to His own, and accordingly the dead in Christ rise first, as the immediate fruit of it. "Then we, the living that remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." This at once dispels the difficulty as to those who were asleep. So far from missing the moment of meeting between the Lord and His own, they rise first; we immediately join them; and thus both together are caught up to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with Him.

Then the apostle, having left with the Thessalonians the comfort of this about their brethren, turns to the day of the Lord, or His appearing. "But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night." "The day of the Lord" is invariably in Scripture that period when the Lord will come in manifest and awful judgment of sinful men. It is never applied to any dealing with the Christian as on the earth. We find a very particular application of it, which seems connected with the saints.

This is not exactly called the day of the Lord, but “the day of Christ.” Confessedly there is a connection between the two. The day of Christ means that aspect of the day of the Lord, in which those who are in Christ will have their special place in the kingdom assigned. Consequently, where it is a question of the fruit of labour in the service of Christ, reward of faithfulness, or anything of the kind, “the day of Christ” is mentioned.

But “the day of the Lord,” as such, is invariably the day of the Lord’s dealing in judgment with man as such on the earth. Of that day, then, the apostle felt no need to write. It was already known perfectly that the day of the Lord is coming as a thief in the night. This was a matter of Old Testament statement and phraseology. All the prophets speak of it. If you search from Isaiah to Malachi, you will find that the day of Jehovah is that moment of divine intervention when man is no longer allowed to pursue his own path, when the Lord God will deal with the world’s system in all its parts, when the idols of the nations all perish together with their benighted votaries. But — the Lord Himself shall be exalted in that day, and His people shall be brought into their true place, and the Gentiles shall accept theirs. This will be the time of displayed divine government. Jehovah will take Zion as the central seat of His earthly throne, and all peoples shall submit to His authority in the person of Christ.

Hence, therefore, the apostle, when he speaks of the day of the Lord, alludes to it as already too notorious to need fresh words about it. The Thessalonians did not require to be instructed as to that. But this makes most plain the distinction of the manner in which the saints and mankind will be dealt with. When he treats of the Lord’s

coming, they require to be instructed; where he speaks about the day of Jehovah, they do not. The day of Jehovah was matter of common knowledge from the Old Testament. To a scribe instructed thus, there was no doubt about its bearing. Not even a Jew disputed about it, and of course a Christian would be subject to the testimony of God in the Old Testament. But a Christian might not know that which most of all it was desirable for him to understand, — the manner in which his own proper hopes would link themselves with the day of Jehovah.

It is exactly there many make such utter confusion; for they do not distinguish between the hope of the Christian and “the day” for the world. And this lets out a great secret — the heart’s desire to think of the two things together. We can all understand that people would like to have the best of both. But it cannot be done. Hence in speaking of the day of the Lord (and I draw your attention to it, because we shall find its importance in the next epistle) he says, “When they shall say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child.” He does not say “you,” but “they.” Why this difference? When he is speaking about the presence of the Lord, he says “you,” “we;” but when treating of the day of Jehovah, he says “they.”

Indeed, the apostle excludes the believer; for he says, “Ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.” Besides, he gives a moral reason, “Ye are children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they

that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation. For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ." Salvation here means complete deliverance not yet come — the redemption of the 'body and not that of the soul alone. For Christ "died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him."

Carefully remember that waking or sleeping here has reference to the body; it has no reference at all to anything of moral state. It is impossible that the Spirit of God should say that, whether in a right state or wrong we should live together with Him. The Holy Spirit never makes light of the condition of sin. Nor is there anything more foreign to the tone of scripture, than that the Spirit of God should treat with indifference the question whether a saint was in a good or a bad state. He had no doubt just used the words "wake or sleep" in another sense; but he seems to me to assume the impossibility of a saint applying them in a moral sense when he pursues the subject farther. In verse 6, for instance, the sleeping and watching are moral states; but when we come down to verse 10, they refer to the question of life or death in the body, and not to the saints' ways. In fact this manner of taking up words, and applying them in another sense, will be found to be one of the characteristics of the abrupt, animated, and forcible style of the apostle.

I should not make the remark if I had not known excellent men sometimes in considerable danger from overlooking this, and taking scripture in a narrow and pseudo-literal sense. But this is not the way to understand the Bible. It is one of the great misuses to

which a concordance exposes those who are caught by verbal analogies, instead of entering into the scope of thought real meaning.

We shall live with Him then. “Wherefore,” he says, comfort yourselves to ether, and edify one another.” Then he gives them certain instructions; and I add this observation, which is one of practical importance. He calls upon these young believers to know those who laboured among them, and were over them, or took the lead in the Lord, and admonished them. They were to esteem them very highly in love for their work, being at peace at the same time among themselves.

This exhortation, always right, has, to my own mind, great wisdom and worth for us now; for the simple reason that, so far, we stand in a measure, as to circumstances — though not from the same cause — with these Thessalonian saints. Assuredly they were in a comparatively infantine condition, quite as much or more than those I am now addressing. Yet if saints, no matter how informed, then had among them those that laboured and were over them in the Lord, surely the same Lord gives still the same helps and governments. He raises up and sends His workmen in the world, and those who bring in that moral power and wisdom which enable some to take the lead. Hence it is beyond just controversy — from the case of the Thessalonians (and it is not alone) — that for some to be over others in the Lord did not depend on apostolical appointment. It is a defective and even mistaken idea to restrict it to this, though it is admitted that the apostles used to appoint such elders. But the essence, — of what we find here is, that in that appointment spiritual power and might did show itself in this way; and that the greatest of the

apostles exhorts the saints to acknowledge those who were thus — and only thus — over them in the Lord, altogether independently of any apostolic act. No doubt the due external appointment was desirable and important in its place. But what of places (and I would add, what of times) where it could not be had?

These are our circumstances now; for no matter how much we might welcome and value such outward appointment, we cannot have it. Without the proper scriptural authority, who is to appoint? Any body unquestionably, and leaders especially, might imitate Paul and Barnabas, or Titus. But, assuredly, mere imitation is nothing, or worse; and those that take the lead, or are qualified to do so, are the persons to be appointed — not to appoint, if we really bow to the Lord. More than this — direct authority from the Lord for the purpose was needed. Where is it now? The moment you make an appointing power of your own, it is evident that its authority cannot rise above its source. If it is only a humanly given authority, it can exercise no more than a human power. But the apostle — or rather the prescient Spirit of God — meets various contingencies in the exhortation, and shows that a company of believers, even though not long gathered, might have more than one in their midst qualified to lead the rest, and entitled to respect and love on the score of their work, as thus labouring. If there be such now, (and who will deny it?) are the saints not called on to know them? Are there none who labour among them — none that take the lead among them in the Lord? It is evident that there ought to be no flinching from such a truth as this. For the present and long-existing confusion of Christendom in no way neutralizes it, but rather creates a fresh reason

for adhering to it, as to all scripture. No doubt it may not be always pleasant to high-minded men; but be assured, it is a thing of no small moment in its place.

Again, under the circumstances of Thessalonica, as there must have been danger of headiness, the apostle calls on the brethren to watch against unruly ways. The two things would be likely to go together: peace promotes love and respect. Disorderly folk are apt to know nobody over them in the Lord. Hence he calls on all to admonish them, to comfort the fainthearted, to support the weak, to be patient toward all. Then follows a cluster of other exhortations on which I need not dwell now. My object is not so much to insist on the exhortatory part of the epistle, as to present the general thread of design that runs though each, so as to give a comprehensive view of its structure.

2 Thessalonians

The second epistle takes up another difficulty. It was written in view of another abuse of the truth of the Lord’s coming — a danger that threatened the saints. As the first epistle was intended to guard the saints from an error about the dead, the second epistle was more particularly meant to correct them about the living. They were distressed at finding that some of their brethren died before the Lord came. So filled were they with the constant expectation of Christ from heaven, that it never occurred to them that a single Christian might depart from the world before His return, How they must have realized, in their habitual waiting, the nearness of that blessed hope! They now learnt that they need not sorrow on such a score; for the dead in Christ shall rise first, and then we, the living at His coming, shall be

caught up with them to join the Lord together. But the second epistle grew out of another and more serious error. We have seen that they were greatly alarmed and agitated. The apostle was really uneasy about them lest the tempter should tempt them, and his labour come to nought — lest, moved by their sore affliction, they should fall into fear about the awful day of the Lord, which the enemy knows well how to use.

Everybody who has read Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the lesser prophets knows what they tell us of the horrors for men when the day of Jehovah comes upon the earth, — that it will be. a day of dismay and darkness, when all earthly things are utterly confused, and the people of God seem about to be swallowed up by their enemies. False doctrine ever sets one truth against another; and it was not wanting among the Thessalonians at this time. For some sought to persuade them that the day of the Lord was even then arrived. They probably argued that their troubles were part of the circumstances of that day. Certainly they sought to shake them by pretending that the day of the Lord was actually there. There was such fearful persecution and trouble among them, that this might be plausibly enough mixed up as supporting the idea that the day of the Lord was begun. For this false rumour seems to imply that they must have given some sort of figurative colour to “that day” (as it was certainly so used in Old Testament prophecy). At any rate, they must have supposed that “the day of the Lord” did not necessarily require the presence of the Lord Himself. In other words, they might think, is many Christians since have imagined, that a dreadful time of trouble must befall the world before the Lord comes to receive His own to himself above.

This second epistle was written to disabuse the minds of the Thessalonian saints; and indeed it directly tends to set all Christians free from any anxiety of the kind, though, of course, there may be persecution again, as there was then, and repeatedly afterwards, especially from Pagan and from Papal Rome. But this is wholly different from the dread which the enemy sought to infuse among the Thessalonians. The apostle accordingly sets himself to this task. First of all he comforts them.

"Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth; so that we ourselves glory in you." It may be noticed that he leaves out "the patience of hope." How comes this? It was exactly the hope that was no longer bright in their hearts. So far the enemy had succeeded. They had been comforted, but they had lost somewhat of the light and joy of the hope. They were moved more or less by their tribulation; not perhaps so much by the outward pressure as by the insinuation of Satan through false teaching, which is a far more dangerous thing for the child of God. It is plain that the apostle merely mentions their faith growing, and their love He no longer praises nor names their patience of hope, but rather prays for them in 2 Thessalonians 3 in such a way as to show there was a lack in this respect. That is, he takes up two of the qualities mentioned in the first epistle, and not the third. This, which was bound up with the whole structure of the first epistle, is left out of the second. There was too

good reason for it. For the time they had let it slip, as I have just explained. It is true that the apostle tells them, “we glory in you in the churches of God for your patience, and faith” (he does not speak of their “patience of hope”) “in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure.” They were holding on, and not giving up Christ but their souls had not the former spring through Christ their hope. We shall have the evidence of this more fully soon.

There was “a manifest token,” says he, “of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer.” So far it was well. “Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Observe the reason why he brings in “that day.” It was a false doctrine about the day, which draws out an explanation of its nature and its relation to the coming of the Lord. When that day comes, it will not fall with its troubles on the children of God. In truth the Lord will then execute judgment on their enemies — I do not mean on the dead till the close, but on the quick or living. It will be no more in some figurative and preparatory sense of exceeding affliction, or of natural overthrow; but its description here is the Lord Jesus revealed from heaven in flaming fire. There will be no doubt about its nature or effects. Every eye shall see Him.

That is, even 2 Thessalonians 1 plainly prepares us for the complete discomfiture of the illusory and alarming

dreams which these false teachers had been foisting in under false colours among the Thessalonian saints. But he pursues the matter farther. He will take vengeance on two classes — on those that know not God, and those that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These seem the Gentiles and the Jews respectively; but why do not we find here some allusion to the third class — His relation to the church of God? Because those who compose the church are no longer here.

Thus it is shown that the Lord will deal with all on earth, — not merged in one, but discriminated; for He executes judgment, and hence does not confound those who differ in a common class. There is thus a definite distinction drawn; but this so much the more precisely leaves out the Christian. Its force is more understood the more it is weighed. The apostle does not declare all at once, but prepares the way with much circumspection. When he says “them that know not God,” he means the idolatrous Gentiles. Then he adds with another article, “and those that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (not, as we have it in English here, “and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus;” as if all were one and the same class). There are two classes, and therefore accuracy would seem to call on us to make the sense more definite — “and on them that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.” At all events, whatever mode of rendering may be preferred, I have no hesitation in saying that such is the sense of the Greek, and nothing else. They are the Gentiles, who knew not God, (or, as Bengel has it, “qui in ethnica ignorantia de Deo versantur,”) and the Jews, who might know God after a sort and to a certain point beyond Gentiles, but who did not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. (“Judaeis

maxime, quibus evangelium de Christo praedicatum fuerat.") For unbelief is always convicted by the test that God employs; and the day of the Lord will deal with every form. The Gentiles that know not God will be punished, and the Jews that abuse the forms of Old Testament revelation to disobey the gospel will not escape, still less nominal and apostate Christendom.

The reason why no notice is taken of Christians as then on earth we shall see assigned a little lower down: I merely now remark that he could not put himself in either of those two classes. It is evident that on whomsoever that day is to fall it has no bearing on such. If therefore the Christians were troubled now, it was in no way the same character of trouble as that which shall be in the day of the Lord. The teaching of those who had spread this impression was utterly false; and if they claimed the highest sanction for it, they were worse than mistaken — they were the guilty tools of Satan. But as to both the classes we have seen described by the apostle, they "shall be punished with everlasting destruction," both "from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believed:" for this is the full force of it.

In the new age people will be blessed abundantly, but the blessing of the millennium does not exactly take the shape of belief. They shall behold the glory of the Lord. Such is their form as assigned by scripture. The earth shall be filled with the knowledge — not with the faith, but with the knowledge — of the glory of Jehovah, as the waters cover the sea. It will be in countless cases the fruit of true divine teaching; but knowledge describes it better than faith; and we may easily understand the

difference. They will behold the glory, they will look upon the Lord, no longer hidden but displayed. The blessed spoken of in our chapter are clearly those that have already believed. So indeed the apostle states: “Wherefore we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of the calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power; that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Next (2 Thess. 2) he comes to the special error in question. “Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.... that ye be not soon shaken in mind nor troubled, neither in spirit nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of the Lord is present.” It is well known that “of the Lord” (not of Christ) is unquestionably required by the best manuscripts, and other ancient witnesses.

Ἐνέστηκε does not mean “at hand,” but actually come. I do not enter into any long proof of this just now, having already done so elsewhere. Suffice it to say, that the word occurs in half a dozen places in the New Testament, and nowhere can bear any sense but the one alleged. Nor does it ever convey any such meaning as “at hand” in any correct Greek author. It has been so thought; but it is a mistake. It always means present, in contrast with future ever so imminent. So in two instances of the New Testament it stands over against future things; as when it is expressly said (in Romans 8 and 1 Cor. 3), “things present and things to come.” The latter might be “at hand,” but not the former. The things to come are in pointed opposition to those actually arrived. Again, we have (Gal. 1:4) “this present evil

world." This is now only. The age to come is not evil but good. It is in contrast with the present. And so as to "for the time then present," (Heb. 9) and "for the present necessity." (1 Cor. 7) It is not a question of the future, but solely of the present; a necessity now, and at no other time. In short, it is the regular word for "present." If a Greek meant to say "present" in contrast with the future, there was no more emphatic word to use. What, then, can be conceived more calculated to destroy the right understanding of this epistle than the common mistranslation? Such is the true sense of the word, I am bold to say.

But clearly this gives an immense help to the understanding of the passage. The apostle appeals to the saints. It is not a question of teaching in this verse, but the apostle beseeches them by a certain powerful motive, which was still in their souls. He does not mean, "We beseech you concerning," as some conceive, but as our English version says, "by." It is a legitimate meaning of the preposition with words of entreaty. He uses the hope of being gathered to Christ at His coming as a motive why they should not listen to those misleading the saints. Now mark the character of this false teaching. It was not the excitement of hope, but of terror produced on the spirit. It caused them to shake, hindering them from a settled, holy, hearty waiting for Christ. The error occupied them with the terrors of some intervening trouble. The pretence was that all the afflictions they had been enduring were parts or signs of the well-known day of trouble, the day of the Lord. Not at all, says the apostle: the trouble of that day will befall the enemies, not the friends, of the Lord. As they knew that every believer loved His name, the notion

propagated was wholly astray. It was morally false, as ignoring in the first place His unfailing and perfect love for them.

Therefore he could say, “We beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, nor troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as by us, as that the day of the Lord is present.” Do you not know that Christ is coming for you, and that the first aim and effect of His coming will be your gathering together to meet Him in the air? Why, therefore, be uneasy at such a rumour about His day, with all its awful associations? You have been taught that from God; why be disturbed by this effort of the enemy, who falsely pretends to the Spirit and word, and an alleged letter of mine? That day will fall on the world. Indeed, the apostle had implied in the opening of this epistle, as well as in the latter part of his first, that the day of the Lord does not concern the saints, who were sons of light and of day. They would come accordingly with that day, instead of its overtaking them as a thief by night, because so it comes on whom it may. It comes from the Lord in His execution of judgment on a guilty world; and the very fact of their being sons of light ought to have proved that it cannot surprise such, because they belonged to the region whence it comes.

With striking pithiness he briefly points to the ways of deceit and darkness which accompanied the notion, and betrayed its real source. Truth refuses an admixture of falsehood; and the pretence that any had a spiritual intimation to themselves, or a word for others, that the day of the Lord was really come, was manifestly of the serpent, not of God. Such and so rapid are the steps of

evil, one wrong leading to another. But the allegation that they had the apostle's own authority for the delusion gave him a direct opportunity to contradict the error. "Let no man deceive you by any means: for lit shall not come] unless there shall come the apostasy first, and the man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition." These are two different things. The apostle affirms that the day cannot be before both. Christendom will have abandoned the faith, and the man of sin must be revealed. What a prospect! Do the children of God believe it? We know the world has wholly opposite expectations. Those who allow themselves with so little seriousness to bear the excellent name of the Lord will openly fall away from the confession of the gospel; and then a suited leader into the gulf of perdition will soon appear for the apostates.

I am perfectly persuaded that some of the most important parts of Satan's means of bringing about the apostasy are now actively at work. God has been graciously filling many hearts with joy and comfort of the truth. He has given not a few to believe these words, the moral signs of which are becoming daily more and more manifest. The apostasy again must come, and, in contrast with the man of righteousness, the man of sin be revealed, even the final Judas, "the son of perdition, who opposeth and exalteth himself above every one called God, or an object of veneration; so that he sitteth down in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God." How sharply in contrast with the Lord Jesus, who, though really God, in love became man, in order to accomplish the glorious counsels of God and man's salvation by grace! This one is the son of perdition to the ruin of those who trust him. Although he be but a man,

and the man of sin, he takes the place of being the true God here on earth, and this too, not in the world, but in the temple of God of that time. Thus he not merely takes the place of God here below, but actually as such enters His temple. I do not doubt that the temple will then be in Jerusalem; so that as Christendom began at Jerusalem, the holy city will be its last scene of sinful pride and of divine judgment, though not its only place of judgment. Jerusalem! Rome! — they are two names of most solemn import as to the subject to which I am briefly alluding. "Remember ye not that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time." It is no absolute restraint, but provision only; for he must be revealed in his own season.

The reference to previous teaching left the matter in comparative obscurity, and has given rise to a great deal of discussion. I think the true answer neither difficult nor uncertain. It is evident that what withholds or restrains must be a power superior to man or Satan, and of a nature totally opposite to the man of sin. As this is the embodiment, or rather head, of evil, so that which restrains his revelation would naturally be the power of good which suppresses as long as God pleases the full manifestation of the lawless one. There seems to be a good reason why the matter is put in this general, if not vague, manner. What withholds is presented as a principle or power in an abstract way, and not as a person only. It might, I suppose, assume a different shape at different times.

Thus we find ourselves within narrow limits in order to fix the restraint and the. restrainer. The Thessalonians, who were but young in truth, already knew what

restrains, “that he might be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of iniquity” [or “lawlessness,” which is the true force of the word] “doth already work: only there is one who restraineth now until he be taken away; and then shall the lawless one be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus shall consume with the breath of his mouth, and shall destroy with the appearing of his coming” or presence. Evidently, then, we find here a power that hinders the manifestation of the lawless one — a power which is also a person. Where do we find one that effectually checks the plans of Satan, a person no less than a power? We need not consider long, but answer, without hesitation, the Spirit of God.

Undeniably He is both a power and a person; and save in Him it will be far from easy, if possible, to find an answer that combines these two distinct intimations, as well as both the character and the extent of the power involved. It can hardly be said to be the Spirit of God dwelling in the church, except in the most general way. We must recollect that the Holy Spirit not only dwells there, but also acts providentially in the government of the world. I am far from meaning that, when the church is gone, He will restrain the powers of the world much longer. There are men of the world who have no confidence in its stability; though it exercises no salutary fear over their souls, and they cling to it all the same. I am sure that no Christian man should trust it for a moment. They are not called to promise fair things to that which cast out and slew the Lord of glory. They know that its doom is coming quickly, but not till they have formally rejected the truth, and accepted the man of sin. But no matter what the wicked will of man and the wiles of Satan may be, they will not be able

absolutely to extinguish divinely-controlled government among men as soon as they desire. There is One that still restrains, who could always indeed, but who will cease only when, according to God, the time for the final outburst arrives. It does not, I think, terminate at once, even when the Lord shall have come and taken up His saints, both those that sleep and all those alive and waiting for Him. I say “all,” for, you must remember, it is invariably assumed in scripture that every saint waits for Christ. The notion that a person may be a saint, and not looking for His coming, does not enter into the mind of the Holy Spirit. One may fall, of course, into a wrong state from bad teaching or careless ways; but if Christ is my life and righteousness, I shall surely love Him; and if so, I must want to see and be with Him in the condition of glory, where alone such life and righteousness, and the love that gave them, have their just display and results. Hence it is always assumed that every Christian is, in the knowledge of His love, waiting for Christ to come and receive us to Himself, that we may be with Him in the Father’s house before He executes judgment on the world. Till then the Spirit of God acts as a cheek on the designs of Satan; and even after the church is gone (as I think) He will restrain for a short space.

From the Apocalypse we learn that for a little while God carries out certain agencies of blessing. Not only does He not immediately cease to deal with souls, but we do not at once see either the apostasy or the man of sin. This is a consideration that bears on the question; for undoubtedly it is not the will of man that either sheds blessing on souls or restrains the proudest effort of Satan. After the church is taken up, then the Spirit of God works; and this doubly. He will bring souls into the

knowledge of the testimony that God will then raise up to meet the existing circumstances, for His own glory as well as in His pitiful mercy to man. But, besides, He will even then restrain the powers that be from falling instantaneously into the devices of the devil. At a certain given moment, which the Revelation clearly defines, Satan will be cast down from heaven, and will then bring forward his long-meditated plan. The empire that has disappeared from among men for so long, that the wise men of the world think its resurrection impossible — the Roman empire will come forward clothed with a diabolical energy. This is the moment when the Spirit ceases to restrain.

Accordingly the Western empire will use all its might, and Satan will help it, to establish a politico-religious power in Jerusalem, who will be the head of the Jews, and at the same time the religious chief of the West. Such is the issue of idolatrous Christ-rejecting Judaism and of apostate Christendom. The man of sin will sit and be worshipped as God, in His temple at Jerusalem. This will enable the Roman empire still to carry on its political game of opposition to the Eastern powers. The West, I say, will support and be supported by the Antichrist, and consequently must share in the awful destruction that the Lord will Himself execute when He appears. Angels will do their part, and the breath of the Lord like a stream of brimstone; for they will be caught red-handed in their opposition to the Lamb, little knowing that He is Lord of lords and King of kings. As for the civil and religious leaders, the beast and the false prophet, they will be consigned to everlasting destruction, without even the form of trial. Nothing less awaits these last and seemingly greatest leaders of the

world’s false glory. But, remember, the flower of the West (of these lands that boast of religion, and civilization, and progress) shall perish in this destruction of the revived imperial power and its Jewish ally.

I dare not prophesy smooth things to our own country and race. I believe that all these kingdoms of the West, now so confident in their resources and power, will fall helplessly into the hands of Satan at last. At Jerusalem the man of sin, as at Rome, the civil head of empire, with his confederate but subject kings, will be the two beasts of Rev. 13. It is not the time to enter into further details now; but I may state ray conviction, that the man of sin, whom 2 Thess. shows enthroned in God’s temple, will be the accepted Messiah of the deceived Jews in Jerusalem, as the first beast is the imperial head at Rome; for the civil power will then be separate from the religious, and we all know how ardently men desire this now. But its accomplishment will have results far different from what most look for.

I confess I am struck by the solemn fact, that one cannot speak of these subjects, even at short intervals of time, without perceiving new features which, in principle, bring us more and more up to the brink of the precipice. I do then, from every point of view, warn all those who are looking for bright hopes on the earth, and promising improvement to men. It is serious to observe that the lawless one here described and reserved for such a destiny is related very nearly to the mystery of lawlessness which was then at work, as the apostle let us know, and which has gone on increasing, and is immensely increased now. It is true that the lawless one will not be revealed until the restraint of the Spirit of God over the world is removed. This appears to me to be

the unforced deduction from the apostle's statement, compared with the light thrown on the subject by other Scriptures, which, by common consent, treat of the same time and point. It is the Spirit of God ceasing to restrain in the world as well as in the church, since He will for a brief space both act on souls and restrain Satan in the world, after the church has been caught up to heaven.

This I consider a comprehensive and correct view of what, is revealed. It is put generally here both as "he who withholds" and as "that which withholds." The particular from of withholding power might differ according to varying circumstances. The Christians of old used to think the Roman empire withheld them. Nor was their idea far from the mark; because the empire was assuredly among the powers ordained of God, as I do not doubt emperors, kings, presidents, etc., are still. But the hour hastens when the powers that be will cease to derive their authority from God; when the West above all will openly renounce the true God, and the beast will rise up from the abyss. Our chapter adds a true picture of the extent to which the man of sin will be allowed to go in diabolical imitation of what God wrought by Christ when here below. It is the hour of retribution, when the proud apostates who refused the truth accept and perish in the lie of the enemy. How blessed the lot of the saints which the apostle contrasts with this! (Verses 13-17.)

The next chapter (2 Thess. 3) closes the epistle with divers desires, and a prayer for them that the Lord would direct their hearts into the love of God, and into the patience of Christ. The key-note is thus maintained from first to last. As Christ waits to come, so should we, that we may meet Him then. But the apostle would not have this hope nor the Lord Himself dishonoured by the

reproach of disorderly ways. And thus he nowhere more enjoins the duty of honourable industry, appealing to his own example, than in the epistles which most insist on Christ's coming as the proximate and constant hope of the Christian. If any would pervert such a truth, or any other, to idleness and disorder, he was to be marked as unworthy of Christian companionship, not of course counted an enemy (like the wicked or heretics), but admonished as a brother. Idleness is fruitful of disorder and the foe of peace, which the apostle desired for them from the Lord of peace Himself always and in every way.

May we seriously heed the truth, and its immediate application to our consciences and ways! May God give us quiet energy without restlessness or excitement, but so much the more calmly, because of the realized nearness of the Lord's return, and the solemn consequences for all mankind! Oh for an earnest, burning zeal; for self-denying love; for hearts devoted to Christ, which might warn men of their impending destruction, that, if they have not been won by His love, they may at least tremble at the hopeless inextricable ruin in which their unbelief will soon leave them for ever.

First And Second Timothy

1 Timothy 1. We enter now on the confidential communications of the apostle to some of his fellow-labourers, and tonight on the epistles to Timothy. The two have much in common, but they have also not a little that is distinct. The first epistle is characterized by laying down the order which becomes both individuals and the church of God viewed as His house. We shall find, I trust, how remarkably His care for godly moral order, which descends into the family, into the relations of children and parents, of servants and masters, of man and woman, is also bound up with some of the main doctrines of the epistle. At the same time, while this pertains more particularly to the first epistle, there is a striking expression which meets us on the very threshold, and belongs not merely to these two epistles, but also to that addressed to Titus. God is not here regarded as our Father, but as our Saviour God. We have in harmony with this none of the special privileges of the family of God. The relationships before us wear another character. Thus, we have nothing at all about the body of Christ; we hear nowhere again of the bride of the Lamb; but what tallies with God as a Saviour. It is not Christ our Saviour, though, of course, He is so; but there is broader truth pressed — even of God our Saviour, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

This prepares for much that we shall find. God, as a Saviour God, is certainly in contrast with His dealings under law, or in government. Nevertheless it takes in also His preserving care, which extends far beyond believers, though very especially toward believers. It

embraces also that which is much deeper than presidential care, even the salvation which is in course of accomplishment through Christ. I do not say accomplished; because salvation here, as elsewhere, must not be limited simply to redemption, but goes out into the results of that mighty work on the cross, whereby the soul is kept all the way through the wilderness, and the body of humiliation changed into the likeness of the Lord's glorious body.

Accordingly, Paul introduces himself as the "apostle of Jesus Christ by commandment of God." Authority has a large place in these epistles; thence the apostle shows it was not his writing to his child Timothy in this respect without the Lord. It was not merely love, it was not simply that the Spirit of God empowered him to meet need, but he styles himself in it the "apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God our Saviour, and Christ Jesus, our hope; to Timothy, my true child in faith: grace, mercy, and peace," etc.

Another feature of these epistles meets us in the place which is given to mercy. I do not merely now refer to what has been often observed — the introduction; but we shall find that mercy is wrought into the tissues and substance of the epistle. Mercy supposes the need, the constant wants, the difficulties, the dangers, of the saints of God. It supposes also that God is acting in love, and in full view of these difficulties. Hence we find that, while there is jealous care, there is also a remarkable tenderness, which appears every now and then, in these epistles; and this is just and beautiful in its season. The apostle was drawing toward the close of his career, and (although all be inspired, and he was a rare jewel even among the apostles) there is, I am persuaded, an

evidence of a tone more suitable to the growing trials and necessities of the saints of God; a tenderness towards those that were faithful and tried, that is far more manifest here than in the earlier epistles. I do not say that all was not in its due time and measure, but we can well understand it. As a faithful servant, he had been for many years not only leading on, but sharing too the hardest of the fight, and had gone through perils such as had left many of his companions behind. Shame, afflictions, persecutions, the enticements of Satan too, had drawn away some that had been in the foremost ranks of old. He was now left with comparatively few of the familiar faces of those he had loved and laboured with so long.

We can easily understand, then, how calculated such circumstances were to draw out the expression of a love that was always there, but that would be in a more comely and suitable manner expressed at such a conjuncture of circumstances. This we shall find in these epistles. He writes to Timothy as his genuine child; it is not at all the usual way in the earlier epistles. It was his Bethany, Here and now was the opening of that long pent-up heart. At the same time he was also laying an important commission on one that was raised up of God for the purpose, who was comparatively young, who would soon have to fight his way without the sympathy and the countenance of one that had been so blest to him. Hence he says here," Grace, mercy, and peace." He felt his need, but certainly the mercy was not lacking in God, but rich and ready to flow. "Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord. As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when. I went into Macedonia." We see the love that even an

apostle adopts towards his child in faith. It was not at all a peremptory word, though full of earnest desire for the work of the Lord. He wishes Timothy to stay, “that thou mightest charge some not to be teachers of other doctrine, nor to give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than God’s administration1 which is in faith.”

Then he explains what the nature of this charge was. Often, I fear, “commandment” gives the English reader a wrong impression. I do not say that “commandment” is not correct, but that so naturally do people in Christendom turn to what we call the Ten Commandments, or ten words of the law, that whenever the word “commandment” occurs, you may expect many, even children of God, who might and ought to know better, at once unconsciously turning back to the law. But so far was this from being the writer’s thought here, that we shall find him in a moment deprecating most strongly that whole system of idea as a misuse of the law. What the apostle means by the commandment is the charge that he was laying on his child in the faith and fellow-labourer Timothy. The end of the charge or commandment “is love out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.” It was, in point of fact, not merely that charge that he was giving him, but the charge touched the truth of the gospel; it was the care of the faith, jealousy for the revelation of God Himself, our Saviour God in Christ. The end of all this was “love, and a good conscience, and faith unfeigned.” And so then, as remarked already, far from leaving the smallest reason for any perversely to confound this with the law, the apostle instantly turns to that perverting of the law, which is so natural to the heart of man. “From

which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling; desiring to be law-teachers; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm;" and thereupon he parenthetically, as disposing of this matter, shows what the lawful use of the law is. They were not to suppose that he meant that God could make anything without a real use. As there is no creature of God that has not its value, so certainly the law of God has its right field of application, and its own proper use. Thus he vindicates God in what He has given, as well as afterwards in what He has made, and nowhere so much as in this epistle do we find this.

At the same time it is evident that he consigns the law to what we may call a comparatively negative use. The use of the law is to condemn, to kill, to deal with evil. This never could be the full expression of God. It does keep up a witness to God's hatred of evil no doubt; those that are presumptuous it leaves without excuse. But a Christian, who takes up the law as the rule of his own life, must in the very first instance give up his place as being in Christ, and abandon that righteousness of God which he is made in Him. The law was not enacted for the Christian. It is not, of course, that any Christian deliberately intends such folly; but this is really what the error implies. The very principle of taking the law for himself is the abandonment (without knowing or intending it) of all his blessing in Christ. To apply it thus is ignorance of the mind of God It was never designed for such a purpose. But there remains the lawful use of the law. It was made not for the righteous, but for an unrighteous man. Clearly what Satan here aimed at was to put the saints under the law. But the apostle will not hear of it, treating it as simply condemnatory of the bad,

and in no way either the power or the rule of what is good for the believer. “Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for lawless and disobedient, for ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for smiters of fathers and smiters of mothers, for manslayers, for whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine.”

A weighty sentence, and eminently characteristic also of these epistles. The time was appropriate for it. The saints (at Ephesus especially) had heard a great deal of heavenly truth. There was also an effort, as we see, to correct what was supposed to be a defect, in those that were living on heavenly fare, by supplementing their truth with the law. But this is all wrong, cries the apostle. It is an unwitting denial not only of Christians, but even of your place as righteous men. Very different from this is the true and divine principle. But “sound doctrine” is brought in here; and we shall see how very beautifully this is applied in the epistle at a later point. For a moment he just touches on the wholesome thought, then turns to a higher one. There is in Christ that which lifts entirely out of nature, and puts one before God according to all that is in his heart — his counsels of glory for us in Christ. In fact, immediately after this he calls what he preached the “gospel of the glory” (“the glorious gospel,” as it is styled in our version,) “of the blessed God.” “According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust.” He takes great pains to show that no glory that is revealed in Christ, no blessedness in our total clearance from flesh, no setting of the believer

free before God in Christ Jesus, impairs, but, on the contrary, gives importance to “sound doctrine.”

By “sound doctrine” we shall find that he brings in the nicest care for the least relations of this life, as flowing from the grace and truth of God. This is the true guard against an abuse of heavenly truth; not putting persons under law, which is inevitable bondage and condemnation, that brings no glory to God, nor power or holiness to the man. But at the same time heavenly truth, so far from being inconsistent, never shines so much as when it is seen in the smallest details of walk in the home, in the family, in the ordinary occupation, in the bearing and tone of a man in his life day by day. It is not merely in the assembly; neither is it in worship only; it is not certainly in ministerial work alone, but in the quiet home. The relationship of a servant to his master gives a blessed opportunity in its place for showing out what the truth of the glory is to faith, and what the strength of the grace which is come to man in Christ the Lord. This is what we shall find in these epistles to Timothy — that the apostle combines in his own wonderful way his reference to ordinary duty, and even enters into the smallest matters of this life, according to the gospel of the glory of the blessed God. He refers to his own case; for he was so much the better a preacher of the gospel, because he so deeply felt himself an object of the grace of God, who revealed it in Christ to him. What can be conceived more remarkably characteristic of the man? The bearing of the passage is therefore intensely personal and practical. “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, appointing me unto ministry.” He does not forget this, but he takes care to assert another

and a far nearer and more immediate want — “who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and insolent: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.”

This accordingly brings out a statement of the gospel: “Faithful is the word, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy.” It is always mercy, as may be observed. It is not so much a question of righteousness; justification is not here prominent, as in other epistles. “I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.” This draws out his ascription of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord; and then he repeats the words of the fifth verse: “This charge I commit unto thee.” It is not the law, nor any supposed adaptation of it, to direct the path of those who receive the gospel. “This charge,” he maintains, is the commandment of our Saviour God. It is that which He is sending out now, and nothing else. “This charge I commit to thee, child Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou mightest war the good warfare; holding faith, and a good conscience, which some having put away, concerning, faith have made shipwreck.”

There again we find the same mingling of the faith and good conscience as we had earlier. Some having put away, not the faith, but a good conscience, made shipwreck of the faith. Thus, no matter what you may hold or appear to delight in, abandoning jealousy over your ways, giving up self-judgment in the great or small

matters which each day brings before us, is fatal. It may be a very little sin that is allowed, but this, where it is unjudged in God's sight, becomes the beginning of a very great evil. Having put away a good conscience, their ship no longer answers the helm, and as to faith they make shipwreck: "of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may be instructed not to blaspheme." Satan's power is regarded and really is in the outside world. The apostle had delivered these men to him. The power to torment and harass the soul with fears does not belong to the house of God, where, as we shall find, His presence is known, and this is incompatible with fear, with doubt, with question of acceptance and of blessing in His sight. The apostle had given up to the enemy these men, who had abandoned all that was holy, not only in practice, but also afterwards, as a consequence, in faith. They were consigned to Satan, not necessarily to be lost — surely not; but that they might be so troubled, by proving what the power of Satan is by the flesh, and in the world, that they might be thus brought back broken in all their bones, and glad to find a refuge again in the house of God. Better surely not to need such discipline; but, if we do need it, how precious to know that God turns it to account in His grace, that they might be thoroughly dealt with and exercised in the conscience!

In the next chapter (1 Tim. 2) the apostle carries on his care as to what was becoming. This, you will find, is a main topic of the epistle. It is not merely instruction for saints, or conversion of sinners, but also the comeliness that belongs to the saints of God — their right attitude toward those without as well as those within. In it we begin with what is toward those in authority, that are

without. “I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and givings of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in eminence; that we may pass a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and gravity.” May it not be a question whether we are sufficiently careful and exercised in heart, as to that which becomes us in this respect? Do we really enter on our due place of intercession, and exercise that which becomes us before God, as having so blessed a function — the mind of God in this world, and care for those that seem to be outside our reach? But in truth to stand in this world in known and near relationship with a Saviour God, with One that we know, at once brings before us also those that are outside. Christianity fosters no spirit of harsh: unruly independence. And what then becomes us in respect of them? Prayer, intercession, even for the highest, let them be kings or in eminence; they need it most. Nothing but the strong sense of the infinite blessing of the place that grace has given us could lead to or keep up such prayer. But sometimes we are apt to settle down in the enjoyment of the grace, without reflecting on that which becomes us as to those outside it. From pre-occupation within, how often we forget those without!

But the reason goes deeper. “For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; who desires that all men should be saved:” speaking now of His gracious willingness. Not His counsels but His nature rises before us. We must be blind if we fail to see that a great point in these epistles is the good and loving nature of God, that would have us look at all men without exception. It is another thine, how far the counsels of God work, how far the effectual work of His

grace is applied; but nothing alters God's nature. And this is true both in the spirit of grace that becomes the saints, and also in their zealous care for the glory of God. Hence he says: "There is one God, and one mediator between God and men." This is always the ground and character of the First and Second of Timothy. It is not the Father and His family; it is God and man. And it is not merely God as He once dealt with Israel, for then this Mediator was not. There was a promise, but the Mediator of grace was not come. But now, apart from the heavenly relations that are ours, and much that we know and enjoy by the Holy Ghost in our hearts here below, there is this that needs to be looked after and maintained, that is, the public character — if we may so speak — of the Christian, and that which belongs to him thus broadly before men. It is the testimony of God as a Saviour God, of a God that has to do with men. Accordingly He has revealed Himself in a Mediator. Thus he speaks of Him: "There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, the testimony in its own season. Whereunto I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I speak the truth in Christ, and lie not), a teacher of Gentiles in faith and truth."

His general exhortation is pursued, but still in view of the due and decent outward order, of that which met the eye even of an unconverted person. "I will therefore that the men" — that is, not women — "that the men pray in every place, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and disputing." There are occasions and places where it would be wholly unsuitable for women to speak, but as to men they pray everywhere. There is no place where it is not in season, but let it be "without wrath and

disputing." or "reasoning." Either would be altogether opposed to the spirit of prayer. Prayer is the expression of dependence on God; and wrangling on the one hand, and all angry feeling on the other, even supposing it might have some righteousness about it, still are unsuitable to prayer. Thus, what may have its place may really be uncomely in drawing near to God. A spirit of reasoning would be quite as out of place.

But with regard to woman he says, "In like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in orderly guise, with modesty and sobriety; not with plaits and gold, or pearls, or costly array." It does not matter what may be the particular taste and habits of the day or of the country, the Christian woman, as much as the Christian man, ought to be above the age, and unlike the world. And indeed it is this very want that he here takes occasion to connect with Christianity itself in its outward order before man; so that we may truly desire that our Saviour God should not lose, as it were, His character in and by His people; for this is the great point that the apostle is so full of in these epistles. Such is the way in which a woman can contribute to a right and godly testimony as well as a man.

But he pursues it a little more. He says, "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man." In truth he really goes somewhat beyond this. A woman might say, "I do not usurp authority; I only exercise it." But this precisely is what is wrong. It is forbidden to be exercised. Nothing therefore can be more exclusive. It does not matter, if the man may be weak and the woman strong; it would have been better they had thought of this before they became husband and wife. But even

thus no excuse avails; the woman is not to exercise authority over the man; nor (need I add?) in any other relationship. For this he traces things to their roots. “Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being quite deceived was in transgression.” That is, he decides things with that marvellous power which God gave him beyond any of the other apostles of tracking the stream to its source, both in man and to God; and this ruling of the case he deduces from the unquestionable facts of the beginning of divine history as to the man and woman. The man was not deceived, in a certain sense: so much the worse; he was a bold sinner. The woman was weak and misled by the serpent; the man deliberately did what he did — with his eyes open. Adam sinned against God knowingly. Of course it was dreadful and ruinous; nevertheless this shows the difference in their character from the outset. Men as a class are not so liable to be deceived as woman She is more open to be taken in by appearance. The man may be ruder and worse — bolder in his sin, but still the Lord remembers this even to the last. At the same time the apostle mingles this with that which is the lot of women here below: “But she shall be preserved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.” It is not merely if “she,” but if “they” continue. How serious is the word for both man and woman! In the government of God He mingles the most solemn things with that which is the most thoroughly personal, showing how He would have the conscience exercised, and jealous care even on such a matter as this. I do not agree with those who refer the childbearing to the Incarnation.

And now he comes (1 Tim. 3), not so much to comely order as to the outside, or as to the relation of man and woman, but to the ordinary governments and helps of the saints. He takes up what was of a graver kind, and touching more on spiritual things, namely, bishops (or elders); then deacons; and this leads him naturally to the house of God. “Faithful is the word, If any one aspireth to oversight, he desireth a good work. The overseer then must be blameless, husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; not given to wine, no striker; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity.” It is plain that this is not at all a question of spiritual gift. One might be endowed with a good gift and yet not have a well-regulated house. Perhaps the wife might not behave properly, or the children be unruly: no matter what his gift, if the wife, or the family were a dishonour, he could not be an overseer (for this is the simple and true meaning of bishop”).

In early days persons were brought in to the confession of Christ who had been Pagans, and trained up in its habits. Some of these had more than one wife. A true and gifted Christian one might be; but if such were his unhappy position, he was precluded from exercising formal oversight. The evil of polygamy could not be corrected at that time by strong measures. (Since then in Christendom it is dealt with as criminal.) To dismiss his wives would be wrong. But the Holy Spirit by such an injunction applied a principle which was destined to undermine, as in fact it did undermine, polygamy in every form. There was a manifest censure conveyed in the fact, that a man with two or more wives could not be

set in the charge of elder or deacon. A man was not refused as a confessor of Christ, nor was he forbidden to preach the gospel, because such might have been his sad circumstances at home. If the Lord called him by His grace, or gave him as a gift to the church, the church bowed, But an elder or bishop was to be one that not only had a suitable gift for his work, but also in the family or in his circumstances must be free from all appearance of scandal on the name of the Lord. He must have a good report, and be morally irreproachable in himself and his household. There might be trial or sorrow, — few families were without both; but what is spoken of here is something that damaged the public repute of the. assembly. For this very reason the grand point for local oversight was moral weight. It was not only the ability to inform, counsel, or rebuke, but in order to do all this efficiently a certain godly influence proved at home and abroad. In the practical difficulties with which an elder or bishop would be called to interfere continually in an assembly, there should never be room for those whose conduct might be in question to point to flaws in his own home, or in his own open life and spirit. Thus wisely and holily did the Spirit demand that he should be a person of good report himself, that neither past ways nor present habits should in the least degree compromise the office; and again, with a stainless reputation as well as a man of some spiritual experience in his family — “one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.” These things would not apply to a man’s ministry in the word. A Christian may begin to preach almost as soon as he believed the word of truth, the gospel of salvation; but for one to be

clothed with a public and responsible place as elder in an assembly is another thing altogether.

As a rule the apostle never appointed persons elders directly after they were converted. A certain time was needful for the Spirit of God to work in the soul, and discipline them in the midst of their brethren. They would then and thus manifest certain capabilities and moral qualities, and acquire weight, which would make them respected and valued, besides gaining experience in godly care for the well-being of the saints of God. All these things, where there were circumstantial requisites, relative and personal suitability, would mark out a person for this office.

Besides, though this is not said here, in order to be an overseer, one must be appointed by a valid authority; and the only one recognised by Scripture is an apostle or an apostolic delegate. Thus the Christians that a superficial. observer of the present day might tax with inattention to godly order in these respects are in truth those alone who are really adhering to it. For manifestly to set up men in such a position of charge without a proper validating authority is really to vitiate all in its very springs. Those who refuse to exceed their powers are clearly in the right, — not those who imitate the apostles without warrant from the Lord. I am perfectly satisfied therefore that those now gathered to His name have been mercifully and truly led of God in not presuming to appoint elders or bishops. They do not possess the needful authority more than others; and there they stop, using, and blessing God for, such things as they have. Appointment must always raise the question, who they are that appoint. And it is impossible for an honest man of intelligence to find a scriptural

answer, so as to sanction those who pretend to ordain, or those who claim to be duly ordained, in Christendom. There was no difficulty in primitive days. Here indeed (if we except a debatable allusion in another place) the apostle does not touch the subject of appointment as he does to Titus. He merely puts before Timothy the qualities requisite for both the local charges.

After the overseers he turns to the deacons. “Likewise must the deacons be grave, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proved.” The modern deacon in the larger and national bodies has no resemblance to this, and is indeed an unmeaning form. It is a mere noviciate for the so-called presbyters who compose the body of the clergy. Of old no inexperienced man ought to have been in such a position. Even though it was a function about outward things, still they were to be first proved. “Then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless. Even so must their wives be grave.” It is plain on the face of it that this is more particularly insisted on for the deacons than for the elders. The reason was, that as the deacons had to do more with externals, there was greater danger of their wives making mischief and heart-burning. They might interfere with these matters, which we know are apt to gender strife, as they cast a gloom over the Pentecostal Church at an early day. There was not the same temptation for the wives of the elders or overseers. Hence it is written here, “Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife.” In this we find the same thing as was said of the elders: both must

rule their children and their own houses well. “For they that have served well purchase to themselves a good degree, and much boldness in faith which is in Christ Jesus.”

Then the apostle sums up these regulations, and says, These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: but if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God,” (may we, too, profit by his words, beloved brethren!) “which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.” The church is the guardian of the truth, its sole responsible witness on the earth. The church owes all in the grace of our Lord Jesus to the truth. It may not be competent to define the truth: inspired men have done so. At the same time it is bound to hold forth God’s word as the truth, and to allow nothing inconsistent with it in the doctrine or ways of the assembly. For we are called to be a manifestation of the truth before the world, even of that which goes beyond that of which the church is the embodiment. The acts done should always be an expression of the truth. It is a most important duty, therefore, and one requiring continual watchfulness. God alone can vouchsafe or keep it good.

Truly, there are often difficulties that arise in the church of God, and prudence might suggest many plans to meet the difficulty; but then it is the house of God, not merely the house of the prudent or the good. It is a divine institution. It has nothing in common with well-intentioned men doing their best. Let the matter be ever so simple, whether it be a question of discipline or order, it should express the truth of God applied to the case. This shows the exceeding solemnity of either advising or

resisting any course that might be the will of God in any particular matter. Excellent desires, zeal, honesty, are in no way sufficient for the purpose. God can employ the most feeble member of the assembly; but still ordinarily one looks for better guides. One might expect that while God would give no allowance to a man presuming on gift or experience, — because the moment you begin to assume to yourself or to others, there is danger, — but nevertheless, surely one might expect that God would, by suitable means, bring out that which is wholesome, and true, and godly — in short, what would express His own mind on any given subject.

These are among the reasons why the apostle maintains it here. We have it viewed in its outward comely order in this world, but the principle of the maintenance of this, and nothing less than this, always remains true. No renewed state gives any reason for abandoning it. The great thing is never to let details swamp the principle. There is always a way for those who, consciously weak, distrust themselves; and this is to wait, to refuse to act until God shows His way. Faith waits till it gets a distinct word from God. No doubt it is hard to be at one's wits' end, but it is a good thing for the soul. So here: he bids Timothy to take heed to these things, in case he himself tarried.

And what is that truth especially which characterizes the church? This is another instance of the tone of the epistle. "Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness." Mark the expression "mystery of godliness," or piety. It is not simply the mystery of Christ in the church, but the "mystery of godliness." "God2 was manifested in flesh, was justified in Spirit, was seen of angels, was preached among Gentiles, was believed on

in [the] world, was received up in glory." It is not God reigning over a people here below. This was no mystery, but the wonted expectation of all Israel, indeed, of saints before Israel. They expected the Messiah, the Redeemer to come, the One that would make good the promises of God. But now "God was manifested in flesh, was justified in Spirit." The power of the Holy Ghost had shown itself all through His life, had been proved to the uttermost in His death, and now marked Him out as Son of God in resurrection. He was "seen of angels," not of man alone; He was "preached among Gentiles," instead of being found on a throne amongst the Jews; He was "believed on in the world," instead of manifestly governing it by power. Another state of things altogether is present: it is Christianity; but Christianity viewed in the person of Christ Himself, in the grand bearings of His own person and His work; not as forming a heavenly body, nor even pursuing the special privileges of the habitation of God through the Spirit; but laying the foundation for the house of God, as the scene and support of His truth and moral order before the world. The whole matter is closed by Jesus, not only "believed on in the world," but "received up in glory."

Now what is the reason why this is brought in here? It seems to be set in contrast with the speculations of men (1 Tim. 4) who wanted to interweave with Christianity certain dreams of a fancied spirituality above the gospel. What was this scheme? They fancied that the gospel would be a still better system if the converts would eat no meat; if they would not marry, and so on. This was their notion of bringing in some "higher life," superior to anything that the apostles had taught How does he meet them? He shows here the "mystery of godliness;" but

along with this, and immediately after it, he brings in the most necessary fundamental truth. This is the point that has much struck my mind in speaking of 1 Timothy at this time.

That is to say, there is a combination of God's revelation in Christ, in most essential and even lofty features, with the plainest and simplest truth of God as to creation. Now, you will find that the way in which false doctrine enters habitually is in contrast with this. Men thus break down, who despise common duties; they are far too good or too great for occupying themselves with the homely things that become a Christian man or woman. They may perhaps weave the love of Christ (we will suppose) into some high-flown speculations; but they set aside that which connects itself every day with moral propriety. Oh, how often this has been the case! how one could easily recount one name after another, if it would become any so to do! Such then is the way in which error is prone to show itself. The man who most of all brings out what is heavenly and divine is he who should be devoted and obedient in the simplest duties of every day. This very epistle is the witness of it. Whereas the moment one sanctions the principle of making little of the family relations, setting aside duty, neglecting it personally, and making it even a boast to do so, as if jealousy for the Lord's glory were mere legalism, the result will be that, while they set aside the common claims of every day's duty, the conscience is ruined, and shipwreck of the faith is inevitable. They first cast aside a good conscience, and then the faith itself comes to nothing.

Thus the apostle brings the reader into close juxtaposition with the mystery of godliness, or, as it is

emphatically called, the mystery of piety. The glorious person of Christ is traced through from His manifestation in flesh, or incarnation, until He is beheld "received up in glory." The work of God proceeds in the church on earth founded on this. In contrast with it 1 Timothy 4 follows up: "But the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of demons; in hypocrisy of liars, cauterised in their own conscience, forbidding to marry, [bidding] to abstain from meats, which God created to be received with thanksgiving of those that are faithful and know the truth." Some necessary changes are here made, so as to convey what seems to me the meaning. Then he proceeds: "For every creature of God is good," etc. We can hardly descend to anything lowlier than this.

But these airy speculators had completely forgotten God. They despised the simple self-evident truth that every creature of God is good. So, too, we see that they put a disparagement on the basis of family life, and the social system — marriage. Not to marry through devotedness to God's work may be right and most blessed; but here it was a pretension to superior sanctity. As a principle and practice, Christian people were urged not to marry at all. Now the moment that this ground is taken, the same apostle who tells us what he believed to be the best thing. (namely, to be free from fresh ties, so as to care only for the Lord), defends resolutely the sanctity of marriage, and resents the blow struck at the creatures of God. It was really a slight of His outward love, and of His providential arrangements. Danger threatens wherever there is a virtual setting aside of God's rights, no matter what the plea. Oriental

philosophy, which tinctured some of the Greeks, fostered these high soarings of men. As usual, Paul brings in God, and the dream is dissipated. The moment you use anything so as to set aside the plain duty of every day, you prove yourself to be losing the faith, to have slipped from a good conscience, to have fallen a victim to the enemy's deceits; and what will be the end of it?

The apostle then gives personal counsel to Timothy, of a very salutary character. As he also desires that none should despise his youth, so he urges that he should be a model of the believers, in word, conversation, love, faith, and purity. He was to give himself to reading, to exhortation, to teaching, and not to neglect his gift, given him through prophecy, in the imposition of the hands of the presbytery or elderhood. Nothing simpler, nor more wholesome. It might have been thought that one so specially endowed as Timothy was not called to occupy himself thus, and be wholly in them, that his profiting should appear to all. But no; grace and gift create a corresponding responsibility, instead of absolving from it. Timothy must give heed to himself, as well as to the teaching; and he must continue in them, instead of relaxing after a rigorous beginning. Depend upon it that those who seek to give out had better take care that they take in; that both labourers and those laboured amongst may ever grow in the truth. Doing thus, Timothy would save both himself and those that heard him.

In 1 Timothy 5 the apostle gives needful directions to Timothy as regards an elder. He was not to be rebuked sharply, but to be entreated as a father. Undoubtedly Timothy stood in a prominent place of trust and service; but this gave no exemption from the comeliness that

becomes every one — especially a young man. The apostle had maintained his post of honour in the preceding chapter; now he will not let him forget the due consideration of others. How often does over-frankness drop words which rankle in the memory of an elder, easily floated over when love flows freely, but when it ebbs, an occasion of shipwreck! Again, “younger men as brethren; the elder women as mothers; the younger as sisters, with all purity.” Nothing more beautiful, more tender, more holy; nothing more calculated to edify and cement the saints to the glory of God, whilst His wisdom enters into all circumstances with an easy elasticity which is characteristic of His grace.

So too we find divinely-furnished regulations as to those who ought to be chargeable to the assembly — what was right in the case of the younger widows — what was desirable as to younger women in general; and then again the obligations toward elders, not now when faulty, but in their ordinary functions and service. “Let the elders that preside well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.” But what if they were charged with wrong? “Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.” Prejudice and partiality must be eschewed at all cost. Finally, care, must be taken to avoid any compromise of the name of the Lord. Thus the well-known sign of blessing in the outward act of laying on hands was to be done circumspectly. “Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men’s sins: keep thyself pure.”

There is condescension even to so small a point seemingly as to tell him not to be a water-drinker. It would seem that Timothy's scrupulous conscience felt the dreadful habits of those times and lands so as to bring him into bondage but the apostle, not in a mere private note, but in the body of the inspired letter itself, sets aside his scruples, and bids him "use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities." I am aware that men have cavilled at this, yielding to their own thoughts of what they deem fit subjects for the pen of inspiration; but if we exclude anything whatever from the range of the Spirit of God, we make it to be merely a question of the will of man. And what must issue from this? There is nothing either too great or too little for the Holy Spirit. Is there anything that may not, that ought not, to be a question of doing God's will? Thus, if a person takes wine, or anything else, except to please God, and is not in danger on the score of morality, certainly he has lost all adequate sense of his own place as a witness of the glory of God. How happy ought we to be that God gives us perfect liberty! only let us see to it that we use it solely for His praise.

In the last chapter (1 Tim. 6) comes the question of servants and their masters, which also it was important to regulate; for we all know that a servant might turn to a selfish account that his master and himself were brethren in Christ. It is all very well for the master to say so; and certainly he should never act without bearing in mind his own spiritual relationship to his servant; but I do not think it becomes a servant to say "brother" to his master. My business is to know him as my master. No doubt it would be grace on his part to own me as his brother. Everything therefore where

grace is at work will be found to have its blessed place. Whoever thought differently (and such have never been wanting) was puffed up, and could only suggest evil.

Then he touches on the value of piety with a contented mind in contrast with the love of money, and its various snares in this age as in all that are past. These things will be found dealt with successively, until at last the apostle calls on the man of God to flee these things himself, and to pursue the path of righteousness, etc., as well as strive in the good combat of faith; otherwise a man of God was in no degree free from danger. He was to lay hold of eternal life, to which he had been called, and had confessed the good confession before many witnesses, and this in view of the great event which will display our fidelity or the lack of it — the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which in its own time the blessed and only Potentate shall show. At the same time he calls on him to charge them that are rich neither to be high-minded nor rely on aught so uncertain. What would give weight to the charge? That he was above such desires himself, trusting in the living God, who affords us all things richly for enjoyment. Let them be rich in good works, liberal in distributing, ready to communicate, laying up for themselves a good foundation for the future, that they may lay hold of what is really life. “O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of false-named knowledge, which some professing have erred concerning the faith. Grace be with thee.”

2 Timothy

Turning to the SECOND EPISTLE, we find that, although there is the same grand truth of the Saviour God

maintained, the state of things had become sensibly worse, and the hour for the apostle's departure from the world was drawing near. Accordingly, there is a depth of feeling that one may safely say far exceeds the first epistle, although it had shown so much tenderness and care both for Timothy and the faithful of those days. But now there were other reasons for it, namely, that Christians were neglecting godliness and order. They had been long accustomed to the truth, and alas! human nature began to show itself out in indifference. There was no longer the freshness of a new thing; and where the heart was not kept up in communion with the Lord, the value of divine things was less felt, if it did not quite fade away. Accordingly, in much grief of heart, the apostle writes to his tried and trembling child in the faith, and seeks to strengthen him, above all things not to be discouraged, and to make up his mind to endure hard things. "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, according to the promise." (2 Tim. 1:1.) It is not "the commandment," as of authority, but "according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus." The crumbling away of everything here was before the apostle; and accordingly it is one of the peculiar features of this second epistle, that he brings out that which never can decay — which was before there was a world to dissolve — namely, that life which was in Christ Jesus before the world began.

Thus the apostle comes to the close of his ministry, and touches upon the line of St. John. There is no part of John's doctrine more strikingly characteristic than life in Christ. Now we see that when Paul was touching the confines of that difficult and most perilous moment when John was to be left alone, he brings out as his last note

that very truth which John was to develop with special care and fulness. “To Timothy, my dearly-beloved child: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers,” — what singular language this from Paul! How comes it so? Paul “the aged,” as he says, was just about to leave this world. Activity of service was no longer before him. This he had known most extensively, but it was closed; no longer had he before him any prospect of having to fight the battles of the church of God. He had fought the good fight of faith. Others must do that kind of work in future. But now before his heart — just as in principle before the dying Lord Himself, wonderful to say — two things come together: a deeper sense of what is in God, as revealed in Christ Himself, before there was any creation at all; and on the other hand so much the deeper sense also of what could be owned in nature. Now these seem to many very difficult indeed to combine. They appear to think that if you hold life in Christ to be the one thing that is most precious, to be the prize that your heart reverts to, all owning of anything short of this would be out of place; but it is exactly the contrary. When the Lord was entering on His ministry He says, “Woman, what have I to do with thee?” But when dying upon the cross, He calls to John to behold His mother. We find a precisely similar kind of combination in Paul. Of course it was infinitely higher, it is needless to say, in the Master; but the servant was as closely as possible following in His steps.

It is beautiful to trace this double working and current of the apostle — that is, what is imperishable, above and beyond nature; and, along with this, the utmost value put on everything that he would own in those naturally

bound up with him — those of either family that feared God. “I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers, with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day, greatly desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears.” He had not said a word about them before. There was infirmity in the character of Timothy. There might be a mixture of timid shrinking from pain and shame. He was one that needed to lean on an arm stronger than his own. It was a part of his lot. Thus it was that God had made him: there was no use denying it. But the apostle at the same time owns, and loves to own, that which another might perhaps despise. There was no despising natural links or spiritual here, far from it.

Timothy, again, winced under trials, — too sensitive to slights, disappointments, and the manifold griefs that came upon him. But the apostle remembered it all, felt deeply for if not with him, and greatly desiring to see him once more. His own desire after going to the Lord did not prevent this, but the reverse: “that I may be filled with joy: when I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also.” I refer to this just to remark that such links as these, which are connected with nature, all come before the apostle’s mind, at the very moment when a spurious feeling would have judged it precisely the time to banish and forget them. There are persons who think that the approach of death is intended to blot out everything here. Not so the apostle Paul. In that large heart which weighed so justly and with single eye, there was a deepening feeling as to all that he saw around him; there was a realizing of the

importance of things of which he had said not a word before. For him the light of eternity already shone strongly on present things, instead of taking him completely out of them. And this, I believe, is much to be considered.

“I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands. For God hath not given us the spirit of fear” (it was what Timothy was manifesting), “but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord” (there must, I suppose, have been some ground for the exhortation), “nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel, according to the power of God; who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.” Here we have him recurring to that which was entirely outside nature, and before its very platform existed. At the same time there is the carrying on his full notice of everything found here below that would be a source of comfort to one who anticipated the ruin of Christendom.

Afterwards he also speaks of his own work and of that which he was suffering. Instead of hiding either from Timothy, he points all out to him. He wants to accustom his mind to expect hardship instead of shirking it. He tells him further to “hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us.” At the same time he shows also his sense of the kindness of a particular individual and his family. “The Lord give

mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain; but, when. he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently, and found me." It appears it was not merely in Rome. "The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day." The same tone of mercy is equally promised in this #epistle as in the last. "And in how many things he ministered unto me at Ephesus, thou knowest very well."

In the second chapter he turns to another theme, he instructs and exhorts Timothy as to communicating (not authority, or status, or gift, but) truth to others. It is not a question here about elders, but what would abide all the same when elders could not be duly appointed. He is now looking at the state of disorder in the house of God, instead of contemplating it in its public integrity, as in the first epistle. There was a state of things coming when it would be impossible to have local charges chosen according to the full sanction which they had in apostolic days. Indeed it may be well to remark here, that we never read of Timothy appointing bishops or elders. Possibly he did appoint them; but there is no scriptural proof of it. Titus, we know, did so; but God took care that it should never be positively stated about Timothy. The peculiar task confided to the latter was care of doctrine much more than of outward order. As far as appointment went, Titus had a commission to establish elders in each city of Crete; but not so Timothy, as far as the inspired records speak.

"Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men." (2 Tim. 2:1.) We must not be afraid of a

manifest duty because it has been abused. There are those who shrink from helping on others in order to the work and doctrine of the Lord. This I cannot but consider as a proof of want of faith. What is a man well taught in the truth for, if not to communicate his knowledge to others that are faithful, but not equally instructed in the word of God? Surely if it is an urgent call to convey what we know of Christ and the truth to those that know nothing, it is a great privilege to help to contribute a greater knowledge of the truth to those that know little. The great thing is to do the will of God, let others say what they please; and so the apostle Paul exhorts Timothy. It is to be supposed that the younger labourer cowered somewhat, unwilling to incur the odious charge, so easily made but hard to refute, of setting himself up and taking the place of some great one. This might deter a sensitive saint from his duty. But, says the apostle, “be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.” This was to touch the right chord in his heart. Had the Lord Jesus not sent him? Why then yield to the enemy? Assuredly he would rejoice to scare Timothy from the field of serving Christ, and would shrink from no means to secure it.

“And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.” He would not have him to be spreading doubtful opinions; but what he had heard from the apostle himself he need not scruple to give out freely. Let me remark, that there are comparatively few indeed that receive truth without help of others directly from God. A great many certainly flatter themselves that they are thus favoured; but the cases are uncommon where it is more than pretence.

The fact is that God loves to make His children mutually dependent; and if we are only humble, there are very few saints from whom we may not derive some good, though not always in the same way. Nor do I at all see that any Christians should be above learning, if others can teach. At any rate the apostle presses this very strongly on Timothy. He was to communicate the things he had learnt of Paul, that they might be able to teach others also.

Next he comes to a more personal need. “Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.” To take pains and to endure are requisite even in what pertains to this life. “No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life” (he must be unencumbered, and undivided in his object); “that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier. And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully.” He must take care of the manner in which he strives. And then again “the husbandman that laboureth must be first partaker of the fruits.” Rather he must “labour before he partake of the fruits.” That is, he must first labour, and then partake of the fruits. God takes care of His people, and ensures them a blessed end. At the same time He will have them undividedly for Himself; and He is also jealous of the way in which they seek even the ends of God.

Then the apostle puts before them a blessed model of that which he had before his own soul. “Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things. Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel.” This is a very striking word. For he does not say Jesus Christ simply in. His connection with the church, but “of the

seed of David," the fulfiller of the promises, and object of the prophecies. Even if we look at Him so, He was raised from the dead. Resurrection is the form and character of the lowest blessings of which Jesus is the dispenser; much more is He risen to exalt God in the highest. Death and resurrection, then, are thus put before this servant of God; the more remarkably, because the point here is a practical and not a doctrinal question. He was to remember, then, "that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel: wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil-doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound." Paul suffered as he taught: a single eye to Christ and His grace made him consistent. "Put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit but to the subverting of the hearers. Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane and vain babblings."

It was thus Paul treated the proud reasonings and speculations of man; withal briefly touching on those that had gone entirely astray — Hymenaeus and Philetus. It was not merely now that they had made their consciences bad and slipped away from faith. Their own word would eat as a canker, and do harm to others as well as to themselves, "who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some." This was to reverse the lesson of a risen Christ, and to open the way for all laxity. It was a kindred error, though in an opposite direction, to that which false teachers sought to infuse among the Thessalonians: there that the day of the Lord was come, producing panic; here that the resurrection

was past, leading, to ease. The one was suited to upset the young, the other to beguile the old.

Then the apostle brings out most important directions for the days that were then coming in, but now come, and more. Questions are before him more serious than a maintenance of order. How are we to walk so as to please the Lord when disorder reigns, claiming to be the only true order? In a measure, no doubt, the truth is in Christendom, and only there; for one cannot look for the truth in Judaism or heathenism now. Judaism had its divine institutions and hopes, but the truth is found in Christendom only: nevertheless in Christendom, who fails to discern Jewish elements and heathenish enormities? How is a man to walk in such a state of things as this? In the former epistle, Timothy was told how to behave in the house of God, as yet in order; but now we are told how to behave in such a state of things as the present disorder. “The foundation of God standeth sure [or, the firm foundation of God standeth], having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, let every one that nameth the name” — not of “Christ,” but — “of the Lord depart from iniquity.” I must do so, if I own Him only in the indispensable truth of His Lordship — if I own Him simply as the One that has authority over my soul. And a less confession than this God never permitted the church to accept; nor in fact in Jerusalem itself was less ever accepted than the naming the name of the Lord. God had made Jesus to be Lord and Christ, preached Peter on that day of power, when as yet much lay hid, and the great instrument of the revelation of the mystery was still shrouded in the darkness of midnight. But, if one confesses the name of the Lord, the word is imperative: “let him depart from iniquity.” The disorder

might be so great that we might make mistakes in our anxiety; but “The Lord knoweth them that are his.” On the other hand, if a soul confesses the name of the Lord, he must have done with iniquity.

This of itself indicates that the epistle provides for a time when it is no longer simply a question of recognising persons coming out of the world. It is needful to exercise judgment now. One must try disorders and prove profession. Truth and holiness and endurance are wanted, not authority or outward order. Why cannot a man be as simple now as in apostolic times? Why not baptize at once every soul around? It would not be accordant with the mind of God. It is a duty in the present state of confusion to use scriptural means; and here we have our warrant, as in the epistles we find more. Whatever therefore may be right in certain cases, the assembly of God ought never to be forced to put every case on the same dead level — ought never to be bound by any special process, as if it were unalterable. The cause of this is the present confusion, and accordingly the apostle brings a picture of it before Timothy’s mind.

“In a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master’s use, and prepared unto every good work.” That is, it is not enough that I should walk with the Lord individually, but I must clear myself of association with that which is contrary to His name. Such is the meaning of purging himself. It is not the question of discipline — dealing With evil ways; but here we are in a state of things where we are in danger

of being mixed up with vessels unto the Lord's dishonour. Nothing can sanction this. I am not at liberty of course to leave Christendom, I dare not get out of the great house at all; indeed I cannot (at any rate without becoming an apostate) leave the house of God, however bad its state may be. This is evidently not the true remedy — to abandon the confession of Christ: only an apostate could think of it. On the other hand, it is unholy to tamper with evil. Therefore it is incumbent for the Christian to look to this gravely, — never to be dragged by the fear of breaking unity into accrediting what dishonours the Lord. Now this is in particular a difficulty for saints, when they have revived before the soul the blessedness of maintaining the unity of the Spirit. It can never cease to be a Christian's duty to maintain the unity of the Spirit; but it is not maintaining the unity of the Spirit to couple with the name of the Lord that which is fleshly and sinful. It is well to be exclusive of sin, but of nothing else. It is well to maintain the largest heart for everything that is really of Christ. But we must exclude that which is contrary to His name; and the very same desire to prove one's love, one's faith, one's appreciation of Christ, will make one anxious not to be dragged into that which is not for His glory. "If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work."

But then another thing. He lets Timothy know that while he laid this on others, he must look carefully to his own ways. "Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace." It is not simply now to follow these, as urged in the first epistle (1 Tim. 6:11); but he adds a most characteristic word in the second epistle.

And this, I apprehend, is the reason. He forbad his going on in association with those that dishonour the Lord with vessels to dishonour; but he tells him to follow these things “with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” Therefore, isolation is never desirable, though it may be sometimes necessary. But no man ought to separate himself from the children of God, unless it be a dire necessity for the Lord; it is clearly not according to Christ. It seems to me, I confess, that if there were simplicity of faith, the Lord would give one eyes to see some at least that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart.

Thus we have everything cared for here; the state of confusion is clearly depicted, as it then was beginning, and as results have proved yet more. How gracious of the Lord to point out the path for the saint, separate from that which grieves the Lord, yet enjoying all that He sees good for us of the privileges of Christianity! Otherwise this might have seemed to be (what unbelief taunts and stigmatizes it, spite of His sanction) pride of heart and presumption. And the comfort is that, if prepared to cleave to the will of the Lord alone, we shall have, through His grace, fellowship with the true-hearted. “Follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart. But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes. And a servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle toward all, apt to teach, forbearing, in meekness correcting those that oppose, if perhaps God may give them repentance for acknowledgment of the truth, and they may for his will wake up out of the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him.” This was always the becoming tone; but

now it is imperiously necessary, as well as wise and good.

Then in 2 Timothy 3 he proceeds to show us not merely a picture of the condition that Christianity will fall into, but, besides, a state of things that would be produced by this confusion. Here we find the perilous times fairly brought before us. “Men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.” Things are very much taking this direction of late, and at the present moment. Take what is called physical Christianity — a stupid, gross, and heathenish phrase, but just enough to show where people are drifting to. It answers not a little to the kind of thing,;et forth here. As we know, there may be over it all a certain form of godliness, but underneath it is really wickedness. This the apostle guards Timothy against, and indeed ourselves, he warns him how seduction would go on more and more, but “from such turn away.” No matter what the reasons or excuses for joining with them, “turn away.”

Then he points out the two principal guards for the faithful, in such a perilous state. The first is the moral character of the source or channel whence Timothy had derived what he knew. “Thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, long-suffering, charity, patience, persecutions, afflictions.” It is the whole spiritual experience, so to speak, of the apostle. He was to continue in the things which he had learned, and had been assured of, knowing of whom he had

learned them — a very important point. Persons sometimes say it does not matter who taught; but God does not treat the matter so lightly. It is often a very great safeguard for the saint of God; for, after all, it makes no small difference who says this or that. A word altogether unbecoming in one mouth might be most proper in another. The apostle well knew that the God who had brought these glorious truths to man, the God that had manifested His grace, had given a witness of their reality in the man from whom he had learned them; and this was meant to have an enduring effect on the conscience and heart of Timothy. For it is not dogma pure and simple, it is not mere instruction; and we may thank God for it. It is an immense blessing that we have the truth not only in a book, but in a practical shape, the truth that comes out of the heart and from the lips of living men of God. Accordingly the apostle reminds Timothy of this.

At the same time there is not the smallest slight of the only and abiding standard. He brings out the infinite value of the Scriptures, that is of what was written, the one transcendent resource for perilous times when we have not the presence and personal help of apostles. It is not merely what had been preached, but what is in a permanent shape for the good of the saints of God here below, which elicits the remarkable assertion of its peculiar worth. “Every scripture” — for this is the proper force of the passage — “Every scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”

The closing chapter (2 Tim. 4) then gives his solemn charge, and at the same time his own expression of what was before him. As Timothy was about to enter upon a new phase of his ministry, without the apostle's presence or living counsel, the latter charges him with great emphasis, "before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; preach the word, be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine." And the reason why he makes it so urgent not to be turned aside was, that the time would come when men would not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts they should heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they should turn away their ears from the truth, and should be. turned unto fables. "But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry. For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." Thus he looks not to the coming of the Lord to receive him to Himself, but to the "appearing of the Lord," which is the usual side of the truth taken in these epistles. The reason is obvious. The coming of the Lord will in no way manifest the faithfulness of the servant; His appearing will. At "that day" will be the display of whatever has been endured, as well as done, for the Lord's sake.

With this prospect he comforts Timothy no less than his own spirit; but at the same time he speaks as to joining

him, with a glance at one that had forsaken him. “Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me.” He was comparatively alone. If he does not hide the sorrowful view of an old fellow-labourer’s cooling in zeal, with all its dangers, the consolation is also before Timothy both of those that go on in faithful labour, and of one at least restored. “Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.” So we find that God knows how to temper the bitter with the sweet, always doing the right thing in the right place and time.

Thus he comforts Timothy at the same time that he admonishes him. In the midst of all, he is told to bring the cloak that he left at Troas with Carpus, and the books, but especially the parchments. This again has stumbled the minds of men. They cannot understand an inspired apostle talking about a cloak in the midst of a divinely given pastoral charge. The reason is manifest: they themselves savour of the things of men, and not of God. There is nothing that more shows God than His ability to combine that which is eternal with care for the smallest things of this life. It was not then an indifferent matter to God. The Holy Spirit would make it to be most practical and precious. Be assured, that if you do not bring the Spirit of God into these matters, perhaps your cloak, perhaps a book, will become a snare to you. To many a man and woman has a little bit of dress done no small injury, just because they think it is too little for the Spirit of God to direct them in. “The cloke,” then says he, “that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring with thee, and the books,” — not only the clothing, but even that which he is to read, — “especially the

parchments;” — what he was going to write on, probably. “Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works: of whom be thou ware also; for he hath greatly withstood our words.”

Finally, we have his assertion of the blessed Lord’s care, and his confidence in Him that He would preserve him from all evil to His heavenly kingdom; closing this solemn and touching epistle (it would seem the last words he wrote) with salutations to various saints.

1 *The true reading, represented by (Cod. Sin.) and all other uncials save the Clermont, and almost if not all the cursive manuscripts, is οἰκονομίαν, dispensation, in the sense of administration, or stewardship. Even Matthaei joins the rest of the critics, with the Complutensian Polyglott, against the received οἰκοδομίαν, which he considers a mere blunder of δ for ν by Erasmus’s printers. But this does not account for the Latin, Syriac (save later), Gothic, etc.; even supposing δ was the slip of the scribe. It is evident that “edification” is not the point in question, but the right order of the house of God, and this in faith. Internal evidence is thus as strong as external as to the true reading.

2 * Cod. Sin. () agrees with the great authorities which give ὅς, “who” (or others, ὅ, “which”) instead of Θεός, “God.”

Philemon

Various considerations call on me to be comparatively brief on the epistle to PHILEMON. This has altogether a different character from the epistles that have lately been occupying us. Here the Holy Ghost by the same apostle takes up a domestic matter, and makes it the occasion of the sweetest application of the grace of God.

From his prison he writes to one that evidently was his friend, one at a former day, yea, for ever, deeply indebted to him, inasmuch as he was brought to a knowledge of Christ through him. Now Paul informs him of another no less indebted to him in the grace of Christ, and this none other than Onesimus, the slave of Philemon. Wonderful ways of God! He had deserted, and probably otherwise defrauded (verse 18), his excellent master — an act which even the most worthless lord could not but punish with the utmost severity. Onesimus had left Philemon, we may be sure, for nothing justifiable, and thus proved himself a vile person, who could not appreciate goodness. But what is too hard for the Lord, who led him into Paul’s path, converted him, and turned his heart and steps back to his master?

This circumstance becomes the occasion of an inspired epistle. The church throughout all ages profited, and the grace of Christ unfolded therein by Paul the apostle! Oh, what a God is ours! And what a word is His, delivering from the world, and from the thoughts and feelings of nature! How far have we derived blessing by it? Is this what would commend itself to our souls? Does aught else draw out the admiration and the thankfulness of our hearts?

“Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ:” thus he opens the letter. He would not put his request on the ground of his apostleship, lest he might bring in the force of authority, where all that would meet and reflect Christ in the matter must turn on the state and the willing answer of his heart to whom be was appealing in grace. “]Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy our brother,” for the desire was not confined even to Paul, but Timothy gladly joined himself with this most touching communication of Paul — “unto Philemon our dearly beloved.” There was no doubt as to right and wrong: Onesimus was inexcusable; but love abides, and can never fail. To love and count on love is of faith, and prevails. But Philemon was not only an object of tender affection, but a “fellow-labourer,” and the nature of the case made it expedient, unlike the usual character of apostolic addresses, to add the household.

Again, observe, his wife is remembered. She would thus feel that she was not left out in the delicate ways of grace, but is included, as in the injury, so now in the good the apostle wished them to manifest. “And to our beloved Apphia.” A mistress might have particular reason to feel the misconduct of a slave. Whatever the special motive, she, at any rate, is addressed, and coupled with her husband in it. She is thus given a direct interest in its new phase, but it was the interest of grace.

The apostle brings in Archippus also, honoured with the title of “our fellow-soldier.” It is the same individual whom he exhorted at the close of Colossians to take heed to the ministry he had received in the Lord. Let him not forget to cast in whatever help he could render in this charge of grace. Small or great, let all be done to

the Lord. Finally, Paul includes the church in Philemon's house. There were others in the Lord, either of the household or in the habit of meeting there.

How blessed is grace, and how large! And all this movement of heart about a runagate slave! Yet is it defined within the right bounds. The assembly, and only the assembly, in Philemon's house are comprehended in the appeal. The saints at Colosse are not included; — why, we can all appreciate. Further, mark the wisdom of it. In any other case the assembly had been the first; but here mark the lovely ways of God, who now pursues a different course. After all, the slave is Philemon's, who therefore is put first. There never is a change, not even of order, in the word of God, but what has some adequate divine motive, and the beauty of grace and truth in it. Never is an insertion or omission of a casual sort: all flows from a, wise purpose, which would be impaired, though we may not all be spiritual enough to say how, were a single feature of it either left out or superadded. It is all a vital organism; every part of the living body of truth is needed for His own glory.

The formula usually introducing the longest epistle to the greatest assembly follows. "Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Then Paul addresses Philemon personally: "I thank my God, making mention of thee always at my prayers, hearing of the love and faith which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all the saints," (he was about to be tried whether his love would stand true toward all the saints,) "so that the communication of thy faith may become effectual in the acknowledging of every good thing which is [not "in you," which really gives no sense

in the passage, but “which is] in us” (according to the best and most ancient authorities) unto Christ Jesus.”

Thus Paul thoroughly acknowledges the grace and faith that was in him generally; but the question remained, whether Philemon would answer to that which was in Paul’s heart in writing about Onesimus. His participation in the faith was owned; but was it now to operate in practical communion between them? Paul would do nothing as from authority in such a case: this would be to become a director, not an apostle of Christ. Everything here must be of grace. Hence he adds, “For we [or I] had [the best reading] great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother.” Philemon seems to have been a man habitually given to acts of love, and thus a continual channel of refreshment by grace among God’s children. But the most excellent of men have broken down occasionally by the pettiest things that entice or provoke self.

And now there was a matter which might touch Philemon’s sense of injury — he might have and retain a keen sense of the wrong Onesimus had done him as a Christian master. How often persons who were amiability itself in all respects that had come to our view prove quite unprepared for something which grates against their feelings in an unexpected quarter! What the apostle desired was, for others as for himself, that they should live Christ in everything. So he says, “For love’s sake I beseech thee, being such an one. as Paul” — not merely “the prisoner,” which had been already pleaded as to his actual circumstances, and soon to be repeated with emphasis, but now he takes another ground, Paul — “the aged.” Would Paul, “the prisoner”

and “the aged.” have a feeble ineffectual claim on the heart of Philemon? Not Paul the apostle in any case; yet was he not a whit behind the chief. And indeed he proves how well he knew — not that he now forgot — the distinctive value of his apostleship, by keeping it hidden wherever the assertion of it might (not to say must) have marred the free exercise of grace. Accordingly being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ, I beseech thee for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten.” and not this merely, but begotten “in my bonds.” This would make him specially an object of interest and affection to one who venerated and delighted in the apostle. If Philemon loved Paul, he would love his child; and Onesimus was his child, as he says. He names him at least as emphatically his child as either Titus or Timothy; but more than this, he was a son born as neither Timothy nor Titus was — begotten in his bonds — bonds destined in the grace of God to be more fruitful for the instruction of saints than his most free service and world-wide labours; for Paul was never so honoured in the service of God for the leading up of the church of God as when he was bound a prisoner in Rome.

It was at this time, and under such circumstances, that Onesimus was born in the faith. It is true that once he “was to thee unprofitable, ‘but now profitable to thee and to me” — an allusion to his name, as is well known, and which becomes yet more evident in verse 20. He had been unserviceable before, but now Paul assures himself that grace will not fail its effectual work — to whom I have sent back: thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own bowels: whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me

in the bonds of the gospel; but without thy mind would I do nothing." The apostle would have Philemon's good to be not as of necessity but of willingness. The delicacy of feeling, and the sense of propriety that grace forms, are truly exquisite. There is nothing that maintains right so much as grace. At the same time it relinquishes its own dues, it maintains those of others! This is of all importance for our souls to heed. The contrary alas! habitually appears. A person abuses grace in humbling another: the use of grace is to humble one's self, showing all godly respect to every other in our place. I do not deny that there is that which becomes others in their place: surely no saint is exempt from the exercise of grace. But with this I have nothing to do in the way of dictation, whatever one's desires. I have to do with the grace that has reached my own soul; and this ever gladly accords to others that which is their due or more. There is nothing that truly delivers from the spirit of self but the mighty grace of God.

The apostle so writes to his friend and brother. "For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever; not now as a slave, but above a slave, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord?" There cannot be a more exquisite apology for one whose return might have recalled painful feelings, and who, in fact, was so guilty in law that his master would have been by it justified in the sternest measures. But the grace in Christ, while it makes evil more heinous, changes all, because it brings in that love which met our own yet greater need and guilt, and the mercy that has left no room for blessing, however feebly we enjoy and appreciate it, Onesimus had failed in the very first duty

of a slave; he had denied, in fact, — his relationship to his master. But now the apostle takes simply and solely the ground of grace, and appeals to the heart of Philemon in the presence of all Christ had done for him, and through the same instrument who had been used toward his bondman. This he knew would dissipate the smallest cloud of suspicion that might otherwise have hung over Onesimus on his return to his master. As he says here, “If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself. If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account; I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it: albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides.”

The great practical lesson, beloved, we ought all to gather from this is that it is not merely a question of doing the right thing, but of the way in which it should be done. It is too often thought by many that if only the object be right, this is enough. But not so: Christ is as much the way as He is the end. If it is not Christ along every step of the road, the best intentions often turn out productive of very grave disorder; and for this simple reason, that we are incompetent for anything of ourselves:. Christ alone can guide us through.

This is just what is taught in the epistle before us. Who but God would have thought of bringing in Christ at every point of that which concerned Onesimus? But now, that He has so spoken, this is precisely the privilege of the Christian. It is the introduction of Christ, not merely for the regulation of elders and young men, widows, households, and the like. It is not merely the regulation of outward order by the application of the same name: Titus does this. But the epistle to Philemon lets us into

another atmosphere, for it shows us Christ brought in, yea, the name of Christ and the grace of Christ bound up with all the relations of the family, with matters that might seem to belong solely to the domain of human rights or wrongs, wherein it was for a master in his generosity to forgive. Here, too, we are taught how to live Christ.

I am aware some, enamoured of theories, and savouring the things of men rather than of God, would think it dreadful to discuss or deal with the relations of a master and a slave. Why not condemn the whole principle, root and branch? But this is not Christ. The Spirit of God does not establish a mere code of human rights. Christianity is not a system of earthly righteousness; it is the unfolding of the grace of Christ, and of heavenly hopes. It is the bringing of souls to God, who by that cross delivers them from all wrongs, spite of their guilt and His most deserved judgment. It elevates them above these rights, not in pride of heart, but bowed down by the rich mercy of the Lord. Nothing so maintains the rights of others; but at the same time it is no question of adhering to our own. It is a question of using the grace of Christ, and thus of glorifying God. “Yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord: refresh my bowels in the Lord. Having confidence in thy obedience I wrote unto thee, knowing that thou wilt do also more than I say. But withal prepare me also a lodging: for I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you.” Salutations follow in verses 23-25.

Throughout the Spirit speaks to the renewed affections. What the effect of this epistle may have been it is not for us to say, as not knowing. But it appears to me not doubtful. The heart that could stand out against such

appeals of grace, from such a quarter, was far from Philemon. But is it not a call to you and to me, as living, fresh, applicable, and imperiously needed, if we value nothing so much as Christ? The literal circumstances are changed, no doubt; but why is it given here? Why is it that such an epistle should have been inspired? Why was it not a private communication? It is as necessary in its own place as any one of the epistles we have had before us: I do not mean to the same degree, but as necessary, if in truth our object is to glorify our Lord Jesus.

Titus

The epistle to Titus has much in common with those to Timothy, as all must observe; not only as being addressed to a fellow-servant, and indeed a son in the faith, but in general similarity of character. Like them, its objects are pastoral, as being addressed to a companion in labour, whose work lay among the assemblies of God. Nevertheless, there is no portion but what has its own special design; nor could there be a single scripture lacking without positive loss to the saints, and, indeed, to God’s glory by us.

In writing to Titus, we shall see the apostle giving more prominence to external order than in the epistles to Timothy. We have observed already that although in these epistles the Holy Ghost does not develop the higher and special privileges of the saints of God, nevertheless the church, in its earthly place of responsibility, is brought largely before us. It is the house of God; first in order, next in disorder. The one gave the measure of responsibility; the other furnished provision for the guidance of those whose desire is towards the Lord, and who would shrink from the least approach to presumption. These are instructed of the Spirit to be faithful, without fear or favour; leaving with God all consequences, and judging simply as in conscience before Him. Hence they have it laid upon them as a positive obligation to carry themselves in such a way as the love and humbleness of a saint of God might have hesitated to take, without a peremptory word from the Lord. Of course, there is no real ground to charge such with presumption; but faith, in its

language and ways alike, looks so to those who do not possess it. Much move are they open to it who despise His word, and ignore their own state. Those who purge themselves from the vessels of dishonour are found in the lowliest place of all — that of obedience.

But in writing to Titus the apostle does not take up so much the question of the house of God, either in its responsible order, or in the provision which the Lord makes for the worst of times. He introduces himself as "a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness." (Titus 1:1.) It is evident, therefore, that it is more a question of the truth here than of the house of God. It is that which is not only not perishable, but whose value is increasingly felt when in face of the ruins of Christendom. The house of God, alas! we know, might be grievously affected. Called to be the pillar and the support of the truth, it nevertheless might be grossly corrupted, as, in point of fact, it has been; but the faith of God's elect abides, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness is always a duty. In the very nature of things this does not change. God holds to it and maintains it, and so do those who bow to His word.

There is great force, therefore, in the description — "the faith of God's elect." I do not mean that the latter designation is limited to the epistle to Titus. The apostle employs it in the epistle to the Romans, and there, too, with very marked emphasis, in closing his grand recapitulation of the Christian privileges — the ordinary standing blessing of the saints of God — in presence of all that could harm them. He takes the ground of a

challenger. Let what will be brought against them, “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth; who is he that condemneth?” In the present case it is not a question of furnishing Christians with a knowledge of their privileges, and a maintenance of them against all antagonists, as in Romans 8, but the calm yet serious writing of the apostle to a confidential fellow-servant, in which, as at an earlier day, so now in one of his latest communications, be still holds this blessed word, “God’s elect.” But he adds another element — “the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness.” There is no small importance in this acknowledgment. The faith of God’s elect is not to be hidden under a bushel; it must be owned before men and the enemy, as well as learnt from God. It is to be confessed without compromise, no matter what the difficulty. The acknowledgment — not the belief only — of the truth must never be given up, and in its most practical shape — “the truth which is after godliness; in hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began.”

There we touch again that which came before us in the second epistle to Timothy; but a few words more may be now added. The occasion was exactly suitable for it. The value of eternal life is proved when all that is connected with the testimony of God among men has received a severe shock. In this lies the blessedness of seeing how truly that into which we are brought is of God. There was a creation formed of God on a ground of responsibility. Its tenure depended on the fidelity of man. Soon all was ruined; but in the midst of this havoc God wrought, according to His own wisdom, and in various ways, for the purpose of making manifest the

whole question of the state of the creature in relation to Himself. Now, late in the world's history, the Son of God is come, who was Himself that eternal life which was with the Father, and has displayed it in every possible circumstance here below.

Here we have another order of things, the truth in fact revealed — grace and truth. Those who are called to follow and to confess the Saviour have themselves proved that, looked at in their responsibility, they too had brought shame and confusion on the name of the Lord. So far from God giving up His glorious counsels, the truth of eternal life is brought out far more fully in the decay of Christian profession. In the sad flood of evils that had swept over Christendom, this was just the moment when the Holy Ghost saw fit to call attention not merely to the grace of God saying sinners, and the faithfulness of God keeping His own children, but to the character of the life which was their portion in Christ. Thus, therefore, the apostle here refers to it in the introduction to this epistle. "In hope (says he) of eternal life, which God that cannot lie" — an expression evidently used because of the character of the persons to whom he is writing, who are, indeed, but a sample of what man has always proved himself, even such as bear the name of Christ. God, at any rate, that cannot lie, promised it, "before the world began." Nor can anything touch this life; but the value is now more, felt of this eternal life that was in Christ before the world began. It had come down into this scene; it had been utterly rejected by man; but it nevertheless became the possession of faith in Christ. Now it shines. It was not merely a reality, not merely that believers had it in Christ; but now the Holy Ghost causes them to take

notice of it, brings out the value of it, and strengthens them in the confidence of it. After all, that eternal life in the hope of which they had been formed and called by the power of the Spirit of God, that eternal life which God who could not lie promised before the world began, was now their known portion. They had it in Christ. It is also of exceeding encouragement, and indeed a truth of immense import for souls, both in itself and in the fact, that the Holy Ghost brings us into the more distinct apprehension and enjoyment of the wondrous bliss of possessing the very eternal life of Christ, when all that can decay has already shown the most fatal symptoms at work.

In accordance with this, it may be profitable to observe the ways of God. It was before the world began, no doubt; but in due time it had been manifested. He had "in due time manifested His word through preaching,." This gives us to see the very special place that Christianity has in the ways of God. We do not often take notice of what is after all a very striking and evident fact, that, for very much the largest period of this world's history, no such thing was known as preaching. We are so used to think of preaching, that we do not always weigh what it means, or what a light it casts on the character of God, and on that blessing which He has now given us in Christ. All through the previous history of the world, the creature as such was the object of the divine dealings. Now it is not so. Christ is the object before Him; and our best blessing of grace through redemption is that we have Him as our very life. Oh that God's children, with all simplicity, laid hold of this truth! What a place it gives us as passing through the world! I am not merely speaking of being secured. The heart

continually lowers eternal life to a simple question of being delivered from wrath, and going to heaven, perhaps, through a process of judgment. Were this all true, how short of Christianity! How much more to know, with the authority of a God that cannot lie, and in all the breadth that preaching gives, that we no longer belong to this creation, in virtue of the only life we have as saints; that God has now made it a revealed certainty, that the eternal life which was in Christ, and which Christ was, is now for ever ours in Him. Accordingly God has manifested His word now through preaching showing the universality of the testimony of grace in contrast with the narrow limits of law. Thus, when the special separation of Christians takes place, when God attaches unto Himself His children here below, He makes them conscious that they do not belong to the world; yet is it coincident with the gospel sent forth everywhere. His church is gathered out from the world at the same time that His word goes all over the whole world. These two points are very characteristic of Christianity; and they are of immense importance for the soul to seize clearly, and not let slip.

Let me just sum up briefly again. First of all the life that we have received in Christ shuts us up, as it were, to Him, and gives us the consciousness that we belong as Christians to an order of being which never can be impaired or corrupted — of course, therefore, to that which has no connection whatever with the world, or with the creature that has slipped through sin into ruin. That eternal life, which is ours now, was in the Son of God, and this before there was a world made or lost. While man’s probation in various forms went on, it was hidden; when the world was manifestly lost, as in the

rejection of the Lord Jesus, it was manifested by preaching. Up to this time the dealings of God were comparatively narrow, and had either individuals or a particular race as their object — all this while there was no revelation of eternal life at all. Now there is, and with increasing distinctness, when it became evident that Christendom itself proved no exception to the past ages of man's failure. Thus, when all had closed in the cross, God still waits till Christendom was a judged thing, too, in principle. Then it is that the Spirit of God, not exactly gives us the life in Christ, but makes us know that we have the life that was true in Christ when the gospel went out. But when the gospel was being corrupted, as far as men could, or rather when there were the manifest germs of Christendom everywhere showing the ruin of the latest and highest testimony of God, then it is that God directs fresh attention to the kernel of the blessing conveyed to us. Come what will, eternal life is our portion. Let the world dissolve by judgment, let the creature perish morally by its own sin, eternal life never can. That eternal life was in Christ; that eternal life is now given to us; that eternal life God would have us to enter into more than ever, enjoying it at its fullest worth at the very time when there seems nothing else to enjoy, when it becomes simply a question of falling back on that which never can be lowered or destroyed. Such, then, is the "due time" when "he manifested his word through preaching."

Thus there is the other point — what goes out, as well as shuts us up to Christ, giving the true principle of separation to God in the most blessed manner: for it has nothing to do with assuming or pretending to anything. Setting up of ourselves is wholly excluded. How can a

man, according to nature, vaunt of another who proves his own good-for-nothingness? All evil boasting, all that is injurious, is of self; but that which is our only just ground of exultation is in Jesus Christ our Lord. Consequently, though we have in Him a worthy object of boast, it flows from the grace of God, and is thus the fountain of genuine humility in His sight. We are thus shut up, so to speak, in the circle of divine life; it may seem a narrower one, but, in truth, there is nothing that can rival it in point of large and deep affection — not alone resting on those within, but actively going out; for along with the fact that we have Christ Himself as our actual and eternal life — life in the Son — our changeless portion, there is an increasing and world-wide manifestation through preaching.

True, you will find that, whenever children of God take up one of these truths to the exclusion of the other, there is invariably very great damage done to souls. Thus, take some whose hearts go out to what they consider the only desirable aim, that is, the spread of the good news through evangelizing. It is a blessed work; but it is never safe when exclusive. Again, look at another section of God's children, all whose comfort is confined to the circle of what is elect, or Christian. But the truth embraces both. It is excellent to hold fast Christ, and to know that we have eternal life in Him; but do you not see that when God was pleased to make this known, in the person of His Son, is just the time when the glad tidings are sent out by His grace to all men, breaking through every question of race, tongue, law, or any other distinction you please? When a ministration of death and condemnation was in question, a limit was good and wise; when eternal life, and remission of sins

in Christ's name were the burden, God could not, would not, keep the good news pent up to one only class of the human family. "Preach the gospel to every creature."

It is evident that in all this, lower glories disappear from view. It is no longer a question of the Messiah as such. The title of Son of David did connect Christ with a particular nation. But now, when we behold a far deeper glory of Christ brought out, there is an unlimited manifestation of God's word through preaching, "which is committed unto me," says the apostle. In point of fact, it will be found that Peter, for instance, speaks but little of this great truth. He does tell us of life; he makes much of our blessed Lord Himself as the Living Stone; he treats of the saints of God as living stones, as also of their being begotten again by the word of God. But he never handles the subject either in the comprehensive, or in the precise, manner of the apostle Paul. If he writes, it is only to those that were of the dispersion. Both his epistles are addressed to believers of the circumcision. It would be unnatural, therefore, that there should be either depth or breadth comparable to that which appears when St. Paul presents it. I need not now dwell on James or Jude, who are manifestly distinct. John does take up the very point at which Paul leaves off; for his special work was to show life eternal. But then he traces it as a question, first, of divine life in the person of Christ, for the purpose of maintaining His glory; and, secondly, as that life, or divine nature, in the saints of God. He does not present it in its connection with the ruin of Christendom, neither does he treat it explicitly in his epistle as a testimony to man at large. Paul presents it both in the counsels and in the ways of God; John, rather as bound up with His nature, first in

Christ, and then in the saints. Both are admirably suited to the objects of God, but they are different, however harmoniously they may blend.

The apostle then gives his salutation, “To Titus, mine own child in the common faith: grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour;” and next proceeds to instruct him as to the object for which he was writing. “For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and establish elders in every city, as I had appointed thee. If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children, not accused of riot or unruly. For the overseer must be blameless.” Here we have positive regulations, as well as principles laid down, that were to guide the conduct of Titus. One main part of his commission was the appointment of men in certain exterior charges.

A difficulty may be felt by some children of God. They may enquire, how is it, if these charges were not intended to be continued, that the Holy Ghost inspired these directions? I believe that they are of the utmost practical value in two ways: first, negatively, and second, positively; negatively, inasmuch as they enable us to judge the pretensions of those who appoint, and of those that are appointed. By their help, we can see that those who boast most of ministerial order are the very men who palpably offend against these scriptures as well as others. It will always be found, and more particularly in a day of difficulty and darkness, that there is no security except by dependence on the Lord and cleaving to His word. Not only do the simple and the humble find themselves kept of the Lord’s grace, but the truest order will prove to be among them. Wherever order is

confidently vaunted of be not surprised to discover a real departure from that which the Lord prescribes. His word invariably refutes, as His Spirit never formed, so self-complacent a tone.

But then there is a more direct value still. Undoubtedly there are some things wanting now; and I for one believe that it is of God that they should be wanting in the present state of Christendom. Where would be the moral fitness of sound exterior order, when the condition is deplorably bad, the world is rampant, the word exercises small authority, and the Spirit of God is systematically hindered and quenched? As to the matter of appointing these local officers, the apostles were the pillars of authority. The absence of apostles, and consequently of such a delegate as Titus, is fatal to those who set up to have everything fully and literally according to the word of God. For my part, far from considering this fatal for God's glory in the present state of Christendom, I believe that. the presence of apostles would be an enormous anomaly. The reason is simple. Anything would be unseasonable now that tends to weaken the sense — first, that God's mind, God's truth — no matter what it may be about — abides unchangeable and obligatory; and, secondly, that God takes account of the present scattering of His children, and would have us to feel the havoc that has been wrought in Christendom. Now suppose the apostles (as we cannot but suppose they must) adhere to nothing but the word of God, what could keep them from seeming to deny the relationship of the mass of misled Christians, carried away by error, self-will, human tradition, etc., contrary to the word? God was pleased, in view of the corruption already begun, and still graver departure

from His word that was impending, to cause that there should be no perpetuation of the apostles; that there should be consequently a lack felt, which could not be made good, yet essential to that outward order which men would most loudly pretend to when it was irreparably lost.

Thus the path of lowly obedience is easily proved to be the only safe and sound one; because it refuses to swerve from God's word; it acknowledges the absence of a validating authority which none on earth possesses; it justifies the Lord, who is adequate for all exigencies, and provides amply for every present need; it confesses the ruined state of God's testimony in the earth, while it owns whatever of Himself there may be, and wherever it is. Yet none the less, but the more, it adheres to the word of God, as the only and the sufficient warrant of faith and conduct in a state of ruin. The directions that the apostle gives are not in vain, though neither you nor I can do all that Titus did. To do so would be presumption. He was expressly left in Crete, and charged by the apostle to appoint elders there; and we are not. There is no disobedience nor neglect on our part, but rather fear of God, and maintenance of godly order in not exceeding our real powers. But there is manifest haughtiness in all who imitate an apostle, or an apostolic delegate, without warrant from the Lord, and infringing His word in that imitation. Who on earth now can authorize like Paul? Who can appoint like Titus? Certainly not a minister of the Crown, or an ordinary preacher, or a synod of preachers, still less a Christian congregation.

God took care that the direction should not be in a general epistle, nor in one addressed to an assembly. In

the epistles to the Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, etc. no such orders are given, any more than in those of James, Peter, or John. When the apostle addresses the church in any place, he never lays down injunctions about the appointment of elders or bishops. Had it been so, either the leading brethren, or perhaps the saints as a whole, would have been too ready to take the matter into their own hands. As it is, there is no possible excuse for it. Directions are given to individuals who had a special place in the work and church of God. No other was qualified so to do. Thus Apollos and Silas never attempt it, while Titus does. An inspired epistle was addressed to him. No doubt there was a suitability in his gift; but besides that he has an outward authority and inspired credentials, on which he was entitled — nay, bound — to act. Where is there such a person at the present time? Hence, therefore, for any one to act upon the fact that Titus was thus empowered by the Spirit of God would be altogether invalid. But then for that reason these. directions, far from being obsolete, are of permanent value.

To this use I would now direct attention, that although we cannot, in the absence of apostles, have the due outward authority to clothe men with local charges in this or that place, still, if we see those in whom the qualities are really found, — if we see men who possess that which the Spirit of God treats as suitable for the overseer or elder, it is evident that it is the positive duty of the children of God to own this in their persons. No doubt an unfaithful heart would take advantage of the fact that they had never been formally installed as elders. A believer with the spirit of godly obedience would if possible be more careful to own and honour in

the absence of any such outward title. Thus a state of ruin always tests the heart more than when things are in primitive order. When all is in its normal state, even the careless, or those that sooner or later turn out refractory, are overawed by the strength of the current that runs in the right direction; but when that current becomes weaker, and shallows begin to show themselves, and all sorts of obstructions in the way, then is precisely the moment when real faith and humility of heart are not only displayed by the saints, but are specially honoured of the Lord. Observe it, for instance, in the messages to the seven churches; so that we may surely see that the grace of the Lord is never defeated or in vain.

We cannot now nominate, then, because we are not apostles, nor even apostolic delegates. Still we are wholly wrong if we do not profit by that which the word of God has laid down as to local charges. We can gather from these and other scriptures at least enough for our practical warning and guidance. We are thus kept from the confusion of gifts with them, which is the parent of the clerical system — Popish, national, or dissenting; and we can discern what remains and what exists no longer. “If any be blameless, husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly.” Thus moral weight is the main point here. And this is much to be heeded. It is not a question of eminent gift. In dealing with the practical difficulties of the saints of God, spiritual power and experience, of course free from outward reproach, personal or relative, are of the greatest possible value. These are the men who really do act on souls for good day by day in the jar of circumstances, and justly so. Others may possess far

more ability, either for spreading the gospel or for unfolding the word of God. I do not mean that in dealing with practical difficulties men are duly qualified for eldership who cannot aptly wield the word in application to passing things. But it is clear that an elder or bishop is not necessarily a teacher, though he should be apt to teach — able to use the word so as to convince gainsayers and encourage the weak. All this is evident on the surface of scripture; but it does not constitute exactly a doctoral gift. It might not go beyond house to house service. I believe therefore that it still remains a positive duty and an important part for the children of God to take heed that they be not absorbed in those that are called to a large public work. No doubt in Christendom generally the error is complete; but those who seek to purge themselves from the vessels to dishonour may not have considered this with the gravity it deserves.

While giving then evangelists and teachers their place, we should also value those who in a simpler and less obtrusive way are devoting themselves day by day to strengthen the links of affection, and to repress the sources of disorder which, as we all know, continually spring up in Christian assemblies. Now these are the persons that were of old by competent authority appointed elders or overseers, as it is said here, “the overseer must be blameless, as God’s steward, not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, not a striker not given to filthy lucre; but a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.” And if we see men of such ways and

endowments labouring now, surely they are to be respected and acknowledged as the men who have the qualities and do the work of elders, though from circumstances their formal appointment is no longer possible.

What made this to be the more urgently needful, even for these Gentile minds, among the Cretans as well as elsewhere, was the Jewish element, the constant fruitful cause of trouble, and in two ways that we might not reasonably expect to see united. “There are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: whose mouths must be stopped.” Not that I mean necessarily Jews, when speaking of the Jewish element. Alas! the evil of Judaism infects Gentiles; the spirit of tradition pervades some, legalism imbues others very largely. These are the persons who give especial trouble, “whose mouths,” we are told, “must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre’s sake.” To this end is used the testimony of one of their own prophets. This witness, says the apostle, is true. One of themselves, not wanting in patriotism, had conscience enough to confess that “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies.” Therefore Titus was to rebuke them sharply. What sin and folly to brand care for their souls as lack of charity or love of domination! Let us remember the whole case for our own profit and guidance.

Although men have, alas! common qualities of evil, and, no matter where they are found, the same corrupt nature, the Spirit of God takes national character into account, and more particularly in practical service. This requires wisdom, and also experience, where our lot may be cast. So in connection with the overseers of

whom he had been speaking. Elders are a local charge. They are not like teachers and preachers, many of whom went about visiting various lands and widely scattered towns in their wide circuit among the nations. Elders as such were necessarily limited in that function to the quarters in which they lived, though they might have gifts which would carry them elsewhere. For them it was of the utmost importance to bear in mind the particular tendencies of those among whom they lived and laboured. The apostle here acts and speaks on this himself. He refers to the sentiment uttered by one of their own poets; for a poet is often truer than a philosopher, and a religious zealot can never be trusted. Your boasted “thinker” loses himself for the most part in dreamy speculations of the closet. A poet may be frivolous indeed, but after all he lets out the real character; it may be in his own person, but at any rate he ordinarily expresses the feeling of the age and place in which he lives, if not the heart in its depths. And this was what one of their own poets, whom the apostle cites, tells about his countrymen. Here Paul was not writing to the church. It might be a matter of doubt whether to speak out so bluntly to themselves; but there could be no question of its importance as information for the fellow-servant to bear in mind in their midst.

Their national character must be taken into account; for though this is a small thing where the grace of the Spirit is in question, it becomes a serious handle to the enemy of souls, who turns the various workings of flesh to his purpose of opposition to the glory of Christ. Their slippery turn of mind would expose them to receive Jewish fables, as these would to misuse the law in general. This was the twofold mischief of which I wish to

say a few words. Not merely does the law generate habits of tradition of slavish adherence to human prescription in the things of God, which so soon are apt to rise up to the destruction of practical faith, but along with this goes what might not at first be suspected — imaginativeness; Jewish fables, as he says. And it is remarkable how the famous repository of Rabbinisrn to this day wears this twofold character: on the one hand, the most servile adherence to the letter, without the least insight into the spirit of Holy Scripture; and, on the other hand, the wildest fictions to feed the fancies of women and children. How contrasted is the word of God, that affords the most healthy exercise for heart and conscience, according to the faith of God's elect!

There is nothing like scripture for delivering from both snares. The word of God never gives us a mere line of duty to be followed. In scripture the duties are the expressions of life, in the relationships wherein God has set us; and the main object of every teacher should be not to impose anything as a bare work, to be done blindfold and unintelligently, but to bind up with Christ Himself the course of God's will we have to follow' so that each servant may be led into direct communication with the Master, and look to His grace alone for all needed wisdom and strength, in carrying out whatever may be His call. Thus, even supposing the teacher disappears in any way, Christ abides, and that which is according to Him tells on the heart. The Christian might not have been able to see it without the teacher; but all else vanishes away when the man is, so to speak, brought face to face with Christ and His word.

Such, according to God, is the object of all teaching; never to interpose the teacher, nor the mere letter of a

duty, between the soul and the Lord, but to blend the smallest practical duty with His will, and grace, and glory, who is our life. This is what the apostle did himself, as he sought also to guard Titus, and direct him, as his plenipotentiary — if I may so say — acting among the Cretans. And it is no easy task to keep souls from that which is the devil's substitute for the truth — fables; and the law misused. For these shut out the word of God, which is the one aliment of faith. On the one hand, the law appealed to man in flesh. instead of judging him for dead. On the other hand, Jewish fables filled the imagination, instead of the heart and mind being drawn out by the blessed entrance into the life of Christ, and carrying it out here below according to the word.

After this he adds another point of instruction: "Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure." How true! Unbelief always degrades even the precious word of God, turns it into a path of self, and in effect severs it from Christ. This accordingly is to make nothing pure. On the other hand, the power of the saint of God is the Holy Spirit acting on that life which is in Christ. He is speaking of practical ways here below. How great then is the spring that the believer possesses! Would that those who teach always knew where their secret of strength lies! It is the ability to mingle Christ with everything that comes before us, and that is incumbent on us. Hence, in contrast with the power of faith, which makes all things pure to the pure, the apostle speaks most solemnly of the character of those that believe not. "They profess that they know God, but in works they deny him, being abominable and disobedient, and unto every good work

reprobate.” What a filling up of the picture Christendom manifests at this day!

The next chapter (Titus 2) turns from the question of those that guide and govern in each assembly and district to the saints themselves. Titus is exhorted to speak the things which become sound doctrine, taking in first aged men and aged women, and then young women and young men. It is all remarkably simple, homely, and wholesome. There is nothing that more marks Christianity than this very elasticity and breadth. Where there is not humility or true greatness, people are afraid of little matters; they shrink instinctively from touching on work-a-day details. The power of Christ makes everything sweet and precious, and lends dignity to the very smallest thing that occupies the heart and mind. How blessed that there is not a person you may have to do with who does not become to you an object for drawing out the grace of Christ. May we cultivate the desire that there may be the growing manifestation of our life, according to His image who is its source and only perfect exemplar!

Hence, therefore, the Holy Spirit, by the apostle, puts before Titus things and persons exactly as they were, and as He would have them be. “That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience. The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine; teachers of good things; that they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.” There are those who might think these exhortations uncalled for,

setting up their judgment, and regarding it as a slight on Christians, as if it were impossible that godly men and women could fall into such snares as taking too much wine, or violence in word and deed. But we must remember that the corruption of the best thing is the worst; and if Christianity has unbound fetters, liberty may be used to shameful excesses. It was wise and needful to exhort young women, among the rest, to be keepers at home, to mind their children, as well as to be obedient to their husbands. I believe you will find that the starting-point of many a Christian's ruin is apt to begin practically with high-minded inattention to the small duties of daily life. How many persons, who afterwards fell into the depths of gross sin, failed originally in something that looks trivial and commonplace, which even natural conscience would recognize and rebuke The true safeguard, then, of the saints' well-being is an exercised conscience, in self-judgment before God, with dependence on Him, whilst withal the heart enters into that blessed truth which the apostle himself put before Titus — eternal life in Christ before the world began. What can be more completely out of the scene of present things than that which is here presented? But if there be what my soul knows I have got, unchanging, before time, and entirely outside the first creation, God reveals it to me that it may be proved and manifested in the family, with the children, with men at large, with the aged and the young of either sex. There is no relationship, there is not a single thing of the most ordinary kind, that does not become a test. And this is particularly shown in what follows: "Young men likewise exhort to be sober-minded. In all thing showing thyself a pattern of good works." For the example of an eminent servant of God is of great

consequence; therefore he adds, “In doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you.” But this also draws out in a remarkable way what to my mind is very characteristic of Christianity. I refer to the great price that God sets on the poor, yea, the very slave. None but God so thought of them then, though even infidelity has filched it from the Bible to work into the aggrandisement of the first man since, and at no time more than in our day, for the final struggle.

Writing to a cherished fellow-servant, when the apostle comes to the slaves, he breaks out into one of the finest developments of the doctrine of grace found in this epistle, or anywhere. If God pays particular attention to any, it is to those that man as such despised. If God makes much of one, it is because circumstances particularly expose that one to be passed by. “Exhort slaves,” then says he, “to be obedient unto their masters, and to please them well in all things; not answering again; not purloining.” What! Christian slaves? To what might not Satan tempt, and into what might not those fall, especially, who regard it as impossible! “Not answering again; not purloining but showing all good fidelity; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.” Here he opens to us the lovely view of what the doctrine of God our Saviour is. “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation unto all men hath appeared, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present age; looking for that blessed hope, and the appearing of the glory of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.”

Thus we have in the most truthful, terse, and luminous terms the foundation, the walk, and the hope of the believer. The foundation is not a law which puts man to the proof, discovering his vanity and the impossibility of so standing in the presence of God, but holding out in its ordinances the pledges of good things to come. The good is come; the test of the first man, and the shadows are not before the Christian. They had their place in schooling the flesh, if it could be; but the time is arrived for realities, which never pass away; and the greatest reality of all is that which God has revealed to us in the Saviour, and His great salvation. It is the saving grace of God, therefore; for man deserves it not, and, as a lost sinner, has no claim on the God he despises and rebels against. But it holds out salvation unto all, and so it has appeared. It is neither hidden nor limited. When it was a question of the law, bringing death and condemnation, its range was restricted; when it is salvation that goes forth, how could a God of grace confine it in boundaries narrower than the need of ruined man? I do not speak of how far it takes effect, but I say that God sends it wherever there are wants, and that He loves to display it where there is the most palpable ruin.

The grace of God, therefore, that bears salvation to all men, has appeared, instead of a law directed to a particular nation. Nothing is farther from the revealed truth of God than the theory that, when we are saved of grace, we are put back again under the law. Rather does the grace which saves teach us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts; for God will make us feel what we are, what our nature is. but then it is grace that makes us judge what we are, and most truly teaches us to detect its evil and lusts.

Observe, too, that it is not a question simply of fleshly but of worldly lusts. All was hatred to God, and discontentedness with that which He gives as our portion. Hence insatiable yearning is indulged after that which we have not. These are worldly lusts; but God's grace teaches us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly as to ourselves, righteously as to those around us, godly in His sight, and all this in the present world where we find ourselves, once sinners but now brought to God.

Nor is this all. The heart wants that which may lift it above all present things; and God does not fail to supply it. He fills not the imagination but the heart, and this with a bright vision of divine and enduring glory, so much the more needed where there is, alas! the reality of sin and misery and sorrow all around. "Looking therefore for that blessed hope, and the, appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ."' If grace has appeared, we know that glory is about to appear. God does not mean to have the world always wretched; He intends to put down His enemies with a high hand; He will not consent that His saints shall ever more be exposed to the efforts and wiles of Satan, who lures men to his deceits and their own destruction. The falsehood of either ameliorating human nature or improving the world will soon end in worse confusion and in the sorest judgment. What a comfort for the Christian to have the certainty that God will take it in hand! It is His fixed mind so to do. Hence, therefore, we have a blessed hope, as sure as the faith that rests on His grace that has already appeared.

But when His glory appears, it will be that of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ. It is the glory of no

secondary God. Any subordinate sense is here repudiated explicitly. If there is any difference, there is always maintained in scripture the utmost care to assert the glory of the Lord Jesus. His humiliation in grace placed Him in circumstances where His supreme glory might be questioned; man readily took advantage of it; and Satan, always the antagonist of the Son of God, has prompted men to abuse His grace so as to deny His glory. But He, the Saviour, the Lord Jesus, is our great God as well as Saviour, and, if this be His glory, it is the very same Jesus who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. Thus the heart, when it looks forward to the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, finds in Him who will usher in the glory the very One who gave Himself for us in self-sacrificing, atoning love. Hence the affections are kept in the liveliest play, and all dread, so natural to be felt at the approach of the glory of the great God and Saviour, is a denial of the love we have already and so fully proved in Him, “who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity,” etc. “These things,” says he, “speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.”

In the last chapter (Titus 3) the exhortation is pursued, as to what was more outside. “Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work, to speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, showing all meekness unto all men.” There are two reasons given to confirm the saints in this. The first is that we ourselves were once so evil; the second is that God has been so good to us. “For we ourselves were sometimes foolish,

disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another." What could be worse? "But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done" — we have done the very reverse — "but according to his mercy he saved us," — and how? — "by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost."

It is not to be thought that these two things are exactly the same. The washing of regeneration looks at our old condition, outside of which it places us; the renewing of the Holy Ghost looks more at that inward work which is made ours by the Spirit of God. The former appears to be set forth in baptism; the latter refers rather to our connection with the new creation. According to the language of the day, the one is a change of position or objective, the other is subjective and inward. This seems the difference between the two. And this is carried on in the next verse more fully. Speaking of the renewing of the Holy Ghost, it is added, "which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour." It is not merely that God continues the work He has always wrought in souls. There never was a time, since sin came into the world and grace followed, when souls were not born again. It must be so, unless all were left to perish. None could enter the kingdom of God unless they had a nature capable of understanding and enjoying the true God. This, of course, the Christian has; but then the Christian should not only know that he has this new nature, but that he has it after the richest sort and fullest measure — "which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour."

Here we learn the blessed truth of Christianity. There is no disparagement done to what was of old among the saints; but, on the other hand, there is no hiding the transcendent blessedness of the Christian. Of no Old Testament saint could it be said that it was shed abundantly. This was suitable and only imparted when our Lord Jesus accomplished redemption. God would put honour on Christ and His cross in every way; so that, as the fruits of His infinite work, the richest blessing is lavished on the Christian now. This is what is referred to here — "which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, that being justified by his grace we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." Thus he binds together the doctrine which met us in the preface of the epistle with the rest; but that which comes before us at the close as at the first — eternal life, has justly an immense place here.

Then in the closing verses he gives some needed practical exhortations. "This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works." It is a beautiful trait to find the apostle, near the end of his course, so exceedingly simple. Not that the depths of truth were not prized by him or not intimated. But plain every-day need goes along with the deepest truth (and there is no deeper or more blessed way of looking at the saint than as having life in Christ which was before the world began). While the unearthly place of the saint is affirmed, there is the greatest care to maintain these small matters so often overlooked and neglected. Is not all this worthy of God? It tells its own tale to every heart that can appreciate what the blessedness of the truth is. How needful for us to be

reminded of that which such high truth might seem to leave out of sight! But it is not so with the Spirit of God.

Nor does he speak only of those within. “Avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the for they are unprofitable and vain. A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject.” By “heretic” is not meant necessarily one who holds false doctrines.1 Such is the sense that is in modern usage put upon the word. In scripture a “heretic” might be sound enough in doctrine. The evil is making his own particular views, etc. the occasion and badge of a party. Supposing, for instance, a person were to press his private opinions of the law of Moses, or the second coming of Christ, and make either these or anything else an indispensable condition for reception as a Christian, or of Christian fellowship, such a course would stamp him as a heretic. Nor am I now raising a question of his thoughts (right or wrong) either about the law or the Second Advent: the use made is the evil here. At the time one finds commonly that where men despise practical grace and godliness, their doctrine sooner or later is apt to turn out unsound. Fundamental error as to Christ is called in scripture antichrist. A man that overthrows His personal glory is not merely a heretic (in the Biblical meaning) but in antichrist; and this must be dealt with in the most stringent and peremptory manner if we pretend to obey God’s word. Nothing less is due to Christ. 2 John goes far beyond 2 Thess. 3 or even 1 Cor. 5. It is not merely a question of our own soul, though it is certainly perilous for any to treat it lightly, but there is a holy duty to Christ; and it is our bounden obligation to the slighted Son of God that we never make terms of compromise or neutrality with

His dishonour. The only scriptural procedure is to deal unsparingly with such evil doctrine as is fatal to the glory of our Lord and Saviour. Need I say that He ought to be infinitely dear to us — dearer than friends, life, or even the church itself?

But a “heretic” here is quite another thing. It supposes the making of a party. Disputes within lead to heresies without. (Gal. 5) When a man has turned his back on the assembly, when he leaves the table of the Lord, and this because of his own views, drawing others after him, you have not a schismatic only but the “heretic” of these passages. Consequently there is no question of removing such an one from the midst of the saints; he is away; he has gone himself, and would form a party outside. I fear that the present distractions of Christendom blind many to this sin. How often we hear believers indulging in words of this sort as to such: “Ah yes; but still he is a dear brother, and we ought to go after him and try to win him back.” What does the apostle say of a man who is a heretic, even to such a confidential labourer as Titus? “After one first and a second admonition shun.” Have nothing more to do with him. And this is the more instructive because certainly Titus was no common man. He stood in a post of special authority, and was surely gifted with suitable wisdom and power for the extraordinary office that the Lord called him to; but even he was not to be tampering with this evil thing. Titus himself is forbidden to have intercourse with him after a first and second admonition. And it is found constantly in practice, as I have known cases myself over and over again, that when a Christian presumes to trust his own mind, feelings, or instinct, in the face of such a warning as this, the result is not that the party-man is won, but

that he gains another adherent. There are then two "heretics," we may say, instead of one. Our best wisdom is implicit subjection to God's word; whilst the man who, with the best of intentions, tries to correct according to his own mind and heart him that forms a party away from the Lord and His table, enters into temptation, and gets drawn into that evil or some other erratic course himself. There is neither fidelity nor even security except in rejecting such ways and persons, and the word of God is the only just and divine measure of rejecting. We must always stand on the authority, and seek simply the just application of the word of God. The one question for us is, "What is the case to which the scripture applies?" The moment you have ascertained that this or that is what the scripture means, then simply obey, trusting the Lord, no matter what may be the reproach. People may denounce or detract: if we cleave to the Lord and His word, it matters not. The reproaches of men are no more than the dust of the balance. The one thing is to do the will of God. He that does His will abides for ever.

The reason assigned here confirms what has been said, and makes all very plain. "A man that is a heretic after a first and second admonition shun; knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself." The whole root of it is self. He. first takes up his own opinion and, contrary to the word of God, presses it on others. Not that it must be heterodox in itself; the opinion may be sound enough, but the use made is sectarian. He that prefers his own opinions and line to the church is self-condemned. Sometimes indeed the opinions may be quite erroneous; but this matters little. The question is not whether one's view is

erroneous or not: to go out because of it is purely selfish, and contrary to Christ. The party-maker is pressing his will or view for ends of his own; and he that does so sins — yea, as it is said here, is self-condemned.

The word “heresies” in 1 Cor. 11:19 may confirm what is after all a very important point, especially at the present time, in regard to Christendom. The apostle tells the Corinthians that there were already divisions or schisms among them, and says that “there must be also heresies” among them. There is no connection whatever necessarily between a schism and a false doctrine; but there is a most vital link between a schism within leading to a party without. The schismatics still met at the same table of the Lord. But the apostle lets them know that if they made splits within, these are sure to work with increase of evil till the fomenters go without as a fixed party there. Divisions already existed within the Corinthian church. These if unjudged would end in open heresies or “sects” (as in the margin) outside. But the result would be in God’s hand that the approved were to be made manifest.

This is a graver matter than many might imagine. What a call to us always and resolutely to resist the first germs of evil! It matters not what the occasion may be. Take that which may pain and grieve deeply: we are entitled in the grace of the Lord to be above it; and the more right we may be, the more we can afford to be gracious. Let us leave results in the hands of the Lord. If ever so right, still, if one fights for self, it will effectually hinder the vindication which the Lord can give in His own due time. From the very fact of your fighting people will never give you credit for singleness of eye. It always stirs up opposition in others. No sooner do you leave it

in the hands of the Lord than He appears, and will make it perfectly manifest who is on His side and who is against Him.

There is another thing, too, that must claim our notice for a moment. The apostle speaks about sending a faithful labourer to Titus. “When I shall have sent Artemas unto thee, or Tychicus, be diligent to come unto me to Nicopolis: for there I have determined to winter.” Of course, such directions were in accordance with the action of the Holy Ghost. It is a great mistake to suppose that there may not be such a thing as arrangement in ministry. Need I say that what was wrong in itself would not be consecrated by an apostle’s doing it? An apostle inspired by the Holy Ghost would never in writing call for a thing that was contrary to the mind of the Lord. Now Paul does speak of sending to Crete one or other of his fellow-labourers in whom he had confidence; and it was quite right. It is a matter that requires wisdom from above, because one might send a wrong person. But the principle is caring for the work. of the Lord, and not leaving things as if it were contrary to truth and the Lord to have an interest even where you cannot be. The notion that such things must be untouched through fear of trenching on the Lord is a fallacy; it is contrary to this word of God and others also. Scripture authorizes care in this kind of way. If I could be a means of sending or inclining the heart of a servant of the Lord to a place where he was calling another servant from it, it would be my duty to do it. Not that this should be meddled with unless the Lord give assurance of His own mind in the matter; but it is not a thing to be left, as if it were contrary to faith to desire such a thing. The apostle here proves to my mind the clean contrary.

On the other hand, it is not everybody that possesses a competent judgment about, such a matter; and there, too, is need of the Lord's own power. The word and the Spirit of God are amply sufficient, although we have neither apostles nor the charges that depended on them. Now, what He tells the apostle here is (and, I have no doubt, was meant in the long run) for the instruction of the saints of God. "When I shall send Artemas or Tychicus, bring Zenas the lawyer, and Apollos on their journey diligently, that nothing be wanting unto them." He adds a few words of great practical moment: "Let ours also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful." It was not merely a question of man supplying his own wants; we ought to have a heart for others. It is a great joy that God uses one for the good of another; and as tie does so spiritually, He would have the saints also consider the value of an honest occupation; not merely to provide for necessary uses, but also not to be unfruitful. What a joy is the joy of grace, the joy of believers over circumstances, the joy that makes us feel we are identified, in our measure, with the great and blessed work of God here below!

1 Pravity of doctrine, as to Christ's person at least, constitutes the ground of the darker guilt of an "Antichrist" in scripture.

Hebrews

Hebrews 1 - 6

The epistle to the Hebrews differs in some important respects from all those which have been before us; so much so that many have questioned whether it be the writing of the apostle Paul, of Apollos, of Barnabas, etc. Of this my mind has no doubt. I believe that Paul, and no other, was the author, and that it bears the strongest intrinsic traits of his doctrine. The style is different, and so is the manner of handling the truth; but the line of truth, though it be affected by the object that he had in view, is that which savours of Paul beyond all: not of Peter, or John, or James, or Jude, but of Paul alone.

One good and plain reason which has graven a difference of character on the epistle is the fact, that it goes outside his allotted province. Paul was the apostle of the uncircumcision. If writing for the instruction of Jews, as here he clearly was, to believers or Christians that had once been of that nation, he was evidently outside the ordinary function of his apostolic work.

There is another reason also why the epistle to the Hebrews diverges very sensibly and materially from the rest of the writings of St. Paul, that it is not, strictly speaking, an exercise of apostleship at all, but of the writer (apostle though he were) as a teacher, and here a teacher clearly not of Gentiles, as he says elsewhere, but of Jews. Now it is plain, if he that was an apostle and preacher and teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth was led by the Holy Spirit to address the saints that were of the old Jewish fold, there must have been a

marked departure from his usual methods in the manner of using and presenting the truth of God to these. But we have this blessed result of his acting outside his own ordinary sphere, that it is the finest and indeed the only specimen of teaching properly so called in the New Testament. It is not a revelation given by prophetic or apostolic authority; and for this reason, I presume, he does not introduce himself at all. It is always a failure when the teacher as such is prominent. The point for such an one is, that the reaching (not himself) should arrest and instruct. But in revealing truth the person whom God employs in that work is naturally brought before those addressed; and hence the apostle took particular care, even if he did not write an epistle, to put his name to it, introducing himself at the beginning through the amanuensis that he employed, and with scrupulous care adding his own name at the end of each epistle.

In writing to the Hebrew believers it is not so. Here the apostle is what indeed he was. Besides being apostle of the uncircumcision, he was a teacher; and God took care that, although expressly said to be a teacher of Gentiles, his should be the word to teach the Christian Jews too; and, in fact, we may be assured that he taught them as they never were taught before. He opened the scriptures as none but Paul could, according to the gospel of the glory of Christ. He taught them the value of the living oracles that God had given them; for this is the beautiful characteristic here. Indeed the epistle to the Hebrews stands unique. By it the believing Jew was led into a divine application of that which was in the Old Testament — that which they had habitually read in the law, Psalms, and prophets, from their cradle we may say,

but which they had never seen in such a light before. That mighty, logical, penetrating, richly-stored mind! that heart with such affections large and deep, as scarce ever were concentred in another bosom! that soul of experience wonderfully varied and profound! — he was the one whom God was now leading in a somewhat unwonted path, no doubt, but in a path which, when once taken, at once approves itself by divine wisdom to every heart purified by faith.

For if Peter, as is known, were the apostle of the circumcision pre-eminently, it was through him that God first of all opened the door of the kingdom of heaven to the Gentiles; and if the apostle Paul, with the concurrence of the heads of the work among the circumcision, had gone to the Gentiles, none the less did the Spirit of God (it may be without asking those who seemed to be somewhat at Jerusalem) employ Paul to write to the believers of the circumcision the most consummate treatise on the bearing of Christ and Christianity upon the law and the prophets, and as practically dealing with their wants, dangers, and blessing. Thus did God most carefully guard in every form from the technical drawing of lines of rigid demarcation to which even Christians are so prone, the love of settling things in precise routine, the desire that each should have his own place, not only as the proper sphere of his work, but to the exclusion of every other. With admirable wisdom indeed the Lord directs the work and the workmen, but never exclusively; and the apostle Paul is here, as just shown, the proof of it on one side as Peter is on the other.

What is the consequence under the blessed guidance of the Spirit? As the great teacher of the believers from

among the Jews, we have, after all, not Paul, but through him God Himself left to address His own, in the words, facts, ceremonies, offices, persons so long familiar to the chosen people. Paul does not appear. This could hardly have been by any other arrangement, at any rate not so naturally. “God,” says he, “having in many measures and in many manners spoken in time past to the fathers in the prophets, at the last of these days spoke to us in his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.” Paul, would show them thus the infinite dignity of the Messiah whom they had received. Never would Paul weaken the personal rights or the official place of the Anointed of Jehovah. Contrariwise, he would lead them on to find what they had never yet seen in their Messiah, and, wonderful to say, he founds his proofs, not on new revelations, but on those very words of God which they had read so superficially, the depths of which they had never approached, nor had they so much as suspected. The facts of Christianity they knew; the linking of all scripture with Christ’s person, and work, and glory they had yet to discover.

But mark the manner of the writer. He is careful to establish the thread of connection with God’s word and ways of old; and yet there is not a single epistle which more elaborately throughout its entire course sets the believer in present relationship to Christ in heaven; I think one might be bold to say, none so much. From the very starting-point we see Christ, not merely dead and risen, but glorified in heaven. There is no doubt that the writer meant his readers to hold fast, that He who suffered all things on earth is the same Jesus who is now at the right hand of God; but the first place in which we hear of Him is as Son of God on high according to

Hebrews 1, and there it is we see Him as Son of man according to Hebrews 2. It was there, in fact, that Paul had himself first seen the Lord. Who then was so suitable to introduce Jesus, the rejected Messiah, at the right hand of God, as Saul of Tarsus? On the way to Damascus that staunchest of Jews had his eyes first opened — blinded naturally, but enabled by grace so much the more to see by the power of the Holy Spirit the glorified Christ, It is to Christ in heaven, then, that Paul, writing to the Christian Jews, first directs their attention. But he does it in a manner which shows the singularly delicate tact given him. True affection is prudent for its object when peril is nigh, and delights to help effectively, instead of being indifferent whether the way of it wounds those whose good is sought. In no way are the former messages of God forgotten in the days of their fathers. Nor would one gather from this epistle that its writer laboured among the Gentiles, nor even that there was a calling of Gentile believers in the Lord Jesus. The epistle to the Hebrews never speaks of either. We can understand, therefore, how active-minded men, who occupied themselves with the surface — the method, the style, the unusual absence of the writer's name, and other peculiarities in the phenomena of this epistle, too readily hesitated to attribute it to Paul. They might not attach much moment to the general tradition which ascribed it to him. But they ought to have looked more steadily into its depths, and the motives for obvious points of difference, even were it written by Paul.

Granted that there is a striking absence of allusion to the one body here. But there was one nearer and dearer to Paul than even the church. There was one truth that

Paul laboured yet more to hold up than that one body, wherein is neither Jew nor Greek — the glory of Him who is the head of it. Christ Himself was what made the assembly of God precious to him. Christ Himself was infinitely more precious than even the church which He had loved so well, and for which He gave Himself. Of Christ, then, he would deliver his last message to his brethren after the flesh as well as Spirit; and as he began preaching in the synagogues that He is the Son of God, (Acts 9) so here he begins his epistle to the Hebrews. He would lead them on, and this with gentle but firm and witting hand. He would deepen their knowledge lovingly and wisely. He would not share their unbelief, their love of ease, their value for outward show, their dread of suffering; but he would reserve each folly for the most fitting moment. He would lay a vigorous hand on that which threatened their departure from the faith, but he would smooth lightly lesser difficulties out of their way. But when he gained their ear, and they were enabled to see the bright lights and perfections of the great High Priest, there is no warning more energetic than this epistle affords against the imminent and remediless danger of those who abandon Christ, whether for religious form, or to indulge in sin. All is carried on in the full power of the Spirit of God, but with the nicest consideration of Jewish prejudices, and the most scrupulous care to bring every warrant for his doctrine from their own ancient yet little understood testimonies.

It is evident, however, even from the opening of the epistle, that though he does not slight but uphold the Old Testament scriptures, yet he will not let the Jews pervert them to dishonour the Lord Jesus. How had God

spoken to the fathers? In many measures and in many manners. So had He spoken in the prophets. It was fragmentary and various, not a full and final manifestation of Himself. Mark the skill! He thereby cuts off, by the unquestionable facts of the Old Testament, that overweening self-complacency of the Jew, which would set Moses and Elias against hearing the Son of God. Had God spoken to the fathers, in the prophets? Unquestionably. Paul, who loved Israel and estimated their privileges more highly than themselves, (Rom. 9) was the last man to deny or enfeeble it. But how had God spoken then? Had He formerly brought out the fulness of His mind? Not so. The early communications were but refracted rays, not the light unbroken and complete. Who could deny that such was the character of all the Old Testament? Yet so cautiously does he insinuate the obviously and necessarily practical character of that which was revealed of old, that at a first reading, nay, however often read perfunctorily, they might have no more perceived it than, I suppose, most of us must confess as to ourselves. But there it is; and when we begin to prove the divine certainty of every word, we weigh and weigh again its value.

As then it is pointed out that there were formerly many portions, so also were there many modes in the prophetic communications of God. This was, beyond doubt, the way in which His revelations had been gradually vouchsafed to His people. But for this very reason, it was not complete. God was giving piecemeal His various words, “here a little, and there a little.” Such was the character of His ways with Israel. They could not — man could not — hear more till redemption was accomplished, after the Son of God Himself was come,

and His glory fully revealed. Now when promises were given to the fathers, they did not go beyond the earthly glory of Christ; but known to Him were all things from the beginning, yet He did not outrun the course of His dealings with His people. But as they manifested themselves in relation to Himself, and alas! their own weakness and ruin, higher glories began to dawn, and were needful as a support to the people. Hence, invariably, you will find these two things correlative. Reduce the glory of Christ, and you equally lower your judgment of the state of man. See the total absolute ruin of the creature; and none but the Son in all His glory is felt to be a sufficient Saviour for such.

The apostle was now being led by the Holy Ghost to wean these believers from their poor, meagre, earthly thoughts of Christ — from that so common tendency to take the least portion of the blessing, contenting ourselves with that which we think we need, and which we feel to be desirable for us, and there sitting down. God, on the contrary, while He does adapt Himself to the earliest wants of souls, and the feeblest answer to Christ by the Spirit of God working within us, nevertheless has in His heart for us what suits His own glory, and this He will accomplish; for faithful is He who hath promised, and He will do it. He means to have all that love the Saviour like Him; and all that He purposes to do for the Saviour's honour, He has perfectly unfolded to us. No doubt, this supposes the resurrection state, and it never can be till then; but He graciously works now, that we may learn by degrees that only such a Saviour and Lord — the effulgence of His glory, and full expression of His substance, the Son of God Himself — could suit either God or us.

Accordingly, while he intimates thus that all was but partial, being piecemeal and multiform, in the revelations from God to the fathers, he lets them know, in the next verse, that the same God had, in the last of these days, “spoken unto us in his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.” If such and so great were His glory, what must not be the word of such a Son? What the fulness of the truth that God was now making known to His people by Him? Was this to slight the glory of the Messiah? Let them rather take heed that there be no oversight of Him on their part; none could justly put it to the account of God. For who was He, this Messiah, that they would fain occupy themselves with as a king, and would have confirmed, had it ‘been possible, to aggrandize themselves — the ancient people of God? The brightness of God’s glory, the express image of His substance; the upholder, not of Israel or their land only, but of all things “by the word of his power.” But hearken — “when he had by himself purged our sins,” was not the whole Jewish system blotted out by such a truth? — “when he had by himself purged our sins.” It is to the exclusion of every other instrument. Help there was not; means there could not be. He Himself undertook and achieved the task alone; and, when He had thus done it, “sat down on the right hand of the majesty on high; being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.”

This furnishes the first part of the doctrine on which the apostle insists. If any beings had special account or stood highly exalted in a Jew’s eye, the holy angels were they; and no wonder. It was in this form that Jehovah ordinarily appeared, whenever He visited the fathers or

the sons of Israel. There were exceptions; but, as a rule, He who made known the will and manifested the power of Jehovah in these early days to the fathers is spoken of habitually as the angel of Jehovah. It is thus He was represented. He had not yet taken manhood, or made it part of His person. I do not deny that there was sometimes the appearance of man. An angel might appear in whatever guise it pleased God; but, appear as He might, He was the representative of Jehovah. Accordingly, the Jews always associated angels with the highest idea of beings, next to Jehovah Himself, the chosen messengers of the divine will for any passing vision among men. But now appeared One who completely surpassed the angels. Who was He? The Son of God. It ought to have filled them with joy.

We may easily understand that every soul truly born of God would and must break forth into thanksgiving to hear of a deeper glory than he had first perceived in Christ, We must not look on the Lord according to our experience, if there has been simplicity in the way God has brought us to the perception of His glory; we must endeavour to put ourselves back, and consider the prejudices and difficulties of the Jew. They had their own peculiar hindrances; and one of their greatest was the idea of a divine person becoming a man; for a man, to a Jew, was far below an angel. Are there not many now, even professing Christians (to their shame be it spoken) who think somewhat similarly? Not every Christian knows that a mere angel, as such, is but a servant; not every Christian understands that man was made to rule. No doubt he is a servant, but not merely one so accomplishing orders, but having a given sphere, in which he was to rule as the image and glory of God: a

thing never true of an angel — never was, and never can be. The Jews had not entered into this; no man ever did receive such a thought. The great mass of Christians now are totally ignorant of it. The time, the manner, and the only way in which such a truth could be known, was in the person of Christ; for He became not an angel but a man.

But the very thing that to us is so simple, when we have laid hold of the astonishing place of man in the person of Christ — this was to them the difficulty. His being a man, they imagined, must lower Him necessarily below an angel. The apostle, therefore, has to prove that which to us is an evident matter of truth — of revelation from God — without argument at all. And this he proves from their own scriptures. “For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee?” Now it is true that angels are sometimes called “sons of God,” but God never singles out one and says, “Thou art my Son.” In a vague general way, He speaks of all men as being His sons. He speaks of the angels in a similar way, as being His sons. Adam was a son of God — apart, I mean, from the grace of God — as a mere creature of God into whose nostrils He breathed the breath of life. Adam was a son of God, angels were sons of God; but to which of the angels did God ever speak in such language as this? No, it was to a man; for He was thus speaking of the Lord as Messiah here below; and this is what gives the emphasis of the passage. It is not predicated of the Son as eternally such; there would be no wonder in this. None could be surprised, assuredly, that the Son of God, viewed in His own eternal being, should be greater than an angel. But that He, an infant on earth, looked at as the son of the Virgin, that He

should be above all the angels in heaven — this was a wonder to the Jewish mind; and yet what had in their scriptures a plainer proof? It was not to an angel in heaven, but to the Babe at Bethlehem, that God had said, “Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee;” and, again, “I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son” — words said historically of David’s son; but, as usual, looking onward to a greater than David, or his wise son, who immediately succeeded him. Christ is the true and continual object of the inspiring Spirit.

But next follows a still more powerful proof of His glory: “And again, when he bringeth in the first-begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him.” So far from any angel approaching the glory of the Lord Jesus, it is God Himself who commands that all the angels shall worship Him. “And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire.” They are but servants, whatever their might, function, or sphere. They may have a singular place as servants, and a spiritual nature accomplishing the pleasure of the Lord; but they are only servants. They never rule. “But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.” Not a word is said about His fellows until God Himself addresses Him as God. The angels worshipped Him: God now salutes Him as God; for such He was, counting it no robbery to be on equality with God, one with the Father.

But this is far from all. The chain of scriptural testimony is carried out and confirmed with another and even

more wondrous citation. “God” may be used in a subordinate sense. Elohim has His representatives, who are, therefore, called gods. Magistrates and kings are so named in scripture. So are they styled, as the Lord told the Jews. The word of God came and commissioned them to govern in earthly things; for it might be no more than in judicial matters. Still, there they were, in their own sphere, representing God’s authority, and are called gods, though clearly with a very subordinate force. But there is another name which never is employed in any sense save that which is supreme. The dread and incommunicable name is “Jehovah.” Is, then, the Messiah ever called Jehovah? Certainly He is. And under what circumstances? In His deepest shame. I do not speak now of God’s forsaking Christ as the point of view in which He is looked at, though at the same general time.

We that believe can all understand that solemn judgment of our sins on the part of God, when Jesus was accomplishing atonement on the cross. But there was more in the cross than this, which is not the subject of Psalm 102, but rather the Messiah utterly put to shame by man and the people; nevertheless taking it all — for this was His perfection in it — from the hand of Jehovah. It is under such circumstances He pours out His plaint. Jehovah raised Him up, and Jehovah cast Him down. Had atonement, as such, been in view here as in Psalm 22, would it not be put as casting Him down, and then raising Him up? This is the way in which we Christians naturally think of Christ in that which is nearest to the sinner’s need and God’s answer of grace. But here Jehovah raised Him up, and Jehovah cast Him down, which evidently refers to His Messianic place, not to His

position as the suffering and afterwards glorified Christ, the Head of the church. He was raised up as the true Messiah by Jehovah on earth, and He was cast down by Jehovah on earth. No doubt man was the instrument of it. The world which He had made did not know Him; His own people received Him not, neither would have Him. Jewish unbelief hated Him: the more they knew Him, the less could they endure Him. The goodness, the love, the glory of His person only drew out the deadly enmity of man, and specially of Israel; for they were worse than the Romans: and all this He, in the perfectness of His dependence, takes from Jehovah. For Himself, He came to suffer and die by wicked hands, but it was in the accomplishment of the will and purpose of God His Father. He knew full well that all the power of man or Satan would not have availed one instant before Jehovah permitted it. Hence all is taken meekly, but with none the less agony, from Jehovah's hand; and less or other than this had not been perfection. In the midst of Messiah's profound sense and expression of His humiliation to the lowest point thus accepted from Jehovah, He contrasts His own estate, wasted, prostrate, and coining to nothing. He contrasts it with two things. First, the certainty of every promise being accomplished for Israel and Zion He unhesitatingly anticipates; whilst He, the Messiah, submits to be given up to every possible abasement. He then contrasts Himself with the great commanding truth of Jehovah's own permanence. And what is the answer from on high to the holy sufferer? Jehovah from above answers Jehovah below; He owns that the smitten Messiah is Jehovah — of stability and unchangeableness equal with His own.

What need of further proof after this? Nothing could be asked or conceived more conclusive, as far as concerned His divine glory. And all that the apostle thinks it necessary to cite after this is the connecting link of His present place on the throne of Jehovah in heaven with all these ascending evidences of His divine glory, beginning with His being Son as begotten in time and in the world; then His emphatic relationship to God as of the lineage of David — not Solomon, save typically, but the Christ really and ultimately; then worshipped by the angels of God; next, owned by God as God, and, finally, as Jehovah by Jehovah. All is closed by the citation of Psalm 110:1, which declares that God bids Him sit as man at His right hand on high till the hour of judgment on His foes. It is one of the most interesting psalms in the whole collection, and of the deepest possible moment as preparatory both to what is now brought in for the Christian (which, however, is hidden here) and to what it declares shall be by-and-by for Israel. Thus it is a sort of bridge between old and new, as it is more frequently quoted in the New Testament than any other Old Testament scripture. “Therefore” (as should be the conclusion, though commencing the next chapter) “we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels” — clearly he is still summing up the matter — “was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward: how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard?” It is striking to see how the apostle takes the place of such as simply had the message, like other Jews, from those who personally heard Him: so

completely was he writing, not as the apostle of the Gentiles magnifying his office, but as one of Israel, who were addressed by those who companied with Messiah on earth. It was confirmed “unto us,” says he, putting himself along with his nation, instead of conveying his heavenly revelations as one taken out from the people, and the Gentiles, to which last he was sent. He looks at what was their proper testimony, not at that to which he had been separated extraordinarily. He is dealing with them as much as possible on their own ground, though, of course, without compromise of his own. He does not overlook the testimony to the Jews as such: “God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and distributions of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will.”

Now he enters on another and very distinct portion of the glory of Christ. He is not only the Son of God, but Son of man; and they are both, I will not say equally necessary, but, without doubt, both absolutely necessary, whether for God’s glory or for His salvation to whomsoever it may be applied. Touch Christ on either side, and all is gone. Touch Him on the human side, it is hardly less fatal than on the divine. I admit that His divine glory has a place which humanity could not possess; but His human perfection is no less necessary to found the blessing for us on redemption, glorifying God in His righteousness and. love. This accordingly the apostle now traces. Jesus was God as truly as man, and in both above the angels. His superiority as Son of God had been proved in the most masterly manner from their own scriptures in the first chapter. He had drawn his conclusions, urging the all-importance of giving heed, and the danger of letting slip such a testimony. The law,

as he had said elsewhere, was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator. He had just said, if it was firm, and every transgression and disobedience received just recompence of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation? Outward infraction and inner rebellion met their retribution. The sanction of the gospel would be commensurate with its grace, and God would avenge the slightings of a testimony begun by the Lord, farther carried on and confirmed by the Holy Spirit with signs, wonders, powers, and distributions according to His will.

Now he takes the other side, saying, “Unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come.” Whatever may have been God’s employment of angels about the law, the world to come was never destined to be subjected to them. It is the good pleasure of God to use an angel where it is a question of providence, or law, or. power; but where it comes to be the manifestation of His glory in Christ, He must have other instruments more suitable for His nature, and according to His affections. “For one has somewhere testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him? Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of thy hands.” Thus we see the first question raised is one as to the littleness of man in comparison with that which God has made; but the question is no sooner raised than answered, and this by one who looks at the Second Man and not at the first. Behold then man in Christ, and then talk, if you can, about His littleness. Behold man in Christ, and then be amazed at the wonders of the heavens. Let creation be as great as it may be, He that

made all things is above them. The Son of man has a glory that completely eclipses the brightness of the highest objects. But also He shows that the humiliation of the Saviour, in which He was made a little lower than the angels, was for an end that led up to this heavenly glory. Grant that He was made a little lower, than the angels, what was it for? “We see not yet all things put under him. But we behold Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; so that by the grace of God he should taste death for everything.” Nor was this the only object; He was “crowned with glory and honour” as fruit of His sufferings unto death; but it had a gracious object as well as a glorious end; “so that by the grace of God he should taste death for everything;” for thus was the only door of deliverance for what was ruined by the fall, and this because it was the only means of morally vindicating God, who yearned in love over every work of His hands. There can be otherwise no efficacious because no righteous deliverance. It may be infinitely more, but righteous footing it must have; and this the death of Christ has given. Flowing from God’s grace, Christ’s death is the ground of reconciliation for the universe. It has also made it a part of His righteousness to bring man thus out of that ruin, misery, and subjection to death in which he lay. It has put into the hands of God that infinite fund of blessing in which He now loves to admit us reconciled to Himself.

The apostle does not yet draw all the consequences; but he lays down in these two chapters the twofold glory of Christ — Son of God, Son of man; and following up the latter, he approaches that which fitted Him, on the score of sympathy, for the priesthood. I do not mean that Jesus

could have been High Priest according to God because He was man. Not His manhood but His Godhead is the ground of His glory; nevertheless, if He had not been man as well as Son of God, He could not have been priest. As for atonement so for priesthood, that ground was essential. But it was for man, and therefore He too must be man. So it is here shown that it “became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one.” Remark, it is not “all one.” We never reach that height in the epistle to the Hebrews; never have we the body here, any more than unity. For the body we must search into some other epistles of Paul, though unity we may see in another shape in John. But the epistle to the Hebrews never goes so far as either. It does what was even more important for those whom it concerned, and, I add, what is of the deepest possible moment for us. For those who think that they can live according to God on the truth of either Ephesians or of the epistles of St. John, without the doctrine of the epistle to the Hebrews, have made a miserable mistake.

Say what men will, we have our wants, as traversing this wilderness; and although we might like to soar, it cannot long, if at all, prosper. We have, therefore, the adaptation of Christ as priest to the infirmities that we feel, and so much the more because of an exercised conscience towards God, and a realizing of the desert sin has made — this defiled scene of our actual pilgrimage.

Accordingly, in the latter part of the chapter, the apostle begins to introduce the great truths which form so large

a part of the epistle to the Hebrews. He speaks of Christ, the Sanctifier: “He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one.” He means one and the same condition, without entering into particulars. “For which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren.” There is a common relationship which the Sanctifier and the sanctified possess. It might be supposed, because He is the Sanctifier and they are the sanctified, that there could be no such communion. But there is: “for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren.” He never called them so, till He became a man; nor did He so fully then, till He was man risen from the dead. The apostle here most fittingly introduces Psalm 22, etc.: “Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee. And again, I will put my trust in him.” He is proving the reality of this common relationship of the Sanctifier and the sanctified. He, like themselves, can say, and He alone could say as they never did, “I will put my trust in him.” Indeed Psalm 16 was the expression of all His course as man — trust in life, trust in death, trust in resurrection. As in everything else, so in this, He has the pre-eminence; but it is a pre-eminence founded on a common ground. It could not have been true of Him, had He not been a man; had He been simply God, to talk of trusting in God would have been altogether unnatural impossible. As for Him then, though the Sanctifier, He and they were all of one. And so further: “Behold! and the children which God hath given me.” Here is again a different but equally good proof of mutual relationship.

“Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had

the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily he took not on him the nature of angels." This last should be, that He does not take up angels; He does not help them. They are not the objects of His concern in the work here described; "but he takes up the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest" — here you have the object of all the proof of His being man — "in things pertaining to God, to make atonement for the sins of the people." I use the word "atonement, or expiation, as being decidedly preferable to reconciliation." You cannot talk of reconciling sins. It is not a question of making sins right. They are atoned for; people are reconciled. Those who have been sinners are reconciled to God; but as to sins they do not admit of being reconciled at all (which is a mistake). There is need of a propitiation, or expiation, for the sins of His people. "For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted." Temptation to Him was nothing but suffering: He suffered, being tempted, because there was that intrinsic holiness which repelled, but, at the same time, most acutely felt the temptation.

Thus the apostle enters on the vast field that will come before us a little while longer tonight. He has laid the basis for the high-priesthood of Christ. He could not have been such a High Priest, had He not been both divine and human; and he has proved both, in the fullest manner, from their own scriptures.

But before he enters upon the unfolding of His high-priesthood, there is a digression (the two chapters that

follow, I apprehend, linking themselves with the two we have considered). Thus, “Christ as Son over his own house” answers pretty much to the first chapter, as the rest of God by-and-by answers to the second chapter; for I hope to prove it is to be in the scene of future glory. In writings so profound as the apostle’s, one generally hails the least help towards appreciating the structure of an epistle: let the reader consider it.

Hebrews 3. We need not dwell long on these intervening chapters. It is evident that he opens with our Lord as “apostle and high-priest of our confession,” in contrast with the apostle and high priest of the Jews. Moses was the revealer of the mind of God of old, as Aaron had the title and privilege of access then into the sanctuary of God for the people. Jesus unites both in His own person. He came from God, and went to God. The holy brethren, then, partakers of a heavenly calling (not earthly like Israel’s), are told to consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, even Jesus, who is faithful to Him that appointed Him, as also Moses in all his house. Moses, “as a servant,” he takes care particularly to say, in everything shows the superiority of the Messiah. “For he was counted worthy of greater glory than Moses, by how much he that built it hath more honour than the house.” He becomes bold now. He can venture, after having brought out such glory to Christ, to use plainness of speech; and they could hear it, if they believed their own scriptures. If they honoured the man who was God’s servant in founding and directing the tabernacle (or house of God in its rudimentary state), how much more did the ancient oracles call attention to a greater than Moses — to Jehovah — Messiah, even Jesus. How plainly this chapter pre-supposes the proofs of the divine glory

of Christ! We shall see also His Sonship presently. “And Moses was faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of the things to be spoken after; but Christ, as Son over his house, whose house are we.” Christ, being divine, built the house; Christ built all things. Moses ministered as servant, and was faithful in God’s house; Christ as Son is over the house; “whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.”

There were great difficulties, circumstances calculated especially to affect the Jew, who, after receiving the truth with joy, might be exposed to great trial, and so in danger of giving up his hope. It was, besides, particularly hard for a Jew at first to put these two facts together: a Messiah come, and entered into glory; and the people who belonged to the Messiah left in sorrow, and shame, and suffering here below. In fact, no person from the Old Testament could, at first sight at least, have combined these two elements. We can understand it now in Christianity. It is partly, indeed, to the shame of Gentiles, that they do not even see the difficulty for a Jew. It shows how naturally, so to speak, they have forgotten the Jew as having a special place in the word and purposes of God. They consequently cannot enter into the feelings of the Jew; and by such the authority and use of this epistle was grievously slighted. It is the self-conceit of the Gentile, (Rom. 11) not their faith, that makes the Jewish difficulty to be so little felt. Faith enables us to look at all difficulties, on the one hand measuring them, on the other raising us above them. This is not at all the case with ordinary Gentile thought. Unbelief, indifferent and unfeeling, does not even see, still less appreciate, the trials of the weak.

The apostle here enters into everything of value for the way. Although it is perfectly true that the Son is in this place of universal glory, and in relation to us, Son over His house (God's house having an all-comprehending sense and a narrower one), he explains how it is that His people are in actual weakness, trial, exposure, danger and sorrow here below. The people are still travelling through the wilderness, not yet in the land. He immediately appeals to the voice of the Spirit in the Psalms: "Wherefore — (as the Holy Ghost saith, Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: when your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do alway err in heart; and they have not known my ways. So I swear in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest.) — take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end; while it is said, Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation. For some, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses."

What is pressed here is this: that the people of God are still in the path of faith, just like their fathers of old before they crossed the Jordan; that now there is that which puts our patience to the proof; that the grand thing for such is to hold fast the beginning of the assurance firm unto the end. They were tempted to

stumble at the truth of Christ, because of the bitter experiences of the way through which they were going onward. To turn back is but the evil heart of unbelief; to abandon Jesus is to turn away from the living God. To be fellows or companions of the Messiah (Psalm 45) depends on holding fast the beginning of the assurance to the end; for, remember, we are in the wilderness. Following Christ, as of old Moses, we are not arrived at the rest of God. “But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcases fell in the wilderness? And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.”

This leads us to the very important, but often misunderstood, Hebrews 4. What is the meaning of the “rest of God”? Not rest of soul, nor rest of conscience, any more than of heart. It is none of these things, but simply what the apostle says, God’s rest. His rest is not merely your rest. It is not our faith seizing the rest that Christ gives to him that trusts Himself, as when He says, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” He did not say, “I will give you God’s rest.” It was not the time, nor is it of that nature. God’s rest is the rest of His own satisfaction. His rest is a change of all, the present scene of trial and toil, the consequences of sin. Of course the people of God must be formed for the scene, as well as it for them. They are incomparably more to God than that which they are going to fill. But the scene has its importance too. It would not suit God, if it would suit us, to be ever so blessed in such a world as this. He means to have a rest as worthy of Himself as the righteousness we are made

in Christ is worthy of Himself now. As it is His righteousness, so will it be His rest. Therefore it is not merely, as Gentiles are apt to suppose, the bringing of comfort into the heart, and the spirit filled with the consciousness of blessings from God and of His grace to us. The Jew, too, had, in another direction, a miserably inadequate conception of it; for it was earthly, if not sensual. Still, what a Jewish believer often staggered at, what he felt to be a serious riddle for his mind, was the contrast between the circumstances through which he was passing, and the Christ of which the prophets had spoken to him. Now the apostle does not in any way make light of the grief by the way, nor forget that the pilgrimage in the desert is the type of our earthly circumstances. He takes the scriptures that speak of Israel journeying toward, but not yet in, the pleasant land, applying them to the present facts, and at the same time he sets before them in hope the rest of God.

Hebrews 4. “Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us were glad tidings preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. For we who have believed do enter into rest.” That is, we are on the road. He does not say that we have entered, nor does he mean anything of the sort, which is clean contrary to the argument and aim. It is altogether a mistake, therefore, so to interpret the passage. The very reverse is meant, namely, that we have not entered into the rest, but, as the hymn says, we are on our way, I will not say to God, but assuredly to His rest. We are entering into the rest, having got it before us, and on to that rest we move; but we are not

yet there. “We which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest.” It is quite true that it is the Holy Ghost’s object to bring the rest close to us, so as to make us always conscious of the little interval that separates us from the rest of God; but still, let the interval be ever so short, we are not there yet, we are only going towards it. For the present, our place, beyond controversy, is viewed as in fact in the wilderness. According to the doctrine of this epistle (as of the Romans, the Corinthians, and the Philippians) to present us as in heavenly places would be altogether out of place and season. To the Ephesians he does develop our blessing as in and with Christ in the heavenlies. There it was exactly consonant to the character of the truth; for it is truth, and of the highest order. But as far as the Epistle to the Hebrews goes, we should never have learnt this side of the truth of God, or its appropriation to us; for we are only regarded in our actual place, that is, marching through the desert.

Here objections, which might be founded on the scriptures of the Old Testament, are met. There were two, and only two, occasions of old whence it might be argued that there had been an entrance into God’s rest.

The first was when God made the creation; but was there any entering of man into that rest? God, doubtless, rested from His works; but even God is never said then to have rested in His works. Was there anything that satisfied God or blessed man permanently? All was good, yea, very good; but could God rest in His love? Surely not, till all could be founded on the basis of redemption. Before all worlds God meant to have this. Nothing but redemption could bring into His own rest. Consequently,

a rest capable of being spoilt, and all requiring to be begun over again in a new and more blessed way, never could meet the heart or mind of God. This, accordingly, is not His rest; it served as a sign and witness of it, but nothing more.

Then we come down lower to the second instance of deep and special interest to Israel. When Joshua brought the people triumphantly into the possession of Canaan, was this the rest of God? Not so. How is it disproved? By the self-same Psalm — "If they shall enter into my rest," written afterwards. So wrote David, "Today, after so long a time." Not only after the creation, but after Joshua had planted the people in the land, a certain day is determined in the future. For if Jesus [i.e., Joshua] had brought them into rest, he would not have spoken afterwards about another day. They had not entered into it yet.

The "rest" was still beyond. Is it not future still? What has there been to bring people into the rest of God since then? What is there to be compared with creation, or with His people settled in Canaan by the destruction of their foes? That which Gentile theology has brought into the matter, namely, the work of the Lord on the cross, or the application of it to meet the needs of the soul — precious as it was to the apostle, as it must be to faith — has no place whatever in the apostle's argument. If so, where does he bring it into the context? The idea that this is the point debated is so perfectly foreign and futile, that to my mind it demonstrates exceeding prepossession, if not looseness, of mind, as well as a lack of subjection to scripture, in those who allow their theories to override the plain word of God, which is here conspicuous for the absence of that infinite truth.

The apostle, therefore, at once draws the conclusion, that neither at creation, nor in Canaan, was the rest of God really come. The latter part of the Old Testament shows us how Israel got unsettled, and finally driven from their land; though it also predicts their future ingathering. The New Testament shows us the rejection of the Messiah, the ruin of Israel, the salvation of believers, the church formed of such in one body, (whether Jews or Gentiles,) but in the stronger contrast with the rest of God. Consequently, the rest is but coming, not come; it is future. This is the application: "There remaineth therefore a rest" (or sabbatism) "to the people of God. For he that hath entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his works, as God did from his own." I must ask you thus to alter the passage, the authorised version giving it wrongly. The emphasis is taken out of one place, and put into another, without the slightest reason.

What he deduces is, "Let us use diligence therefore to enter into that rest." The meaning is, you cannot be labouring and resting in the same sense and time, All must confess that when you rest, you cease from labour. His statement is that now is the time not for rest, but for diligence; and the moral reason why we labour is, that love — whether looked at in God Himself, in His Son, or in His children — love never can rest, where there is either sin or wretchedness. In the world there is both. No doubt for the believer, his sins are blotted out and forgiven, and hope anticipates with joy the final deliverance of the Lord. But as to the course of this age and all things here below, it is impossible to think or speak of rest as these are, not even for our bodies, as part of the fallen creation. There ought not to be rest,

therefore, beyond what we have by faith in our souls. It would be mere sentimentalising; it is not the truth of God. I ought to feel the misery and the estrangement of the earth from God; I ought to go — however joyful in the Lord — with a heart sad, and knowing how to weep, in a world where there is so much sin, and suffering, and sorrow. But the time is coming when God will wipe away tears from all eyes, yea, every tear; and this will be the rest of God. To this rest we are journeying, but we are only journeying. At the same time we should labour: love cannot but toil in such a world as this. If there be the spirit that feels the pressure of sin, there is the love that rises up in the power of God's grace, bringing in that which lifts out of sin. and delivers from it. So he says, "Let us be diligent therefore to enter into that rest."

Allow me to say a word to any person here who may be a little confused by old thoughts on this subject. Look again a little more exactly into the two chief calls of the chapter (verses 1 and 11), and let me ask you if it be safe and sound to apply them to rest for the conscience now? Are souls who have never yet tasted that the Lord is gracious to be summoned to fear? And how does the call to labour or diligence square with the apostle's word in Romans 4:4, 5, where justification by faith, apart from works, is beyond cavil the point of teaching? What can be the effect of such prejudices of interpretation (no matter who may have endorsed them) but to muddle the gospel of God's grace? Thus it seems to me clearly and certainly such a notion is proved to be false. The test of a wrong notion is that it always dislocates the truth of God; often, indeed, like this, running counter to the plainest and most elementary forms of the gospel itself. Thus, take the text already

referred to — “To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly” — the popular misinterpretation sets people working to enter into rest for their conscience. But the doctrine is as false as the written word is true; and the meaning of that which is before us is, not rest now for the soul by faith, but the rest of God, when He has made a scene in the day of glory as worthy of Himself as it will be suited for those whom He loves.

Accordingly, we are next shown the provision of grace, not for the rest of glory, but for those who are only journeying on towards it here below. And what is that provision? The word of God, which comes and searches, tries and deals with us, judging the thoughts and intents of the heart; and the priesthood of Christ, which converts and strengthens, and applies all that is needed here — the grace and mercy of our God. “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”

And now (Heb. 5) we enter upon the priesthood; for it is a priest that we want who stand already accepted by sacrifice. Not a priest, but a sacrifice, is the foundation of all relationship with God; but we need,along the way a living person, who can deal both with God for us and for God with us. Such a great High Priest who passed through the heavens, yet able to sympathize with our infirmities, we have in Jesus the Son of God. How little these Jews, even when saints, knew the treasure of grace that God had given in Him whom the nation abhorred! As previously, the apostle takes the proofs from their own oracles. It is not a question of revealing,

but of rightly applying, by the Holy Ghost, the word they had in their hand.

“For every high priest taken from among men is established for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins.” It might seem scarcely credible that these words could be applied to Christ But there is nothing too bad for the heart of man; and these are mistakes of the heart. They do not arise from intellectual feebleness. It would be folly so to judge of Grotius, for instance. They spring from unbelief. Call it ignorance of Christ and of the scriptures, if you will, but it is not found only with the ignorant, as men would speak. I am sure we ought to have great compassion for the honest ignorance of simple-minded men. But, as in other sad cases, the error is often combined with ample learning of the schools, though with lamentable lack of divine teaching even in foundation truth. I do not deny that God may deign to use anything in His service; but these men confide in their learning and their powers generally, instead of becoming fools that they may become wise, which is the truest learning according to God, if one may speak of “learning” in respect of that wisdom which comes down from the Father of lights.

Thus men, confident in their own resources, have dared to apply this description of priesthood to Christ. They have failed to see that it is a distinct contrast with Christ, and not at all a picture of His priesthood. It is evidently general, and sets before us a human priest, not Jesus — God’s High Priest. If there be analogy, there is certainly the strongest contrast here. An ordinary priest is able to exercise forbearance toward the ignorant and erring, since he himself also is compassed with infirmity.

“And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins.” Did Christ need to offer for Himself, yea, for sins? This blasphemy would follow, if the foregoing words applied to Christ. “And no one taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, even as Aaron. So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest.” Now he teaches a point of contact, as the other was of contrast. All you can procure from among men is one that can feel, as being a man, for men after a human sort. Such is not the priest that God has given us, but one who, though man, feels for us after a divine sort. And so, we are told, that Christ, while He was and is this glorious person in His nature and right, nevertheless as man did not glorify Himself to be made an high priest; “but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, today have I begotten thee; as he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.”

The same God who owned Him as His Son, born of the Virgin, owned Him also as Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec. And in this order too: first, Son (on earth);1 next, the true Melchisedec (in heaven, as we shall find). Albeit true God and Son of God, in everything He displays perfect lowliness among men, and absolute dependence on God: such also was His moral fitness for each office and function which God gave Him to discharge. Mark, again, the skill with which all is gradually approached — how the inspired writer saps and mines their exorbitant (yet after all only earthly) pretensions, founded on the Aaronic priesthood. Such was the great boast of the Jews. And here we learn out of their own scriptures another order of priesthood reserved for the Messiah, which he knew right well

could not but put the Aaronic priesthood completely in the shade. “Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.”

At the same time, it is plain that there is no forgetfulness of the suffering obedience of Christ’s place here below; but He is presented in this glory before we are given to hear of the path of shame which ushered it in. “Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him, called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec The apostle had much to say, but hard to be interpreted, because they were become dull of hearing. It is not that the word of God in itself is obscure, but that men bring in their difficulties. Nor does His word., as is often thought, want light to be thrown on it; rather is it light itself. By the Spirit’s power it dispels the darkness of nature. Many obstacles there are to the entrance of light through the word, but there is none more decided than the force of religious prejudice; and this would naturally operate most among the Hebrew saints. They clung too much to old things; they could not take in the new. We may see a similar hindrance every day. What Paul had to say of the Melchisedec priesthood was hard to explain to them, not because the things were in themselves unintelligible, but they were dull in hearing. “For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye again have need that one teach you the elements of the beginning of the oracles of God.”

There is nothing, I repeat, which tends to make dulness in spiritual things so much as religious tradition. The next to it in dead weight, and in other respects more daringly dangerous, will be found to be philosophy. At any rate, it is remarkable that these are the two occasions of this reproach from the apostle. So he wrote to the Corinthians, who generally admired rhetoric, and had no small confidence, like other Greeks, in their own wisdom. They did not consider Paul, either in style or topics, at all up to the requirements of the age — at least in their midst. How cutting to hear themselves counted babes, and incapable of meat for grown men, so that, being carnal, they must have milk administered to them! The apostle had to put them down, and tell them, with all their high-flown wisdom, they were such that he could not discourse to them about the deep things of God. This, no doubt, was a painful surprise for them. So here the same apostle writing to the Hebrew believers treats them as babes, though from a different source. Thus we see two errors totally opposed in appearance, but leading to the same conclusion. Both unfit the soul for going on with God; and the reason why they so hinder is because they are precisely the things in which man lives. Whether it be the mind of man or his natural religiousness, either idolizes its own object; and consequently blindness ensues to the glory of Christ.

Hence the apostle could not but feel himself arrested by their state. He shows also that this very state was not merely one of weakness, but exposed them to the greatest danger; and this is pursued not on the philosophical side so much as on that of religions forms. We have already seen both at work in Colosse, as I have just pointed out the snare that the wisdom of the world

was to the Corinthians. But on the Hebrews he presses their excessive danger of abandoning Christ for religious traditions. First of all these hinder progress; finally they draw the soul aside from grace and truth; and if the mighty power of God does not interfere, they ruin. This had been the course of some: they had better be watchful that it be not their own case. He begins gently with their state of infantine feebleness; and then in the beginning of the following chapter he sets before them the awful picture of apostasy. “For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”

“Therefore,” (adds he, in Hebrews 6) “leaving the word of the beginning of Christ, let us go on to perfection.” He proves that we cannot safely linger among the Jewish elements when we have heard and received Christian truth; that not merely blessing, not simply power and enjoyment, but the only place even of safety is in going on to this full growth. To stop short for them was to go back. Let those that had heard of Christ return to the forms of Judaism, and what would become of them?

Then he speaks of the various constituents that make up the word of the beginning of Christ (i.e., Christ known short of death, resurrection, and ascension). He would have them advance, “not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and faith in God, of a teaching of washings and imposition of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.” Not that these were not true and important in their place: no one disputed them; but they were in no way the power, nor even characteristic, of Christianity. They go in pairs;

and a mere Jew would hardly object; but what is all this for the Christian? Why live on such points? “And this” (i.e. going on to full growth) “will we do if God permit. For it is impossible [as to] those once enlightened, and that tasted the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and that tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the age to come, and fell away, to renew [them] again to repentance, seeing they crucify for themselves and expose the Son of God.”

It is a question of persons drawn into apostasy after having enjoyed every privilege and power of the gospel, short of a new nature and that indwelling of the Spirit which seals renewed souls till the day of redemption. For them rejecting the Messiah on earth under Judaism God gave repentance and remission of sins; but if they gave up the risen and glorified Christ, there was no provision of grace, no third estate of Christ to meet the case. It is not the case of a person surprised into sin; nay, not even the very awful case of one who may go on in sin, sorrowful to think that it may be so with one of whom we had hoped better things. But here there is another evil altogether. They were those who might be ever so correct, moral, religious, but who, having confessed Jesus as the Christ after the outpouring of the Spirit, had lapsed back into Jewish elements, counting it perhaps a wise and wholesome cheek on a too rapid advance, instead of seeing that in principle it was an abandonment of Christ altogether. The full case here supposed is a thorough renunciation of Christian truth.

The apostle describes a confessor with all the crowning evidences of the gospel, but not a converted man, Not a word implies this either here or in 2 Peter. Short of this

he uses uncommonly strong expressions, and purposely so: he sets forth the possession of the highest possible external privileges, and this in that abundant form and measure which God gave on the ascension of the Lord. He says it all, no doubt, about the baptized; but there is nothing about baptism as the ancients would have it, any more than, with some moderns, the progressive steps of the spiritual life. There is knowledge, joy, privilege, and power, but no spiritual life. Enlightenment is in no sense the new birth, nor does baptism in scripture ever mean illumination. It is the effect of the gospel on the dark soul — the shining on the mind of Him who is the only true light. But light is not life; and life is not predicated here.

Further, they had “tasted of the heavenly gift.” It is not the Messiah as He was preached when the disciples went about here below, but Christ after He went on high; not Christ after the flesh, but Christ risen and glorified above.

But, again, they were “made partakers of the Holy Ghost.” Of Him every one became a partaker, who confessed the Lord and entered into the house of God. There the Holy Ghost dwelt; and all who were there became partakers after an outward sort (not κοινωνοὶ, but μέτοχοι) of Him who constituted the assembly of God’s habitation and temple. He pervaded, as it were, the whole atmosphere of the house of God. It is not in the least a question of a person individually born of God, and so sealed by the Holy Spirit. There is not an allusion to either in this case, but to their taking a share in this immense privilege, the word not being that which speaks of a joint known portion, but only of getting a share.

Moreover, they “tasted the good word of God.” Even an unconverted man might feel strong emotions, and enjoy to a certain extent, more particularly those that had lain in Judaism, that dreary valley of dry bones. What fare was the gospel of grace! Certainly nothing could be more miserable than the scraps which the scribes and Pharisees put before the sheep of the house of Israel. There is nothing to forbid the natural mind from being attracted by the delightful sweetness of the glad-tidings which Christianity proclaims.

Lastly, we hear of “the powers of the age to come.” This seems more than a general share in the presence of the Holy Ghost, who inhabited the house of God. They were positively endued with miraculous energies — samples of that which will characterize the reign of the Messiah. Thus we may fairly give the fullest force to every one of these expressions. Yet write them out ever so largely, they fall short both of the new birth and of sealing with the Holy Ghost. There is everything one may say, save inward spiritual life in Christ, or the indwelling seal of it. That is to say, one may have the very highest endowments and privileges, in the way both of meeting the mind, and also of exterior power; and yet all may be given up, and the man become so much the keener enemy of Christ. Indeed such is the natural result. It had been the mournful fact as to some. They had fallen away. Hence renewal to repentance is an impossibility, seeing they crucify for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to open shame.

Why impossible? The case supposed is of persons, after the richest proof and privilege, turning aside apostates from Christ, in order to take up Judaism once more. As long as that course is pursued, repentance there cannot

be. Supposing a man had been the adversary of Messiah here below, there was still the opening for him of grace from on high. It was possible that the very man that had slighted Christ here below might have his eyes opened to see and receive Christ above; but, this abandoned, there is no fresh condition in which He can be presented to men. Those who rejected Christ in all the fulness of His grace, and in the height of glory in which God had set Him as man before them, — those that rejected Him not merely on earth, but in heaven, what was there to fall back on? what possible means to bring them to a repentance after that? There is none. What is there but Christ coming in judgment? Now apostasy, sooner or later, must fall under that judgment. Such is the force of the comparison. “For land which hath drunk in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: but that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is for burning.”

“But we are persuaded better things of you, beloved.” There might seem too much ground for fear, but of the two ends he was persuaded respecting them the better things, and akin to salvation, if even he thus spoke; for God was not unrighteous, and the apostle too remembered traits of love and devotedness which gave him this confidence about them. But, says he, “We earnestly desire that each of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end that ye be not slothful, but followers of those who through faith and long-suffering inherit the promises.” Here is given a remarkable instance of the true character of the epistle; namely, the combination of two features peculiar

to the Hebrews. On the one hand are the promises, the oath of God, taking up His ways with Abraham; and, on the other hand, the hope set before us, that enters into what is within the veil. We may account for the former, because the writer was not confining himself to that which fell within the proper sphere of his apostleship. But, again, had he been writing according to his ordinary place, nothing was more strictly his line of testimony than to have dwelt on our hope that enters within the veil. The peculiarity of the epistle to the Hebrews lies in combining the promises with Christ's heavenly glory. None but Paul, I believe, would have been suited to bring in the heavenly portion. At the same time, only in writing to the Hebrews could Paul have brought in the Old Testament hopes as he has done.

Another point of interest which may be remarked here is the intimation at the end compared with the beginning of the chapter. We have seen the highest external privileges — not only the mind of man, as far as it could, enjoying the truth, but the power of the Holy Ghost making the man, at any rate, an instrument of power, even though it be to his own shame and deeper condemnation afterwards. In short, man may have the utmost conceivable advantage, and the greatest external power even of the Spirit of God Himself; and yet all comes to nothing. But the very same chapter, which affirms and warns of the possible failure of every advantage, shows us the weakest faith that the whole New Testament describes coming into the secure possession of the best blessings of grace. Who but God could have dictated that this same chapter (Heb. 6) should depict the weakest faith that the New Testament ever acknowledges? What can look feebler, what more

desperately pressed, than a man fleeing for refuge? It is not a soul as coming to Jesus; it is not as one whom the Lord meets and blesses on the spot; but here is a man hard pushed, fleeing for very life (evidently a figure drawn from the blood-stained fleeing from the avenger of blood), yet eternally saved and blessed according to the acceptance of Christ on high.

There was no reality found to be in those so highly favoured of the early verses; and therefore it was (as there was no conscience before God, no sense of sin, no cleaving to Christ) that everything came to nought; but here, there is the fruit of faith, feeble indeed and sorely tried, but in the light that appreciates the judgment of God against sin. Hence, although it be only fleeing in an agony of soul to refuge, what is it that God gives to one in such a state? Strong consolation, and that which enters within the veil. Impossible that the Son should be shaken from His place on the throne of God: so is it that the least believer should come to any hurt whatever. The weakest of saints more than conqueror is; and therefore the apostle, having brought us to this glorious point of conclusion, as well as shown us the awful danger of men giving up such a Christ as that which we have presented to us in this epistle, now finds himself free to unfold the character of His priesthood, as well as the resulting position of the Christian. But on these I hope to enter, if the Lord will, on another occasion.

Hebrews 7 - 13.

The apostle now resumes his great theme, Christ called a Priest of God for ever after the order of Melchisedec. He alludes, in the beginning of our chapter, to the historical facts of Genesis. We must bear in mind that

Melchisedec was a man like any other. There, is no ground, in my judgment, for the thought of anything mysterious in the facts as to his person. The manner in which scripture introduces him is such as to furnish a very striking type of Christ. There is no necessity for considering anything else, but that the Spirit of God, forecasting the future, was pleased to conceal the line of Melchisedec's parentage, or descendants if any, of their birth or death. He is suddenly ushered upon the scene. He has not been of by the reader before; he is never heard of again in history. Thus the only time when he comes into notice he is acting in the double capacity here spoken of: King of righteousness as to his name, King of Salem as to his place, blessing Abraham on his return from the victory over the kings of the Gentiles in the name of the Most High God, and blessing the Most High God the possessor of heaven earth in the name of Abraham.

The apostle does not dwell on the detailed application of His Melchisedec priesthood, as to the object and character of its exercise. He does not draw attention here to the account, that there was only blessing from man to God, and from God to man. He does not reason from the singular circumstance that there was no incense, any more than sacrifice. He alludes to several facts, but leaves them. The point to which he directs the reader is the evident and surpassing dignity of the case — the unity too of the Priest and the priesthood; and this for an obvious reason.

The time for the proper exercise of the Melchisedec priesthood of Christ is not yet arrived. The millennial day will see this. The battle which Abraham fought, the first recorded one in scripture, is the type of the last

battle of this age. It is the conflict which introduces the reign of peace founded on righteousness, when God will manifest Himself as the Most High God, possessor of heaven and earth. This is, as is well known, the special characteristic of the millennium. Heaven and earth have not been united, nor have they been in fact possessed for the blessing of man by the power of God, since sin severed between the earth and that which is above it, and the prince of the power of the air perverted all, so that what should have been, according to God's nature and counsels, the source of every blessing, became rather the point from which the guilty conscience of man cannot but look for judgment. Heaven, therefore, by man's own conviction, must be arrayed in justice against earth because of sin, But the day is coming when Israel shall be no more rebellious, and the nations shall be no longer deceived, and Satan shall be dethroned from his bad eminence, and all idols shall flee apace, and God shall be left the undisputed and evidently Most High, the possessor of heaven and earth. In that day it will be the joy of Him who is the true Melchisedec, to bring out not the mere signs, but the reality of all that can be the stay and comfort of man, and all that sustains and cheers, the patent proof of the beneficent might of God, when "no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly."

But meanwhile, confessedly, the Spirit of God directs attention, not to the exercise, but to the order of the Melchisedec Priest. If we have to wait for the exercise at a future day, the order is as true and plain now as it ever can be. Indeed, at no time will its order be more apparent than at present; for I think there can be little doubt to any unbiassed Christian who enters with

intelligence into the Old Testament prophecies, that there is yet to be an earthly sanctuary, and, consequently, earthly priests and sacrifices for Israel in their own land; that the sons of Zadok, as Ezekiel lets us know, will perpetuate the line at the time when the Lord shall be owned to be there, in the person of the true David their King, blessing His people long distressed but now joyful on earth. But this time is not yet come. There is nothing to divert the heart from Christ, the great High Priest in the heavens. No doubt all will be good and right in its due season then. Meanwhile Christianity gives the utmost force to every type and truth of God. The undivided place of Christ is more fully witnessed now, when there are no others to occupy the thought or to distract the heart from Him as seen by faith in glory on high.

Hence the apostle applies the type distinctly now, as far as the “order” of the priesthood goes. We hear first of Melchisedec (King of righteousness), next of Salem or peace; without father, without mother, without genealogy. Unlike others in Genesis, neither parents are recorded, nor is there any hint of descent from him. In short, there is. no mention of family or ancestors, “having neither beginning of days, nor end of life” — neither is recorded in scripture; — “but made like unto the Son of God, abideth a priest continually.”

The next point proved is the indisputable superiority of the Melchisedec priesthood to that of Aaron, of which the Jews naturally boasted. After all, the telling fact was before them that, whoever wrote the epistle to the Hebrews, it was not a Christian who wrote the book of Genesis, but Moses; and Moses bears witness to the homage which Abram rendered to Melchisedec by the

payment of tithes. On the other hand, the priests, Aaron's family, among the sons of Levi, "have a commandment to take tithes of the people according to the law, that is of their brethren, though they come out of the loins of Abraham." Thus Melchisedec, "whose descent is not of Aaron nor of Levi," like Jesus, "received tithes of Abraham, and blessed him that had the promises!" "And without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better." No argument could be more distinct or conclusive. The other descendants of Abraham honoured the house of Aaron as Levitical priests; but Abraham himself, and so Levi himself, and of course Aaron, in his loins honoured Melchisedec. Thus another and a higher priesthood was incontestably acknowledged by the father of the faithful. "And, as I may so say, Levi also, who receiveth tithes, paid tithes in Abraham. For he was yet in the loins of his father, when Melchisedec met him."

This leads to another point; for the change of the priesthood imports a change of the law. "If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron?" This change was clearly taught in the book of Psalms. It was not only that there had been at the beginning such a priest, but that fact became the form of a glorious anticipation which the Holy Ghost holds out for the latter day. Psalm 110, which, as all the Jews owned, spoke., throughout its greater part at least, of the Messiah and His times, shows us Jehovah Himself — by an oath, which is afterwards reasoned on — signifying that another priest should arise after a

different order from that of Aaron. “The priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law. For he of whom these things are spoken pertaineth to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood. And it is yet far more evident: for that after the similitude of Melchisedec there ariseth another priest.” Thus the Pentateuch and the Psalms bore their double testimony to a Priest superior to the Aaronic.

Further, that this Priest was to be a living one, in some most singular manner to be an undying Priest, was made evident beyond question, because in that Psalm it is said, “He testifieth, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.” This was also a grand point of distinction. Where could they find such a Priest? where one competent to take up that word “for ever”? Such was the Priest of whom God spoke. “For,” says he, “there is verily a disannulling of the commandment going before for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof (for the law made nothing perfect).” He uses in the most skilful manner the change of the priest, in order to bring along with it a change of the law, the whole Levitical system passing away — “but [there is] the bringing in of a better hope.” Such is the true sense of the passage. “For the law made nothing perfect” is a parenthesis. By that hope, then, “we draw nigh unto God.”

But again the solemn notice of Jehovah’s oath is enlarged on. “Inasmuch as not without an oath he was made priest: (for those priests were made without an oath” — no oath ushers in the sons of Aaron — “but he with an oath by him that said as to him, The Lord sware

and will — not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec:) by so much was Jesus made a surety of a better covenant."

And, finally, he sums up the superiority of Christ in this, that "they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death: but he, because of his continuing for ever, hath the priesthood intransmissible." There was but one such Priest.

In every point of view, therefore, the superiority of the Melchisedec priest was demonstrated over the line of Aaron. The fulfilment of the Melchisedec Order is found in Christ, and in Him alone. The Jews themselves acknowledge that Psalm 110 must be fulfilled in Christ, in His quality of Messiah. Nothing but stupid, obstinate, unbelieving prejudice, after the appearance of the Lord Jesus, could have suggested any other application of the Psalm. Before Jesus came, there was no question of it among the Jews. So little was it a question, that our Lord could appeal to its acknowledged meaning, and press the difficulty His person created for unbelief. By their own confession the application of that Psalm was to the Messiah, and the very point that Jesus urged upon the Jews of His day was this — how, if He were David's Son, as they agreed, could He be his Lord, as the Psalmist David confesses? This shows that, beyond question, among the Jews of that day, Psalm 110 was understood to refer to the Christ alone. But if so, He was the Priest after the order of Melchisedec, as well as seated at Jehovah's right hand — a cardinal truth of Christianity, the import of which the Jews did not receive in their conception of the Messiah. Hence throughout this epistle the utmost stress is laid on His being exalted in heaven — Yet there was no excuse for a difficulty on this

score. Their own Psalm, in its grand prophetic sweep, and looking back on the law, pointed to the place in which Christ is now seated above; and where it is of necessity He should be, in order to give Christianity its heavenly character.

The doctrine follows: “Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost.” He does not mean by this the worst of sinners, but saving believers to the uttermost, bringing through every difficulty those “that come unto God by him.” A priest is always in connection with the people of God, never as such with those that are outside, but a positive known relation with God — “seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens.” This statement is so much the more remarkable, because in the beginning of this epistle he had pointed out what became God. It ‘became Him that Christ should suffer. It became us to have a Priest, “holy, harmless, undefiled, made higher than the heavens.”

What infinite thoughts are those that God’s word gives; as glorifying for Himself as elevating for our souls! Yet who beforehand would have anticipated either? It became God that Christ should go down to the uttermost; it became us that He should be exalted to the highest. And why? Because Christians are a heavenly people, and none but a heavenly Priest would suit them. It became God to give Him to die; for such was our estate by sin that nothing short of His atoning death could deliver us; but, having delivered us, God would make us to be heavenly. None but a heavenly Priest would suffice for the counsels He has in hand. “Who needeth not daily,” therefore says He, “as those high

priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's." He always keeps up the evidence of the utter inferiority of the Jewish priest, as well as of the accompanying state of things, to that of Christianity. "For this he did once, when he offered up himself. For the law maketh men priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath which was since the law, a Son perfected (or consecrated) for ever." This was the very difficulty that the Jew pleaded; but now, in point of fact, it was only what the Psalm of Messiah insisted on, the law itself bearing witness of a priest superior to any under the law. Holy Scripture then demanded that a man should sit down at the right hand of God. It was accomplished in Christ, exalted as the great Melchisedec in heaven. If they were Abraham's children, and not his seed only, surely they would honour Him.

Hence, in Hebrews 8, the apostle draws his conclusion. "Now of the things that are being spoken of this is a summary: We have such an high priest, who is set down on [the] right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; a minister of the holies, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man." In Hebrews 1 it is written, that "having by himself made purification of our sins, he sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." The point there is personal glory. No other seat was suitable to such a One. He sat down there as of His own right and title, but nevertheless making a part of His divine glory to be witnessed in, as indeed His person was necessary to make His blood efficacious to the purging of our sins. But in chapter 8. He sits there not merely as the proof of the perfectness with which He has purged our sins by Himself alone, but as the Priest; and accordingly it is not merely said "on

high," but "in the heavens." Such is the emphasis. Accordingly observe the change of expression. He has been proved to be a divine person, and the true royal priest of whom not Aaron only but Melchisedec was the type. Hence the right hand of the throne is introduced, but, besides, "of the Majesty in the heavens." So that, let the Jews say what they might, there was only found what answered to their own scriptures, and what proved the incontestable superiority of the great Priest whom Melchisedec shadowed out, and of whom it was now for the Christian justly to boast. He is "minister of the holies and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not of man." Now the tone becomes bolder with them, and shows clearly that the Jew had but an empty form, a foreshadow of value once, but now superseded by the true antitype in the heavens.

Here, too, he begins to introduce what a. priest does, that is, the exercise of his functions. "For every high priest is constituted to offer gifts and sacrifices: wherefore it is of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer. For if he were on earth, he should not even be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law: who serve the representation and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was oracularly told when about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern that was shown to thee in the mountain. But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant." Thus, before he enters on the subject of the sacrifices at length, he takes notice of the covenants, and thence he draws a conclusion from the well-known prophecy in Jeremiah, where God declares that the days were coming when He

would make a new covenant. What is the inference from that? He presses the fact of a new principle, as well as an institution established on better promises, upon the Jews. For why should there be a new covenant, unless because the first was faulty or ineffectual! What was the necessity for a new covenant if the old one would do as well? According, to the Jews it was quite impossible, if God had once established a covenant, He could ever change; but the apostle replies that their own prophet is against their theory. Jeremiah positively declares that God will make a new covenant. He argues that the word "new" puts the other out of date, and this to make room for a better. A new covenant shows that the other must have thereby become old, and therefore is decaying and ready to vanish away.

All this is a gradual undermining the wall until the whole structure is overthrown. He is labouring for this, and with divine skill accomplishes it, by the testimonies of their own law and prophets. He does not require to add more to the person and facts of Christ than the Old Testament furnishes, to prove the certainty of Christianity and all its characteristic truths with which he occupies himself in this epistle. I say not absolutely all its great truths. Were it a question of the mystery of Christ the Head, and of the church His body, this would not be proved from the Old Testament, which does not reveal it at all. It was hid in God from ages and generations. There are types that suit the mystery when it is revealed, but of themselves they never could make it known, though illustrating particular parts when it is. But whether we look at the heavenly supremacy of Christ over the universe, which is the highest part of the mystery, or at the church associated with Him as His

body, composed of both Jew and Gentile, where all distinction is gone, no wit of man ever did or could possibly draw this beforehand from the Old Testament. Indeed, not being revealed of old, according to the apostle, it is altogether a mistake to go to the Old Testament for that truth.

Hence in Hebrews we never find the body of Christ as such referred to. We have the church, but even when the expression “church” occurs, it is the church altogether vaguely, as in Hebrews 2:12, or viewed in the units that compose it — not at all in its unity. It is the assembly composed of certain individuals that make it up, regarded either as brethren, as in the second chapter (“In the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee”), or as the church of the first-born ones, as in Hebrews 12, persons who drew their title from Christ the first-born Heir. There we have those that compose the church, in allusion to Christ, contrasted with the position of Israel as a nation, because of the nearness which they possess by the grace of Christ known on high.

It may be observed, too, that the Holy Ghost appears but little in this epistle. Not of course that one denies that He has His own proper place, for all is perfect as to each person of the Trinity and all else, but never to this end. For a similar reason we never find life treated in the epistle, nor righteousness. It is not a question of justification here. We hear of sanctification often, but even what is thus spoken of throughout is rather in connection with separation to God and the work of Christ, than the continuous energy of the Holy Ghost, except, as far as I remember, in one practical passage — “Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which

no man shall see the Lord." In other cases the epistle to the Hebrews speaks of sanctification by God's call, and Christ's blood. I refer to the fact just to exemplify on the one hand the true bearing of the epistle, and what I believe will be discovered in it, and on the other hand to guard against the mistake of importing into it, or trying to extract from it, what is not there.

Hebrews 9 brings us into the types of the Levitical ritual, priesthood and sacrifice. Before developing these, the apostle refers to the tabernacle itself in which these sacrifices were offered. "There was a tabernacle made; the first, wherein was the candlestick, and the table, and the showbread; which is called holy. And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called holy of holies; which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold." Carefully observe that it is the tabernacle, never the temple. The latter is not referred to, because it represents the millennial glory; the former is, because it finds its proper fulfilment in that which is made good in the Christian scheme now. This supposes the people of God not actually settled in the land, but still pilgrims and strangers on the earth; and the epistle to the Hebrews, we have already seen, looks emphatically and exclusively at the people of God as not yet passed out of the wilderness; never as brought into the land, though it might be on the verge; just entering, but not actually entered. There remains, therefore, a sabbath-keeping for the people of God. Thither they are to be brought, and there are means for the road to keep us moving onward. But meanwhile we have not yet entered on the rest of God. It remains. Such is a main point, not of Hebrews 4 only, but of the epistle. It was the more

urgent to insist on it, because the Jews, like others, would like to have been settled in rest here and now. This is natural and pleasant to the flesh, no doubt; but it is precisely what opposes the whole object of God in Christianity, since Christ went on high till He come again, and therefore the path of faith to which the children of God are called.

Accordingly, then, as suiting this pilgrim-path of the Christian, the tabernacle is referred to, and not the temple. And this is the more remarkable, because his language is essentially of the actual state of what was going on in the temple; but he always calls it the tabernacle. In truth, the substratum was the same, and therefore it was not only quite lawful so to call it, but if he had not, the design would have been marred. But this shows the main object of the Spirit of God in directing us for the type that applies to the believer now to an unsettled pilgrim-condition, not to Israel established in the land of promise.

To what, then, is the allusion to the sanctuary applied? To mark that as yet the veil was unrent. “Into the second [goes] the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people: the Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way of the holies was not yet made manifest, while as yet the first tabernacle was standing: which is a figure for the present time according to which are offered both gifts and sacrifices that could not, as pertaining to the conscience, make him that did the religious service perfect; which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation.” With all this Christianity is contrasted. “But Christ being come a high

priest of good things to come, by the better and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is, not of this creation, nor by blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood entered in once into the holies, having obtained eternal redemption." Here the words "for us" had better be left out. They really mar the sense, because they draw attention not to the truth in itself so much as its application to us, which is not the point in Hebrews 9, but rather of Hebrews 10. Here it is the grand truth itself in its own character. What is the value, the import., of the sacrifice of Christ viewed according to God, and as bearing on His ways? This is the fact. Christ has gone into the presence of God," having obtained eternal redemption." For whom it may be is another thing, of which he will speak by-and-by. Meanwhile we are told that He has obtained (not a temporary, but) "eternal redemption." It is that which infinitely exceeds the deliverance out of Egypt, or any ceremonial atonement ever wrought by a high priest for Israel. Christ has obtained redemption, and this is witnessed by the token of the veil rent from top to bottom. The unrent veil bore evidence on its front that man could not yet draw near into the holiest — that he had no access into the presence of God. This is of the deepest importance. It did not matter whether it was a priest or an Israelite. A priest, as such, could no more draw near into the presence of God in the holiest than any of the common people. Christianity is stamped by this, that, in virtue of the blood of Christ, once for all for every believer the way is made manifest into the holiest of all. The veil is rent: the believer can draw near, as is shown in the next chapter; but meanwhile it is merely pointed out that there is no veil now, eternal redemption being obtained.

Thus does the apostle reason on it: “For if the blood of bulls and goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh” (which the Jew would not contest): “how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to do religious service to the living God? And for this cause he is mediator of the new covenant, that by means of death, for redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, the called might receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.” Thus the power of what Christ had wrought was now brought in for future ends; it was not merely retrospective, but above all in present efficacy while the Jews refuse Christ.

The allusion in the last clause to the eternal inheritance (for everything is eternal in the Hebrews, standing in decided contrast with Jewish things which were but for a season) leads the Holy Spirit to take up the other meaning of the same word, which was and is rightly enough translated covenant. At first sight every one may have been surprised, especially those that read the New Testament in the language in which God wrote it, at the double meaning of the word which is here translated “covenant.” It (διαθήκη) means “testament” as well as “covenant.” In point of fact the English translators did not know what to make of the matter; for they give sometimes one, sometimes the other, without any apparent reason for it, except to vary the phrase. In my judgment it is correct to translate it both ways, never arbitrarily, but according to context. There is nothing capricious about the usage. There are certain surroundings which indicate to the competent eye when

the word “covenant” is right and when the word “testament” is better.

It may then be stated summarily, in few words, unless I am greatly mistaken, that the word should always be translated “covenant” in every part of the New Testament, except in these two verses; namely, Hebrews 9:16, 17. If, therefore, when you find the word “testament” anywhere else in the authorized version, you turn it into “covenant” in my opinion you will not do amiss. If in these two verses we bear in mind that it really means “testament,” growing out of the previous mention of the “inheritance,” I am persuaded that you will have better understanding of the argument. In short, the word in itself may mean either; but this is no proof that it may indifferently or without adequate reason be translated both ways. The fact is, that love of uniformity may mislead some, as love of variety misled our English translators too often. It is hard to keep clear of both. Every one can understand, when once we find that the word means almost always covenant,” how great the temptation is to translate it so in but two other occurrences, especially as before and after it means “covenant” in the same passage. But why should it be “testament” in these two verses alone, and “covenant” in all other places? The answer is, that the language is peculiar and precise in these same two verses, requiring not a covenant but a testament, and therefore the sense of testament here is the preferable one, and not covenant. The reasons will be given in a moment.

First of all, as has been hinted, that which suggests “testament” is the end of verse 15 — “They which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.” How is it that anybody ordinarily gets an inheritance? By

a testament, to be sure, as every one knows. Such has been the usual form in all countries not savage, and in all ages. No figure therefore would be more natural than that, if God intended certain persons called to have an inheritance, there should be a testament about the matter. Accordingly advantage is taken of an unquestionable meaning of the word for this added illustration, which is based on the death of Christ, "Where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator." That the word (διαθέμενος) in this connection means "testator" appears to me beyond just question. I am not aware that it is, nor do I believe that it could be, ever used in such a sense as "covenanting victim," for which some contend. It often means one who arranged or disposed of property, or anything else, such as a treaty or covenant.

Let us next apply the word "covenant" here, and you will soon see the insuperable difficulties into which you are plunged. If you say," For where a covenant is, there must also of necessity be the death of the covenanter" — the person. Now is it an axiom, that a covenant-maker must die to give it force? It is quite evident, on the contrary, that this is not only not the truth which all recognize when stated, but altogether inconsistent with the Bible, with all books, and with all experience. In all the covenants of scripture the man that makes it has never to die for any such end. Indeed both should die; for it usually consists of two parties who are thus bound, and therefore, were the maxim true, both ought to die, which is an evident absurdity.

The consequence is, that many have tried (and I remember making efforts of that kind myself, until convinced that it could not succeed) to give ὁ

διαθέμονος, in the English Bible rightly rendered “the testator,” the force of the covenanting victim. But the answer to this is, that there is not a single writer in the language, not sacred only but profane, who employs it in such a sense. Those therefore that so translate our two verses have invented a meaning for the phrase, instead of accepting its legitimate sense as attested by all the monuments of the Greek tongue; whereas the moment that we give it the meaning assigned here rightly by the better translators, that is, the sense of “testator” and “testament,” all runs with perfect smoothness, and with striking aptitude.

He is showing us the efficacy of Christ’s death. He demonstrates its vicarious nature and value from the sacrifices so familiar to all then, and to the Jew particularly, in connection with the covenant that required them Now his rapid mind seizes, under the Spirit’s guidance, the other well-known sense of the word, namely, as a testamentary disposition, and shows the necessity of Christ’s death to bring it into force. It is true that victims were sometimes slain in ratifying a covenant, and thus were the seal of that covenant; but, first, they were not essential; and, secondly and chiefly, ὁ διαθέμενος, the covenanter or contracting party had in no case to die in order to make the contract valid. On the other hand it is notoriously true, that in no case can a testament come into execution without the testator’s death — a figure that every man at once discerns. There must be the death of him who so disposes of his property in order that the heir should take it under his testament. Which of these two most commends itself as the unforced meaning of the passage it is for the reader to judge. And observe that it is assumed to be so

common and obvious a maxim that it could not be questioned. “For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator.” The addition of this last clause as a necessary condition confirms the sense assigned. Had he merely referred to the covenant (i.e. the sense of the word which had been used before), what would be the aim of the “also?” It is just what he had been speaking of throughout, if covenant were still meant. Apply it to Christ’s death as the testator, and nothing can be plainer or more forcible. The death of Christ, both in the sense of a victim sacrificed, and of a testator, though a double figure, is evident to all, and tends to the self-same point. “For a testament is of force after men are dead (or, in case of dead men, ἐπὶ νεκροῖς): since it is never of force when the testator liveth.”

But now, returning from this striking instance of Paul’s habit of going off at a word (διαθήκη), let us resume the regular course of the apostle’s argument. “Whereupon neither the first [covenant] was dedicated without blood. For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself, and all the people, saying, “This [is] the blood of the covenant which God hath enjoined unto you. And he sprinkled likewise with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry. And almost all things are according to the law purged with blood; and without shedding, of blood is no remission. It was therefore necessary that the representations of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ is not

entered into holies made with hands, figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear before the face of God for us."

Thus distinctly have we set before us the general doctrine of the chapter, — that Christ has suffered but once, and has been offered but once; that the offering cannot be severed from the suffering. If He is to be often offered, He must also often suffer. The truth on the contrary is, that there was but one offering and but one suffering of Christ, once for all; in witness of the perfection of which He is gone into the presence of God, there to appear for us. Thus it will be observed, at the end of all the moral and experimental dealings with the first man (manifested in Israel), we come to a deeply momentous point, as in God's ways, so in the apostle's reasoning. Up to this time man was the object of those ways; it was simply, and rightly of course, a probation. Man was tried by all sorts of tests from time to time God knew perfectly well, and even declared here and there, the end from the beginning; but He would make it manifest to every conscience, that all He got from man in these His varied dealings was sin. Then comes a total change: God takes up the matter Himself, acting in view of man's sin; but in Jesus, in the very Messiah for whom the Jews were waiting, he has put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, and has accomplished this mighty work, as admirably befitting the goodness of God, as it alone descends low enough to reach the vilest man, and yet deliver him with a salvation which only the more humbles man and glorifies God. For now God came out, so to speak, in His own power and grace, and, in the person of Christ on the cross, put away sin — abolished

it from before His face, and set the believer absolutely free from it as regards judgment.

“But now once in the consummation of the ages,” — this is the meaning of “the end of the world;” it is the consummation of those dispensations for bringing out what man was. Man’s worst sin culminated in the death of Christ who knew no sin; but in that very death He put away sin. Christ, therefore, goes into heaven, and will come again apart from sin. He has nothing more to do with sin; He will judge man who rejects Himself and slights sin. as He will appear to the salvation of His own people. “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.”

It is perfectly true that, if we think of Christ, He was here below absolutely without sin; but He who was without sin in His person, and all His life, had everything to do with sin on the cross, when God made Him to be sin for us. The atonement was at least as real as our sin; and God Himself dealt with Christ as laying sin upon Him, and treating Him, the Great Substitute, as sin before Himself, that at one blow it might be all put away from before His face. This He has done, and done with. Now accordingly, by virtue of His death which rent the veil, God and man stand face to face. What, then, is man’s actual estate? “As it is appointed unto men once to die,” — wages of sin, though not all, — “but after this the judgment,” or the full wages of sin, — “so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many;” — this He has finished; — “and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation.” He

will have nothing more to do with sin. He has so absolutely swept it away for those who believe on Him, that when He comes again, them will be no question of judgment, as far as they are concerned, but only of salvation, in the sense of their being cleared from the last relic or result of sin, even for the body. Indeed it is only the body that is here spoken of. As far as the soul is concerned, Christ would not go up to heaven until sin was abrogated before God. Christ is doing nothing there to take away sin; nor when He comes again will He touch the question of sin, because it is a finished work. Christ Himself could not add to the perfectness of that sacrifice by which He has put away sin. Consequently, when He comes again to them that look for Him, it is simply to bring them into all the eternal results of that great salvation.

In Hebrews 10 he applies the matter to the present state of the believer. He had shown the work of Christ and His coming again in glory. What comes in between the two? Christianity. And here we learn the direct application. The Christian stands between the cross and the glory of the Lord Jesus. He rests confidingly on the cross, that only valid moral basis before God; at the same time he is waiting for the glory that is to be revealed. “For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins.” No Jew could or ought to pretend to such purgation as its result.

I should like to ask whether (or how far) all the believers here assembled can take this as their place with simplicity. You, as a Christian, ought to have the calm settled consciousness that God, looking on you, discerns not one spot or stain, but only the blood of Jesus Christ His Son that cleanses from all sin. You ought to have the consciousness that there is no judgment for you with God by-and-by, however truly He, as a Father, judges you now on earth. How can such a consciousness as this be the portion of the Christian? Because the Holy Ghost bears this witness, and nothing less, to the perfectness of the work of Christ. If God's word be true, and to this the Spirit adheres, the blood of Christ has thus perfectly washed away the sins of the believer. I mean his sins now; not sin as a principle, but in fact, though it be only for faith. "The worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins." It is not implied that they may not sin, or that they have no consciousness of their failure, either past or present. "Conscience of sins" means a dread of God's judging one because of his sins. For this, knowing His grace in the work of Christ for them, they do not look; on the contrary, they rest in the assurance of the perfection with which their sins are effaced by the precious blood of Christ.

This epistle insists on the blood of Christ, making all to turn on that efficacious work for us. It was not so of old, when the Israelite brought his goat or calf. "In those sacrifices," referring to the law to which some Hebrew Christians were in danger of going back, "there is a remembrance made again of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins." Therefore all such recurring sacrifices only call sins to remembrance; but what the blood of Christ

has done is so completely to blot them out, that God Himself says, “I will remember them no more.

Accordingly he now turns to set forth the contrast between the weakness and the unavailingness of the Jewish sacrifices, which, in point of fact, only and always brought up sins again, instead of putting them away as does the sacrifice of Christ. In the most admirable manner he proves that this was what God was all along waiting for. First of all, “Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me: in burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me) to do thy will, O God.” There we find these two facts. First, in God’s counsels it was always before Him to have One more than man though a man to deal with this greatest of all transactions. There was but One that could do God’s will in that which concerned man’s deepest wants. Who was this One? Jesus alone. As for the first Adam and all his race, their portion was only death and judgment, because he was a sinner. But here is One who proffers Himself to come, and does come. “In the volume of the book it is written of me” — a book which none ever saw but God and His Son. There it was written, “Lo, I come to do thy will, O God.” Redemption was the first thought of God — a counsel of His previous to the dealings with man which made the necessity of redemption felt. God meant to have His will done, and thereby a people for Himself capable of enjoying His presence and His nature, where no question of sin or fall could ever enter.

First, He makes a scene where sin enters at once. Because His people had no heart for His promises, He imposed a system of law and ordinances that was

unjudged in them, which provoked the sin. and made it still more manifest and heinous. Then comes forth the wondrous counsel that was settled before either the sin of man, or the promises to the fathers, or the law which subsequently put man to the test. And this blessed person, single-handed but according to the will of God, accomplishes that will in offering Himself on the cross.

So it is said here, “Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first” (that is, the law), “that he may establish the second” (that is, God’s will, often unintelligently confounded by men with the law, which is here set in the most manifest contradistinction). Next the apostle, with increasing boldness, comes to the proof from the Old Testament that the legal institution as a whole was to be set aside. “He taketh away the first.” Was this Paul’s doctrine? There it was in the Psalms. They could not deny it to be written in the fortieth psalm. “Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me: in burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me) to do, thy will, O God.” All he does is to interpret that will, and to apply it to what was wrought on the cross. “By the which will” (not man’s, which is sin, but God’s) “we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”

This leads to a further contrast with the action of the Aaronic priest. “Every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: but this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins, for ever sat down on the right hand of God.” Jesus sits down in perpetuity. This is the meaning of the phrase, not that He will sit there

throughout all eternity. Εἰς τὸ διηνεκές does not express eternity (which would be εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, or some such form of words) but "for continuance." He sits there continually, in contrast with the Jewish priest, who was always rising up in order to do fresh work, because there was fresh sin; for their sacrifices never could absolutely put away sin. The fact was plain that the priest was always doing and doing, his work being never done; whereas now there is manifested, in the glorious facts of Christianity, a Priest sat down at God's right hand, a Priest that has taken His place there expressly because our sins are blotted out by His sacrifice If there was any place for the priest, one might have supposed, to be active in his functions, it would be in the presence of God, unless the sins were completely gone. But they are completely gone; and therefore at God's right-hand sits down He who is its witness.

How could this be disputed by one who simply believed Psalm 110? For there is seen not only the proof that the Messiah is the One whom God pronounced by an oath "a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec," but the glorious seat He has taken at the right-hand of God is now worked into this magnificent pleading. Christianity turns everything to account. The Jew never understood his law until the light of Christ on the cross and in glory shone upon it. So here the Psalms acquire a meaning self-evidently true, the moment Christ is brought in, who is the truth, and nothing less. Accordingly we have the third use of the seat Christ has taken. In the first chapter we saw the seat of personal glory connected with atonement; in the eighth chapter it is the witness of His priesthood, and where it is. Here it is the proof of the perpetual efficacy of the sacrifice of Christ. We shall

find another use before we have done, which I hope to notice in its place.

But the Holy Ghost's testimony is not forgotten. As it was God's will and the work of Christ, so the Holy Ghost is He who witnesses to the perfectness of it. It is also founded on one of their own prophets. "This is the covenant," says he, "that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin."

Then we hear of the practical use of all. "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holies by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our hope [for so it should be] without wavering (for he is faithful that promised); and let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." But the higher the privilege, the greater the danger of either despising or perverting it.

In Hebrews 6, we saw that the Spirit of God brings in a most solemn warning for those who turn their back on the power and presence of the Holy Ghost, as bearing witness of Christianity. Here the apostle warns those that turn their back on Christ's one sacrifice. It is

evident that in these we have the two main parts of Christianity. The foundation is sacrifice; the Power is of the Holy Ghost. The truth is, that the Holy Ghost is come down for the purpose of bearing His witness; and he that deserts this for Judaism, or anything else, is an apostate and lost man. And is he better or safer that slights the sacrifice of the Son of God, and goes back either to earthly sacrifices or to lusts of flesh, giving a loose rein to sin, which is expressly what the Son of God shed His blood to put away? He who, having professed to value the blessing of God abandons it, and rushes here below into the sins of the flesh knowingly and deliberately, is evidently no Christian at all. Accordingly it is shown that such an one becomes an adversary of the Lord, and God will deal with him as such. As in chapter 6 he declares that he is persuaded better things of them, than that they would abandon the Holy Ghost; so here he expected better things than that they would thus dishonour the sacrifice of Christ In that case, he says, God was not unrighteous to forget their work and labour of love; in this case, he lets them know that he had not forgotten the way in which they had suffered for Christ. There it was more particularly the activity of faith; here it is the suffering of faith.

This leads into the life of faith, which was a great stumbling-block to some of these Christian Jews. They could not understand how it was they should come into greater trouble than before. They had never known so great and frequent and constant trial. It seemed as if everything went against them. They had looked for advance and triumph and peace and prosperity everywhere; on the contrary, they had come into reproach and shame, partly in their own persons, partly

as becoming the companions of others who so suffered. But the apostle takes all this difficulty by the horns, as good as telling them, that their having suffered all this was simply because it is the right road. These two things, the cross on earth and glory on high, are correlative. As they are companions, so do they test a walk with God; one is faith, the other is suffering. This, he maintains, has always been so; it is no novelty he is preaching. Accordingly the epistle to the Hebrews, while it does put the believer in association with Christ, does not, for all this, dissociate him from whatever is good in the saints of God in every age. Hence the apostle takes care to keep up the real link with the past witnesses for God in faith and suffering, not in ordinances.

In the beginning of Hebrews 11 we are told what faith is. It is “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” It is no definition of what it is to believe, but a description of the qualities of faith. “For by it the elders obtained a good report.” How could any believers put a slight upon it? “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God;” — a simple but a most sublime truth, and one that man never really found out — that we are entirely dependent on faith for after all. The wise men of the present day are fast giving up the truth of creation. They do not believe that God called all things into being. The greater number of them may use the word “creation,” but it must never be assumed that they mean what they say. It is wise and necessary to examine closely what they mean. Never was there a time when men used terms with a more equivocal design than at the present moment. Hence they apply some terms to the work of God in nature similar to what they apply to His work in

grace. The favourite thought is “development;” and so they hold a development or genesis of matter, not a creation: matter continually progressing, in various forms, until at last it has progressed into these wise men of our day. This is precisely what modern research amounts to. It is the setting aside of God, and the setting up of man; it is the precursor of the apostasy that is coming, which again will issue in man taking the place of God, and becoming the object of worship, instead of the true Creator. Nor is it that redemption only is denied, but creation also; so that there is very great importance in maintaining the rights and the truth of God in creation.

Therefore it is well to stand clear of all men’s schemes and thoughts, ever rising up more and more presumptuously, because they mainly consist of some slight in one way or another on the word of God. A simple word of scripture settles a thousand questions. What the wise men of antiquity, the Platos and Aristotles, never knew — what the modern sages blunder about, without the slightest reason, after all — the word of God has made the possession of every child of His. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

There is no indulgence of human curiosity. We do not know the steps of His work, until we come to the preparation of an abode for man. Nothing can be more admirable than this reserve of God. We are not told the details of what preceded the great week when God made the man and the woman. I am not going to enter into any statement of facts as to this now, but there is no truth in its own place more important than that with which the apostle commences in this chapter, namely,

that “through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God.” It is not only that we believe it, but we understand it thereby. There is nothing more simple; at the same time it is just one of those questions that God has answered, and this so as to settle the mind perfectly, and fill the heart with praise. Man never did nor could settle it without the word of God. There is nothing here below so difficult for the natural mind; and for the simple reason that man can never rise above that which is caused. The reason is obvious — because he is caused himself. Therefore is it that men so naturally slip into, or rest on, second causes. He is only one of a series of existing objects, and consequently never can rise above that in his own nature. He may infer that there must be; but he never can say that there is. Reason is ever drawing conclusions; God is, and reveals what is. I may, of course, see what is before my eyes, and. may so far have sensible evidence of what exists now; but it is only God who can tell me that He in the beginning caused to be that which now is. God alone who spake it into being can pronounce upon it. This is just what the believer receives, feeds on, and lives accordingly.

Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God.” It is possible that the word “worlds,” which is a Hebraistic word, belonging to the Alexandrian Jews particularly, may embrace dispensations; but undoubtedly the material world is included in it. It may mean the worlds governed by dispensations; but still that the idea of the whole universe is in it cannot be fairly contested by competent minds. “The worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen” — which would not be the

case if it was only a dispensation — “were not made of things which do appear.”

Having laid this as the first application of faith, the next question is — when man fell, how was he to approach God? The answer is, by sacrifice. This then is brought before us. “By faith Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain.”

The third point is how to walk with God, and this again is by faith. Thus in every case it is faith. It owns the creation; it recognizes sacrifice as the only righteous means of being accepted with God — the only means of approaching Him worthily. Faith, again, is the only principle of walk with God; as it is, again, the only means of realizing the judgment of God coming on all around us.

Here, it is plain, we have the chief lineaments of revealed truth. That is to say, God is owned in His glory, as Creator of all by His word. Then, consequent on the fall, comes the ground of the believer’s acceptance; then his walk with God, and deliverance from His judgment of the whole scene, in the midst of which we actually are. Faith brings God into everything. (Verses 1-7.)

But then comes far more definite instruction, and, beginning with Abraham, the details of faith. The father of the faithful was the one first called out by promise. At first it was (ver. 8) but the promise of a land; but when in the land he received the promise of a better country, that is, a heavenly, which raised his eyes to the city on high, in express contrast with the earthly land. When he dwelt in Mesopotamia, he had a promise to bring him into Canaan; and when he got there, he had a promise of what was higher to lead his heart above. At the end of

his course there was a still heavier tax on him. Would he give up the one that was the type of the true Seed, the progenitor, and the channel of the promised blessing, yea, of the Blesser? He knew that in Isaac his seed was to be called. Would he give up Isaac? A most searching and practical question, the very unseen hinge in God Himself on which not Christianity only, but all blessing, turns for heaven and earth, at least as far as the fallen creation is concerned. For what did the Jews wait in hope? For Christ, on whom the promises depend. And of what did Christianity speak? Of Christ who was given up to death, who is risen and gone above, in whom we find all the blessing promised, and after a better sort. Thus it is evident that the introduction of the last trial of Abraham was of all possible moment to every one that stood in the place of a son of Abraham. The severest and final trial of Abraham's faith was giving up the son, in whom all the promises were infolded, to receive him back on a resurrection ground in figure. It was, parabolically, like that of Christ himself. The Jews would not have Him living. The Christians gained Him in a far more excellent way after the pattern of resurrection, as Abraham at the close received Isaac as it were from the dead.

Then we have the other patriarchs introduced, yet chiefly as regards earthly hopes, but not apart from resurrection, and its connection with the people of God here below. On these things I need not now dwell farther than to characterize all, from Abraham inclusively, as the patience of faith. (Verses 8-22.)

Then, having finished this part of the subject, the apostle turns to another characteristic in believers — the mighty power of faith which knows how to draw on

God, and breaks through all difficulties. It is not merely that which goes on quietly waiting for the accomplishment of the counsels of God. This it was of all consequence to have stated first. And for this simple reason: no place is given herein to man's importance. Had the energetic activity of faith been first noticed, it would have made more of man; but when the heart had been disciplined in quiet endurance, and lowly expectancy from God, then he could be clothed with the energy of the Spirit. Both are true; and Moses is the type of the latter, as Abraham of the former. Accordingly we find everything about Moses. as well as done by him, extraordinary. His deliverance was strange; still more his decision and its results. He goes out, deliberately and knowingly, just at the time of life when a man is most sensitive to the value of a grand sphere of influence, as well as exercise of his powers, wherein, too, he could have ordinarily exerted all in favour of his people. Not so Moses. He acted in faith, not policy. He made nothing of himself, because he knew they were God's people. Accordingly he became just the more the vessel of divine power to the glory of God. He chose "rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward." And what then? "By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king." This was in the ways of God the necessary moral consequence of his self-abnegation.

"Through faith he instituted the passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them. By faith they passed through the Red

sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned." These two last verses bear witness to the grace of God in redemption. In the blood of the Lamb, sprinkled on the door-posts of Israel, we see the type of God's judgment of their sins; next, in the passage of the Red sea, the exhibition of His power, which, in the most conspicuous way, saved them, and destroyed for ever their enemies. But whether the one or the other, all was by faith.

But mark another striking and instructive feature of this chapter. No attention is paid here to the march through the wilderness, any more than to the establishment in the land, still less to the kingdom. We have just the fact of their passing through the Red sea, and no more; as we have the fall of Jericho, and no more. The intention here was not to dwell either on the scene in which their waiting was put to the test, the wilderness, or on anything that could insinuate the settled position of Israel in the land. As to the pathway through the wilderness, it had been disposed of in Hebrews 4. The grounds why Canaan could not consistently be made prominent in this epistle as a present thing, but only as a hope, we have already seen.

This deeply interesting chapter closes with the reason why those who had thus not only lived but died in faith did not get the promise: "God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect." What was this "better thing"? Can there be a doubt that Christianity is meant? that good portion which shall not be taken away from those who cleave to the Crucified, who is now exalted in heaven? One can well understand that the apostle would leave his readers to gather thus generally what it must have been. God

then has provided some better thing for us. He has brought in redemption in present accomplishment, and at the same time He has given scope for a brighter hope, founded on His mighty work on the cross, measured by Christ's glory as its present answer at the right hand of God. Hence He crowns the noble army of witnesses with Christ Himself. "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, laying aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking off unto Jesus the captain and completer of faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

This is a different way of looking at His session there. In all the other passages of the epistle the meaning of the word is, that He took His seat, or simply sat down there. It is the fact that there He sat down; but in this place it will be observed that His taking His seat there is the reward of the life of faith. As the result of enduring the cross, having despised the shame, the word for sitting down here has a remarkably beautiful shade of meaning different from what is given in all the other occurrences. Its force implies that it is not merely what He did once, but what He is also doing still. Attention is drawn to the permanence of His position at the right hand of God. Of course it is true that Jesus took His seat there, but more is conveyed in the true form of the text (κεκάθικεν) here.

This, however, only by the way. Beyond question the Lord is regarded as the completer of the whole walk of faith in its deepest and, morally, most glorious form. Instead of having one person illustrating one thing,

another person another, the Lord Jesus sums up the perfection of all trial in His own pathway, not as Saviour only, but in the point of view of bearing witness in His ways for God here below. Who ever walked in faith as He? For indeed He was a man as really as any other, though infinitely above man.

From this practical lessons of great value are drawn. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children." Thus the first part of the chapter shows us simply what God holds out to the new man; but the epistle to the Hebrews never looks at the Christian simply in the new man, but rather as a concrete person. From the beginning to the end of it the Christian in Hebrews is not thus dealt with apart from the old nature, as we may see him regarded in the ordinary epistles of Paul, where the old and the new man are most carefully separated. It is not the case in the epistles of James and Peter, with which so far the epistle to the Hebrews agrees. The reason I take to be, that the apostle meets the Jewish believer where he is, as much as possible giving credit for what was really true in the Old Testament saints, and so in the Jewish mind. Now it is evident that in the Old Testament the distinction was not made between flesh and spirit in the way in which we have it brought out in the general doctrine of Christianity.

The apostle is dealing with the saints as to their walk; and as he had shown how Christ alone had purged the sins of the believer, and how He is on high, as the Priest in the presence of God, to intercede for them in their

weakness and dangers; so now, when he is come to the question of the walk of faith, Christ is the leader of that, walk. Accordingly, this is an appeal to the hearts. which cleave to Christ the rejected King, and Holy Sufferer, who is now in glory above. He necessarily completes all as the pattern for the Christian. But then there are impediments as well as sin, by which the enemy would keep us from the race set before us; whilst God carries on His discipline in our favour. And the apostle shows that we need not only a perfect pattern in the walk of faith, but chastenings by the way. This, he says, must be from a father who loves his true and faulty children: others enjoy no such care. First of all, it is love that calls us to the path that Christ trod; next, it is love that chastens us. Christ never needed this, but we do. He reasons that, while our parents only chastise us the best way they can (for after all their judgment might not be perfect), the Father of spirits never fails. He has but one settled purpose of goodness about us; He watches and judges for our good, and nothing but our good. He has set His mind upon making us, patterns of His holiness. It is what He carries on now. Fully does He allow, as connected with this, that the chastening seems not joyous but grievous. We begin with His love, and shall end in it without end. He only removes obstructions, and maintains our communion with Himself; surely this ought to settle every question for the believer. If we know His perfect love and the wisdom of it, we have the best answer to silence every murmuring thought or wish of the heart.

There is nothing more serious than to set grace against holiness. Nowhere does the apostle give the smallest occasion for such a thought. So here he tells them to

“follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: looking diligently lest any man lack the grace of God.” It is not a question of the law, which a Jew might naturally conceive to be the standard of the will of God now as of old for Israel. How easily we even forget that we are not Jews but Christians! Reason can appreciate not grace but law; and so people are apt, when things go wrong, to bring in the law. It is quite legitimate to employ it in an à fortiori way, as the apostle does in Ephesians 6. For assuredly if Jewish children honoured their father and mother on legal grounds, much more ought Christian children on grounds of grace.

Another great call was, to beware “lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled; lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.” Thus you see, either corrupt passion on the one hand or profanity on the other, are unsparingly condemned by the grace of God. If the law could show little mercy in such a case, the grace of God views all sin as intolerable.

This leads him, from speaking of Esau’s case, to add as a known fact, that afterward, when he desired to have inherited the blessing he was rejected (for he found no place of repentance), though he sought it carefully with tears. That is, he sought carefully with tears the blessing given to Jacob; but there was no room left for repentance, simply in the sense of change of mind; for, I suppose, the word here has that sense, which sometimes, no doubt, it has. In its ordinary usage, it has a much deeper force. Every change of mind is far from being repentance, which doctrinally means that special

and profound revolution in the soul when we take God's part against ourselves, judging our past ways, yea, what we are in His sight. This Esau never sought; and there never was one who did seek and failed to find it. Esau would have liked well to have got or regained the blessing; but this was given of God otherwise, and he had forfeited it himself. Arranged all beforehand, neither Isaac's partiality nor Jacob's deceit was able to divert the channel. His purpose utterly failed to secure the blessing for his profane but favourite son. He saw his error at last, and put his seal on God's original appointment of the matter.

And here we are favoured with a magnificent picture of Christianity in contrast with Judaism. We are not come to Sinai, the mountain that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and a voice more terrible than that of the elements. To what then are we come? To mount Zion. And what is its distinctive character as here introduced? If we examine the historical facts as found in the Old Testament story, what is it rises up before all eyes as to Zion? When does it first appear? After the people had been tried and found wanting; after the priests had wrought, if possible, greater corruption; after the king of Israel's choice had reduced them to the lowest degradation. 'It was therefore a crisis after the most painful accumulation of evils that weighed on the heart of Israel. But if people and priest and king were proved thus vain, God was there, and His grace could not fail. Their abject ruin placed them just in the circumstances that suited the God of all grace. At that very moment therefore the tide begins to turn. God brings forward His choice, David, when the miserable end of Saul and Jonathan saw the

Philistines triumphant, and Israel disheartened as they had scarce been beyond that moment. The hill of Zion up to this time had been the constant menace of the enemy against the people of the Lord; but in due time, when David reigned, it was wrested out of the hands of the Jebusites, and became the stronghold of Jerusalem, the city of the king. Thenceforward how it figures in the Psalms and prophets! This then is the monument for such as we are. Let blinded Jews turn their sightless eyeballs to the mountain of Sinai. Let men who can see only look there, and what will be found? Condemnation, darkness, death. But what at Zion? The mighty intervention of God in grace — yea, more than that, forgiveness, deliverance, victory, glory, for the people of God.

For not merely did David receive from Jehovah that throne, but never were the people of God lifted out of such a state of distress and desolation, and placed on such a height of firm and stable triumph as under that one man's reign. He had beyond all mere men known sorrow and rejection in Israel; yet he himself not only mounted the throne of Jehovah, but raised up His people to. such power and prosperity as, was never reached again. For although outwardly, no doubt, the prosperity lasted in the time of Solomon, it was mainly the fruit of David's suffering, and power, and glory. God honoured the son for the father's sake. It remained for a brief season; but even then it soon began to show rents down. to the foundations, which became apparent too, too quickly in Solomon's son. With Zion then the apostle justly begins. Where is the mountain that could stand out so well against Sinai? What mountain in the Old

Testament so much speaks of grace, of God's merciful interference for His people when all was lost?

Rightly then we begin with Zion, and thence may we trace the path of glory up to God Himself, and down to the kingdom here below. Impossible to rise higher than the Highest, whence therefore the apostle descends, to consequences. Indeed we may say that the whole epistle to the Hebrews is just this: we start from the foundation of grace up to God Himself in the heavens; and thence springs the certainty that the stream of grace is not exhausted, and that undoubtedly it will issue in unceasing blessing by-and-by for the earth, and for the people of Israel above all, in the day of Jehovah.

Accordingly we have a remarkable line of blessing pursued for our instruction here. "Ye are come unto mount Zion," which was the highest Old Testament point of grace on earth. Others doubtless could speak of their Ararat, their Olympus, their Etna; but which boasted of the true God that loved His people in the way that Zion could? But would a Jew infer hence that it was only the city of David he was speaking of? Let him learn his error. "And unto the city of the living God, (not of dying David,) the heavenly Jerusalem" (not the earthly capital of Palestine). This I take to be a general description of the scene of glory for which Abraham looked. He could know nothing of the mystery of the church, Christ's body, nor of her bridal hopes; but he did look for what is called here the "heavenly Jerusalem," that city "whose maker and builder is God." In this phrase there is no allusion whatever to the church; nor indeed anywhere in the Hebrews is there any reference to its distinctive portion in union with its Head. When it says that Abraham looked for the city, it means a blessed and

ordered scene of glory on high, which eclipsed the Holy Land before his eyes. This, however, does not mean the church, but rather the future seat of general heavenly bliss for the glorified saints.

Then he adds: “And to myriads of angels, the general assembly” — for such is the true way to divide the verse — “and to the church of the firstborn,” etc. This proves that the city of the heavenly Jerusalem does not mean the church, because here they are certainly distinguished from each other, which therefore completely settles all the argument that is often founded on Abraham’s looking for a heavenly city. It was not the church, I repeat, but what God prepares above for those who love Him. True, the apostle John uses this very city as the figure of the bride. But this essential difference separates between the city for which Abraham looked and the bride so symbolised in the Apocalypse. When the apostle Paul, speaks of “the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem,” he means the scene of future heavenly blessedness; whereas when John speaks of the new Jerusalem descending out of heaven from God, he means, not where but what we are to be. The difference is very great. The epistle sets before us the seat of glory prepared on high; the Revelation speaks of the bride represented as a glorious golden city with figures beyond nature. The one is what may be called the objective glory; the other is the subjective condition of those that compose the bride, the Lamb’s wife.

Having brought its to see the “church of the firstborn which are written in heaven,” the apostle next can only speak of “God the Judge of all.” He describes Him thus in His judicial character. The reason appears to be, because he is going to tell us of the Old Testament

saints. They had known God in His providence and dealings on the earth, though looking for a Messiah and His day. Hence, therefore, he now introduces us “to the spirits of just men made perfect.” These evidently are the elders of olden times. None but the Old Testament saints, as a class, can all be in the separate state: not the church, or New Testament saints, for we shall not all sleep; nor the millennial saints, for none of them will die. The reference is therefore plain and sure.

Then we hear of “Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant” — the pledge of Israel’s full and changeless blessing. Lastly, he points “to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better than Abel:” the assurance that the earth shall be delivered from its long sorrow and slavery.

Thus the chain of blessedness is complete. He has shown its the symbolic mount Of grace in Zion, contrasted with Sinai the mountain of law. If the one figured the imposed measure of man’s responsibility, which can only but most justly condemn him, in the other we behold the mountain of God’s grace after all was lost. Then follows the heavenly glory, to which grace naturally leads; then the natural inhabitants of the heavenly land, namely, the angels — “and to myriads of angels, the general assembly.” Then he shows us others higher than these, by a divine call — “and to the church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven.” They do not belong to heaven like the angels; but God had an eternal purpose, which brought them by an extraordinary favour there. And then, in the centre of all, we have God Himself. But having looked up to Him who is above all, he speaks of the highest group next to God in His judicial character, namely, the Old Testament saints. Then he descends to a new or fresh covenant (not

καινῆς, as elsewhere, but νέας), the recently inaugurated covenant for the two houses of the ancient people. Although the blood on which that covenant was founded may be now long shed, when the covenant comes into force for them will it not be as fresh as the day the precious Victim died and shed His blood? The reference here I cannot but regard as exclusively to the two houses of Israel. And as thus were shown the people immutably blessed (for salt shall not be wanting to that covenant) in the scene that will soon come, we finally hear of the earth itself joyful in the curse removed for ever. It is “the blood that speaketh better than Abel.” For the martyred saint’s blood the earth cried to God for vengeance; but Christ’s blood proclaims mercy from God, and the millennial day will be the glorious witness of its depth, and extent, and stability, before the universe.

The rest of the chapter brings in, accordingly, the closing scene, when the Lord comes to shake everything, and establish that blessed day. But although it will be the shaking of all things, not of earth only but also heaven, yet, marvellous to say, such confidence of heart does grace give, that this, which may be regarded as the most awful threat, turns into a blessed promise. Think of the shaking of heaven and earth being a promise! Nothing but absolute establishment of heart in God’s grace could have gazed on a destroyed universe, and yet call it a “promise.” But it is the language for us to learn and speak, as we are called to rest on God and not on the creature.

The last chapter (Heb. 13) follows this up with some practical exhortations as to brotherly love continuing; then as to kindness to strangers, or hospitality; finally,

as to pity for those in bonds. “Be mindful of those in bonds, as bound with them; and of those which suffer adversity.” Again he insists upon the honour and purity of the marriage tie, and the abhorrence that God has for those that despise and corrupt it, and the sure judgment which will come upon them. He presses a conversation without covetousness, and a spirit of content, founded on our confidence in the Lord’s care.

At the same time he exhorts the believers as to their chiefs, that is, those who guided them spiritually. It is I likely that the Hebrew believers were somewhat unruly. And their relation to their leaders he puts forward in various forms. First, they were to remember those that once ruled them. Those were now gone from the scene of their trials and labours, of “whom, considering the issue of their conversation, imitate the faith.”

This naturally leads the apostle to bring before them One that never ends — “Jesus Christ [is] the same yesterday, and today, and for ever.” Why should His saints be carried away with questions about meats and drinks? He is the same unchangingly and evermore, as He has ever been. “Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established in grace.” See how this word, this thought, always predominates in the epistle. Why turn back to “meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein?”

Had they been taunted with having no altar, possessing nothing so holy and so glorious in its associations? It was only owing to the blindness of Israel. For, says he, “we have an altar,” yea, more than that, an altar, “whereof they have no right to eat which serve the

tabernacle." You that go after the tabernacle (as he persists in calling it, even though now the temple) have no title to our altar, with its exhaustless supplies. To us Christ is all.

But this becomes the occasion of a remarkable allusion, on which I must for a moment dwell. He draws attention to the well-known rites of the atonement day; at any rate, if not of that day exclusively, wherever there was a beast the body of which was burnt without the camp, and the blood carried within the veil. Do you not discern in this striking combination the distinctive features of Christianity? Alas! it is not the dulness of Jewish prejudice only, but exactly what is denied by every system of which men boast in Christendom. For these very features did Judaism despise the gospel. But let not the Gentile boast, no less unbelieving no less arrogant, against true Christianity. Christendom precisely takes the middle ground of Judaism between these two extremes. The mean looks and sounds well, but is utterly false for the Christian. The two extremes, offensive to every lover of the viâ media of religious rationalism, must be combined in Christianity and the Christian man, if he is to maintain it unimpaired and pure. The first is, that in spirit the Christian is now brought by redemption, without spot or guilt, into the presence of God. If you believe in Christ at all, such is your portion — nothing less. If I know what Christ's redemption has accomplished for all who believe, I must know that God has given me this. He honours the work of Christ, according to His estimate of its efficacy, as it is only according to His counsels about us for Christ's glory. Of this we saw somewhat in Hebrews 10. And what is the effect of it? As a Christian I am now free, by God's will,

to go in peace and assurance of His love into the holiest of all — yes, now. I speak, of course, of our entrance there only in spirit.

As to the outer man also, we must learn to what we are called now. The apostle argues that, just as the blood of the beast was brought into the holiest of all, while the body of the same animal was taken outside the camp and burnt, so this too must be made good in our portion. If I have an indisputable present title of access into the holiest of all, I must not shrink from the place of ashes outside the camp. He that possesses the one must not eschew the other. In these consists our double present association by faith, while on the earth. The apostle earnestly insists on them both. We belong to the holiest of all, and we act upon it, if we iet rightly, when we worship God; nay, when we draw near to God in prayer at all times. Brought nigh to God by the blood of Jesus, we have perfect access, so that there is nothing between God and us; for Christ suffered once to bring us to God, as He intercedes that we may have communion. with Him in this place of nearness. Our being brought to God supposes, and is founded on the fact, that our sins are gone perfectly by His one offering; otherwise no madness is greater than indulging such a thought. If it be not the truth, it would be the height of presumption indeed. But far from this, it is the simple fact Of the gospel. “He suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust,” says another apostle, “that he might bring us” — not to pardon, nor to peace, nor to heaven, but — “to God.” Compare also Eph. 2. We are brought, then, washed from our sins, to God, and, according to this epistle, into the holiest of all, where He displays Himself. The real presumption, therefore, is to pretend

to be a Christian, and yet to doubt the primary fundamental truth of Christianity as to this.

But the bodies of those beasts were burnt without the camp: my place, so far as I in the body am concerned, is one of shame and suffering in this world.

Are those two things true of you? If you have and prize one alone, you have only got the half of Christianity — yea, of its foundations. Are they both true of you? Then you may bless God that He has so blessed you, and given you to know as true of yourself that which, if not so known, effectually prevents one from having the full joy and bearing the due witness as an unworldly and simple-hearted servant of Christ here below. It is true, He does not always call at once into the place of reproach and suffering. He first brings us into the joy and nearness of His presence. He satisfies us with the perfectness with which Christ has washed us from our sins in His blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father. But having done this, He points us to the place of Christ without the camp. “Let us go forth therefore unto him without the. camp, bearing his reproach.” This was the very thing that these Jewish Christians were shrinking, from, if not rebelling against. They had not made up their minds to suffer: to be despised was odious in their eyes. Nor is it pleasant to nature. But the apostle lets them know that if they understood their true blessing, this was the very part of it that was inseparably bound up with their present nearness to God, as set forth typically by the central and most important rite of the Jewish system. This is the meaning of the blood carried within, and of the body burnt without.

Let us then seek to combine these two things perfect nearness to God, and the place of utter scorn in the presence of man. Christendom prefers the middle course; it will have neither the conscious nearness, to God, nor the place of Christ's reproach among men. All the effort of Christendom is first to deny the one, and then to escape from the other. I ask my brethren here if they are looking to God strenuously, earnestly, for themselves and for their children, not to allow but to oppose as their adversary every thing that tends to weaken either of these truths, which are our highest privilege and our truest glory as Christians here below. What a surprise to the Hebrew believers to find such truths as these so strikingly shown out in type even in the Jewish system!

But the apostle goes farther, as indeed was due to truth. These characteristics he proves to be really found in Christ Himself. He is evidently gone into the holiest of all in His own person. But how? What had immediately preceded this, The cross. Thus the cross and heavenly glory must go together. The gracious Lord gives and designs that we should take His own place both in heaven and here. "Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp." This is just the closing practical word of the epistle to the Hebrews. God was going openly to set aside the Jewish system, as it had already been judged morally in the cross of Christ. When the Messiah was crucified, Judaism was in principle a dead thing: if it was in any sense kept up, it was no more than a decent time before its burial. But now God sends His final summons, founded on their own ritual, to His people who were hankering after the dead, instead of seeing the Living One on He as it were repeats, "Let the

dead bury the dead." The Romans will do the last sad offices. But as for you who believe in Jesus, wait not for the Romans; let Judaism be nothing but a corpse, which does not concern you. "Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach."

This was a final call; and how gracious! If God had reserved the epistle to the Hebrews until after He sent forth His armies and burned up their city, destroying their polity root and branch, it might have been retorted that the Christians valued the Jewish ritual as loner as it was available, and only gave it up when earthly temple and sacrifice and priest were gone. But God took care to summon His children outside — to abandon the whole system before it was destroyed. They were to leave the dead to bury their dead; and they did so. But Christendom has wholly failed to profit by the call, and is doomed to perish by a judgment yet more solemn and wide-spread than that which swept away the ancient temple.

Another point follows, connected with what we have had before us, and demanding our attention. Instead of pining after that which is about to be destroyed, or repining at the call to go out to the place of Christ's shame on earth, Christianity, which replaces Judaism now, may well cause us to offer "the sacrifice of praise to God continually." There are two kinds of sacrifice to which we are now called. "By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, confessing his name. But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." That may have a higher character, these a lower; but even the highest is never to supersede or make us forgetful of the lowest.

Then comes a second exhortation as to their guides, or leading men among the brethren. (Compare Acts 15:22.) Obey your leaders, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls, as those that shall give account." There is no sanction here, of course, of the vulgar and outrageous error that pastors give an account of the souls of their flock. It is an idea that superstition hatched, for the purpose of spuriously exalting a clerical order. The meaning is, that spiritual guides shall give an account of their own behaviour in watching over other souls; for it is a work that calls for much jealousy over self, patience with others, painstaking labour, lowliness of mind, and that hearty love which can bear all, endure all, believe all. There is then the solemn admonition of the account they are to render by-and-by. They watch as those that shall give an account. Now is the time for self-denying labour, and endurance in grace; by-and-by the account must be given to the Lord that appointed them. And the apostle would that their work of watching might be done with joy, and not groaning for this would be unprofitable for the saints.

But even the apostle felt his own need of the prayers of the faithful, not because he had gone wrong, but because he was conscious of no hindrance to his work from a had conscience. "Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience; in all things willing to live honestly. But I beseech you the rather to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner."

Then he commends the saints to God. "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, in virtue of the blood of the everlasting covenant, perfect you in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing

in his sight “through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for the ages of the ages.”

Finally, he beseeches his brethren to hear the word of exhortation. Such is pre-eminently the bearing of this epistle to those who had no such frequent opportunities of profiting by his teaching as the Gentile churches. We can understand, therefore, both the delicacy that thus entreated them, and the meaning of the added words, “for also in few words I have written to you.” Nor does it seem so natural for any as the great apostle to inform them of his child and fellow-labourer: “Know that the brother Timothy is set at liberty; with whom, if he come pretty soon, I will see you. Salute all your leaders, and all the saints. They from Italy salute you. Grace be with you all. Amen.”

Thus the apostle closes this most striking and precious epistle, brimful to overflowing with that which had an especial and very touching interest to a Jew, but nevertheless needed as certainly by us, and as rich in instruction for us in this day as for those at any time that has passed away. For let me say this as a parting word, and I say it advisedly, because of circumstances that might well be before our hearts, — no deliverance, however enjoyed, no place of death to law, world, or sin, no privilege of union with Christ, will enable a soul to dispense with the truths contained in this epistle to the Hebrews. We are still walking here below; we are in the place therefore where infirmity is felt, where Satan tempts, where we may fail through unwatchfulness. The greater part of the affections of the Christian are drawn out toward our Saviour by all this scene of sin and sorrow through which we are passing on to heaven. If we formed our Christian character practically on such

epistles as those to the Ephesians and Colossians alone, depend on it there may not be the hard lines of the law, but there will be very far from the fervent affections which become him who feels the grace of Christ. Be assured it is of the deepest possible moment to cherish the activity of Christ's present love and care for us, the activity of that priesthood which is the subject of this epistle. Holding fast the permanence of the blotting out of our guilt, may we nevertheless and besides own the need of such an One as Christ to intercede for us, and deal in grace with all our feebleness or faults. The Lord forbid that anything should enfeeble our sense of the value and necessity of such daily grace, There may be that which calls for confusion of face in us, but there is unceasing ground also for thanksgiving and praise, however much we have to humble ourselves in the sight of God.

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1 I see no ground whatever for applying the citation from Psalm 2 to the resurrection of Christ. Acts 13, which is usually quoted to prove it, really distinguishes the raising up of Jesus as Messiah, the Son of God here below, from His resurrection which is made to rest on Isaiah 55 and Psalm 16. Neither does Psalm 2 set forth His eternal Sonship, all-important a truth as it is, and clearly taught by John above all.