The New Testament Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

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Preface

Preface to the First Edition.

The volume which is now before the reader consists of a course of lectures delivered in London during a brief part of this summer, and, after an interval of other work, which delayed the needful revision, printed from the shorthand writer’s report. Few, perhaps, will be more sensible of its defects than the author is. Nevertheless the need of souls is so urgent on the one hand, and the broad outline of the truth is so plain and momentous on the other, that he does not hesitate to commit the work to the mercy and the blessing of the Lord, who loves His own that are in the world, and loves them unto the end.

Guernsey,

November, 1867.

The New Birth and Eternal Life

Lecture 1 - John 3:5.

The subject of which I propose to treat will demand, as the course of lectures may call for it, the development, according to God's word, of many operations of the Holy Ghost only experienced under Christianity, which were unknown in the times which preceded the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus. But I rejoice to begin this night with that which spreads itself over the entire dealings of God in His mercy towards His saints at all times. That is, we enter on what is not special, save only as the knowledge of God Himself must distinguish souls in a lost world where grace chooses and saves-what is not special in the sense of being brought out and enjoyed, under peculiar circumstances and at a particular period, in the ways of God with man. On the contrary, what comes before us now is universal for God's children, was found in the earliest days since sin entered into the world, was never superseded, nor can be, till the last trace of sin is gone for ever. It is the one fundamental want for every soul of man who is brought out of the condition of fallen man-the common lot of man appointed, as we know, to die, and after that to judgment. God would make Himself known, would reveal Himself; it might be only partially, after sundry measures, and in many manners, as the apostle tells us in Hebrews 1; but, whatever the measure or the mode of His revelations, God has always wrought in sovereign mercy to souls, and He has given of His own nature to those who believe here below. This is what is meant by being born again. Nor was there ever a time when it was

more necessary than now, not only to assert what is special, but to cleave to that which is universal in the sense just now explained. Let us maintain then that which never changes; while, at the same time, we leave ample space for whatever it may please God according to His own wisdom to bring in, amplifying, clearing, brightening, deepening, and that in every possible form. There is progress, I need not say, in the way in which God does manifest Himself; at any rate, till Christ appeared, and His work was accomplished. Not that I speak of progress since, but that, in the unfolding of the word of God from the beginning, there is most manifestly an enlarging view given of the divine ways- given until God, and not merely His ways, were fully manifested.

Across the whole course of these varying dispensations, as I gladly allow, we have this great blessing enjoyed. And the reason is manifest: a God of goodness on the one hand, and lost man on the other. “My Father worketh hitherto,” said the Son, also working in grace. Conscience may give its intimations of a God and His judgment; but the mind of man never can rise above the fact, or rather the inference, that there must be a God. God Himself is never thus known. Mind, as such, is incapable of finding out God; and, in point of fact, that which gave scope to the reason of man was his ruin. He reasons about God because he has lost God; and all that reasoning can discover in any of its processes is not what is, but simply, granting this and that, what must be. But a God that simply must be is awful to a conscience burdened with its guilt. The God that must be for him- that is, for a sinner-must be a judge; and if God be the judge of sin and of sinners, what must be the

sinner’s lot? If the righteous even with difficulty be saved, where shall the ungodly appear?

Now, in the face of all this, God has not merely given a revelation, made promises, given even still more distinct prophetic delineations of what He meant to do: this He has done from the very first; but there was always more than this. And it is of very great consequence to souls even now to recognise that it is not only a direction of the soul of the believer toward God by faith, but that there is, and has always been, far more. It is not too much to assume that those who listen to me here have no need to be told what that link really is. I do not refer now to the new fact that God has sent down the Holy Ghost; but I say, that while there was always faith, there was always more than faith. It is a very imperfect and even pernicious view, that souls simply look to God. However true this is, it is but a part of the truth. Besides the look of faith, besides the laying hold of the word of God by the operation of the Spirit in the soul, there is such a thing as spiritual life; and there always was such a thing; for it is the necessary condition of having to do with God. There always was, as there is, a positive new nature given to the believer; that is, it is not merely a question of faith, but of a new life. Faith, of course, is the only means whereby this new nature is imparted, as I shall hope to show; and faith is the true means for the soul to assure itself that it is thus born of God. There may be other evidences to other eyes and hearts; but faith is that which is intended of God to give its possessor the certainty that he is born of God.

Now this truth and indispensable necessity, although always made good in believers, it is evident before Christ was very feebly understood, and, in point of fact

during Old Testament times, was rather implied than explicitly taught. It may be presented in figure, and there may be moral expressions; but nowhere is there a distinct statement of a new birth, save as a predicted privilege. The consequence was, when Nicodemus came to our Lord Jesus, arrested by that which he had seen, but, at the same time, with the sense of a deeper want in his soul, though totally ignorant of what he wanted, he was taken aback and confounded by our Lord's strong assertion to him, that except one were born again, he could not even see the kingdom of God. The Jews had quietly settled down in the conviction that the Messiah could and would do everything for them. Nor were they, in one sense, wrong. When He came, even the Samaritans were satisfied that Messiah would show or teach them all things; and the Jews knew that it was not a question merely of teaching, but that He would do all things; He would bring in everlasting righteousness, seal up the vision, anoint the most holy, deal with sin, iniquity, everything. They knew most imperfectly how it was to be done. Still there was a vague, general, yet, at the same time, sure conviction on the mind of every Jew, except, we may say, the infidel portion of them, that the coming of the Messiah would be the turning-point of the world, and would be more especially the incoming of all promised and expected blessing for Israel. Hence it was most startling to hear so solemn an announcement from One now found present in their very midst, whom His forerunner, John the Baptist, declared to be the Messiah, from One who had manifested by miracles that He was really a teacher come from God at the very least. Yet this very One stopped Nicodemus at the threshold with the most cutting declaration of a necessity that he had never apprehended before, and this put in so broad a manner

as to make it as absolute for a Jew as for a Gentile. “Except a man be,” etc. No exceptions were entertained, no exemption was allowed, for the chosen family of Abraham. It was a divine requirement for those near, as well as the remote. “Except a man be born afresh, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

The consequence is, that Nicodemus puts, as we know, a most unintelligent question to our Lord, how such a thing could be: “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” But at least his question proves that “born from above” is not at all the true meaning of the verse. Had the Lord given Nicodemus to judge that this was the meaning, such a question could not have been proposed. No; He meant to be born afresh, born from the very outset, so to speak. It appears to be the strongest possible expression of this; at any rate, I do not know a stronger one in Scripture. This accordingly brings out from our Lord Jesus the statement on which I desire to enlarge a little to-night: “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” He that sees the kingdom enters the kingdom; but there is no seeing nor entering, unless there be this new birth. What, then, is its source and character?

Our Lord here explains. He does it, as is habitually done in His discourses to the Jews in this Gospel, after a figurative sort. In the chapter before, when there was a question about the temple, He adopted that figure for His own body-Himself. In the chapter that follows He takes up another from the circumstance of the wants of the Samaritan woman; and a well of water becomes the image of that infinite blessing on which we shall hope to

dwell a little by-and-by; and so I might go through the Gospel, and prove that this adoption of some well-known figure startles by the very fact that it is a figure, but by no means obscures; for this is never the object of figures in Scripture, or in any honest writing. The true object is rather to compress into one word the truth which might otherwise need to be expanded into many words; so that a word becomes what may be called an image-word of truth, and therefore bright with the light of God. And so, I doubt not, it is in this case. Now these images were used in the Old Testament prophets, and used too in connection with this very blessing. This was therefore what furnished occasion to the Lord, with a justice that appealed to Nicodemus' own conscience, to censure him who stood in the relation of teacher to Israel (for this is the meaning); not, I apprehend, in some special manner as the master, but the usual article of contrast with Israel as the scholar.

Our Lord, then, does tacitly refer to passages in the Old Testament which ought to have made His allusion and meaning intelligible to Nicodemus. Take Isaiah 44 for instance. Had not God there promised to pour water upon him that was thirsty? Had He not promised to pour His Spirit upon the seed of Jacob? Had He not still more plainly declared, in Ezekiel 36, that when He gathered Israel into the land, He would there take away their stony heart, and put into them a heart of flesh, sprinkle clean water upon them, and put His Spirit within them- the precise two elements of our Lord's statement? Thus in this place the Saviour does most clearly keep in view these Old Testament figures. Indeed, it was not some absolutely new privilege; it was, on the contrary, only the assertion, according to His own special dignity and

glory, of a universal need in a manner suitable to Himself. That is, the Lord does give the whole scope of truth as to this found throughout the Scriptures, but then He brings it all to a point, and clothes it with that force which was proper to the Son of God, if He took the place of a teacher upon the earth. How could He, if He taught, merely teach as another? “Never man spake like this man.” Therefore, even while He is only taking up, so to speak, what was found before (at least in prophecy), and what ought thence to have been known from of old, nevertheless He gives it a characteristic depth in the form in which He presents it to Nicodemus. Hence it is no question of being sprinkled, or having a new heart given, or “a new spirit put within,” but, “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit”-an incomparably momentous, primary, and practical truth.

I deny not that there are other truths more apt to draw out the affections, and to fix them on the person of the Saviour, bringing the soul into full liberty, peace, joy, as well as power here below. Surely there are; but none has so much the character of a foundation, save only Christ and His work in which God Himself was glorified, and glorified too in such a sort, that He could thus righteously bless and give His own nature to a poor sinner. With His own divine perfectness the Lord here, in a single word, changes all, so to speak; for while the truth is adopted from others, nevertheless there is a new beauty, and there is such divine energy given to it, that we can well apprehend how glorious the person must be that utters the truth after such a sort. “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit.” It is in truth a new nature; it is that which has no foundation in man, no source save in God; it is God Himself who has His own

kingdom; it is God Himself that is the centre of it, who fills it in the person of Christ His Son, and, therefore, who should give a new nature. For what nature could be suitably presented? It must be, and it is, the divine nature. “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” And thus, then, we come to the terms.

I have drawn attention to the force of being “born anew” found in the earlier statements. Next, the briefer expression in the third verse is expanded in the fifth. But now, if we look at the manner in which this birth is characterized, it is “of water.” Water, in Scripture, is habitually employed as the figure of the word of God applied by the Spirit. It may be used also for the Spirit Himself in His own power; but still I need not point out the close connection there is between these two thoughts. However, here we have the Spirit distinguished from it, and this shows us at once the reason of the difference. The water is mentioned because God would draw attention to the character of what is applied, to what deals morally with the man. He might not at first be aware that what made him sensible of his uncleanness was the Spirit of God. There must always indeed be in the soul, whenever the Holy Ghost thus acts, a consciousness that there is a dealing of some sort. In a word there never is or can be unconsciousness where there is a real operation of God. But then a man might in nowise comprehend that it is the Spirit of God; but this he knows full well, that the word judges him-that it brings him in as guilty and altogether unfit for the presence of God. Thus, “wafer” is the expression of the word dealing morally with the soul, convicting the man of being unclean, and not

merely, cleansing. It is a question at first of the impartation of a new nature that the man had not before. And as we have found the outward, so we have also the inner character of this divine action: “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit.”

It may be well, at this point, to refer to a few texts of Scripture which show that, in different ways, this is the unquestionable meaning of the passage. Take the apostle Paul, in the epistle to Titus, chapter 3, where he says that God saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost. I purposely go no farther than this, because the next verse does convey a fuller character of blessing than what our Lord here expresses. So far there is a most evident link with our passage, even if the washing of regeneration be supposed to present another application of water, or another figure; still regeneration is in manifest harmony with the truth which our Lord had before Him, and was now pressing on Nicodemus. Again, when we turn to the epistle of James (James 1:18), “Of his own will begat he us,” we find a beginning of a life that was not possessed before. It was not merely that God had so enlightened us; it was not merely that there were thoughts, views, truths, communicated to the mind, but there is a new kind of life or nature which the soul never had before. “Of his own will begat he us by the word of truth.” Not only have we the begetting on God’s part, but also the word of truth, the instrumental means. It clearly connects itself with the “born of water” in our verse of John 3 Again we read in the first epistle general of Peter, (1 Peter 1:22), “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit [born of water and of the Spirit] unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see

that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently; being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." The new birth is by God's word.

Texts need not be heaped up on a point which, it is to be presumed, will be familiar to most here, but I thought it well just to give enough to show how it runs through the inspired writers of God's latest and fullest revelation. I have therefore purposely chosen passages from different apostles. It is a common truth whether Gentiles or Jews be written to, and whether Paul, or Peter, or James be the writer. It is the same fundamental need of souls; but, in point of fact, it found its richest and fullest expression, its most definite and at the same time profoundest form, from the lips of our Lord Jesus. For such seems to me beyond doubt the divine communication in John 3:3, 5.

Another truth of great importance is annexed to it. Not only is there a new nature; namely, as communicated by God's word through the operation of His Spirit, indispensable always, as we see, for man's entrance; but besides that, as the nature of man never can be etherealized, so to speak, never can be so improved or modified as to rise up into any acquaintance with the things of God, never can be changed into divine nature by any spiritual process whatsoever; so, on the other hand, the new nature does not deteriorate, can never be reduced into "the flesh," or the nature of man as he is. As our Lord says, on the one hand, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh," so on the other, "that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." It partakes of the character of its source. Here we find that the great living agent, and not merely the instrument, is brought before us. This I

conceive to be most important. Had there been the presentation of the water, or the word simply, it would have left the door open to the mind of man-which, after all, is really included in “the flesh”- and its pretensions would have led to a subtle kind of rationalism. But not so; “that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” The word of God unquestionably is what He uses; but still man is not born of the word in the strict sense; it is by it, but not of it alone; it is of the Spirit, if you look to the real active personal source.

“Marvel not,” then, He says, “that I said unto you, Ye must be born again.” Here He presses the truth home in the most distinct manner-not merely on man-as the want of all men who would enter God’s kingdom, but now “Ye must be born again.” This eminently leads Nicodemus to put his next question. “Jesus answered and said unto him,” (in answer to “How can these things be?”) “Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness.” Obviously this is a statement of the utmost value, as showing the place of our Lord Jesus in this chapter. He speaks as One who is familiar with God; not merely as One who acted from God, but who pronounced with His authority, speaking as One who is absolutely and perfectly at home with God. “We speak,” says He, “that we do know;” and the word implies intimate knowledge-intrinsic personal knowledge; not that which was given, which a prophet might utter as presented to him, had he the means of revelation, but as One who knew God and His glory consciously. Such seems the reason why He says in this verse, “We speak that we do know.” God alone, He who was God, could thus rightly

speak, and none other. In the consciousness of this divine knowledge therefore Jesus speaks. At the same time also He gives His testimony as to what He had seen. It was not only One who came from God, and so went to God, but also One who while He was God speaks of scenes of glory in which He had been. He was with God as well as was God; He had looked round upon that which was suitable, if I may so say, to the presence of God; He was thoroughly acquainted with it all, not only what suited God Himself, but also the sphere where God dwelt.

Accordingly, from this perfect knowledge of God and familiarity with heaven He makes the declaration: “We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen.” For this very reason man had no relish for it-nay, not only man in general, but the Jews had not. Their place was the earth, and their constant idea, founded upon the testimony of God, as Jews, was God revealing Himself here; God blessing here; God putting down evil here; God delivering His people by judgments here. But now there was One in their midst who differed essentially from all that had ever been upon the earth, who was properly and exclusively the Son of God. But here, so to speak, He takes, if it be possible, a place closer than simply as One whom the Father owns upon earth, as beloved and a son to Him; because you can conceive such a thing possible without His being absolutely God in the fullest sense. But there is the union in Christ’s person, not only of the relationship which He holds as the object of the Father’s delight, but of the very nature of God Himself. Consequently there was not a thought in the Godhead apart from Him, if indeed rightly we can speak of thought as belonging to God; for, in point of

fact, it is a wrong expression. God does not think-man does; but God knows. So Jesus, the Son of God, had this absolute knowledge entirely apart from revelation; He had this absolute knowledge of God, of that which was in keeping with God's presence, and nature, and kingdom; and accordingly here upon earth He also communicates this. What a place to be in! What communion to be brought into, beloved brethren, in the midst of this sea of sin and iniquity, in the midst of men rising up, proud in their own poor thoughts, and evermore proving that they are fallen and far from God-to have Him thus presented whom man would fain, and does, deny to be God!

While I am on this subject,-which is one of the deepest possible interest,-that it was only He who was man that could make known God to man, I am persuaded that it is not in the nature of the Godhead, so to speak, simply as such, to make itself known to man; and that the blessed scheme of God Himself, which was His way of saving us, is just as necessary in order that we should know Him, as it was for saving us. We are more apt to look at the incarnation of the Word, at the Lord Jesus Christ here below, as a means of our being, delivered, and at the fruit of His work in atonement: we are apt to think less of the infinite privilege of knowing God; but, after all, to know the only true God, and Him whom He has sent, is everlasting life. Now, for this very reason God is never called the Truth, nowhere in Scripture, nor anything like it or equivalent. It is a favourite expression of rationalism and infidelity, and for this reason, that man of himself sets up to know God, but never does know Him; and rationalism, by the very fact that it is the pretension of man to know God of and in himself, never

can; for God is only known in Christ, and for this reason I do not know God, just because I am not God. Unless I be a partaker of the divine nature, I cannot know Him. That is the reason why I have been insisting upon this truth of the new birth. It is not faith merely, though of course there is faith, and faith is the only possible way of being brought into the possession of this nature. Again, it is not only the word, but by the Holy Ghost's application of the word, and bringing us in utterly lost as far as we are concerned. Hence also it is really the partaking of a new nature by virtue of which we know God. Now, I say, as long as it was simply God acting, or if it had been merely this, there never could have been such a participation of His nature; for a Being solely divine could not thus give of His own nature to man unless He had revealed Himself in man; and it was as looking forward to Christ, and always presenting Him as the object, that any soul ever did partake of the divine nature, -that any soul ever was born of God. I need not say that the Old Testament saints were thus born of God. Hence our Lord Jesus is not speaking prospectively, but, in point of fact, absolutely, as is His manner in John unless there be exceptions expressly named; that is, He looks prospectively and retrospectively, looks right through the whole course of time into the kingdom of God. And this is the passport into it: a man must be born of God or, as it is explained here, born of water and of the Spirit.

Now the way in which this is done is by God's good pleasure, of His own sovereign love and wisdom, to bring Himself, so to speak, into the nature of man-to reveal Himself in man, as well as to man; that is, He Himself remains in another condition, and man is

perfectly incapable of being brought into it unless in this blessed way; but now He revealing Himself in a man, I, a man, can know Him. By the working of the Holy Ghost, according to His own word, I can be brought into vital association with that blessed Man who is God. And thus it is that the profoundest truths of God, and those that might seem to have no immediate connection with that of which we have been speaking, are proved to be essential; as they are all riveted together in the faith of the children of God; and, while they are admiring the wonderful way in which God has been pleased to send His Son born of a woman- only thinking of it as a necessity for putting away sin- they may learn that it is as necessary for any real knowledge of God and communion with Him. I can know nothing, enjoy nothing of God, as I now know and enjoy Him under Christianity, unless He be pleased to reveal it through the man Christ Jesus. That is, according to the language of the day, so long as He is simply the absolute, I cannot. Will He deign to become relative to me? Will He come down into the condition in which I am? For this is the simple meaning of such out-of-the-way language.

This seems to be precisely the need our Lord here has in view. He asserts in the strongest way that which pertains to Him as God: “We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen.” But then He had come down here to speak to man, and accordingly it became a question of witness. He bears testimony to the truth that it is the sole means by which man is brought into this blessedness which we now enjoy: man must be born of water, and of the Spirit. But what was the reception it met with from man? Man perceived his own things round about him, where he had been born and bred. He

did not care for the things of God; nay, he was an enemy to God. Away from God, he disliked to hear of His things, and of the sphere in which they only should appear. Such was the tendency of man as he is by nature: “Ye receive not our witness.” And it is remarkable that this is found immediately after what might appear to be a very easy reception in the chapter before ours, where, as we all know, they believed, seeing the signs He wrought; but there was no reception of His witness. There was an acceptance of the facts-that is, they acquiesced in what they could see, and what they could judge. And man always thinks the better of himself on account of this, because receiving simply on evidence puts man in the position of a judge: he conceives, he infers, he concludes, and is all the bigger a man because he does. It is something that falls in with the pride of man, who sets himself up in the judgment-seat, even where a miracle of God’s power is in question; whereas here it is God’s witness.

Who does not know every day this very thing? As long as souls are unexercised, they do not trouble themselves about that which they hear; when men are in earnest, they question, or at least sift and weigh. The twofold fact of either resisting obstinately, or of what you may call an otiose reception of a testimony, equally proves that there is no real work in the conscience. The reason of this is simple. If the thing sunk into the heart as that in which it was deeply concerned, there would be at once activity there. It might appear to be even too good; but, for all that, the heart would be deeply moved, and the very anxiety would lead a person to examine farther. At the same time there would be the desire that it should be true wherever God was welcome to the soul,

and this is the form the gospel takes: when a person is utterly dead in trespasses and sins, the testimony of God produces no effect. It is as easy to slight it on the one hand, as to profess it on the other, The effect of indifference is, that you will find easy profession or open hostility to the truth. In short, men lapse into the form either of a mere profession of faith on the one hand, or open infidelity on the other; they are just two forms at bottom of the same thing in the human mind, totally different in appearance, but in truth equally unbelief. Whereas, wherever a soul realizes the importance of it- and this must be so for the simple reason that to have what may be called this easy-going faith in the presence of what Jesus witnesses to us is utterly impossible-the truth, where it is believed in, must move the heart. It is impossible that if, justly condemned and feeling that hell must and ought to be my portion, I believe that God's grace in Christ has delivered me from it, so that I now look assuredly to go to heaven with Jesus; it is impossible for one who believes this to look coolly on it all. Therefore, when you find this kind of inert common-place traditional faith, receiving things with the utmost rapidity, and with no real action on the conscience and heart, it is quite evident that there is no vital work of God: it is a mere human conviction or feeling in the mind, and consequently good for nothing. Our Lord puts the case according to His own divine knowledge of testimony, and tells us of the resistance or indifference it encounters from man. But along with this He hints at higher things: "If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you heavenly things?" This leads us to an important point that modifies what had been laid down. If any here should find it outside their ordinary thoughts, I trust they will

weigh the words of our Lord; for it is His truth, not human speculation, that I would press.

Our Lord Jesus had spoken in the strongest way of the absolute necessity of the new birth for every or any man that enters the kingdom of God. This we must take both backwards and forwards throughout the whole course of the dealings of God. Now there is new language. From the moment that He presents Himself as bringing in this full divine testimony which man does not receive, He speaks of the blessing in a far richer and more precise style. All who are to be in the kingdom of God, whether in the earthly or in the heavenly things, whether below or above, when that kingdom is established and displayed in both its parts, all within it must be born again. But while a soul that receives the gospel now is born of God, it is very far short of expressing the full truth merely to speak of it as new birth. It is not so that Christ puts the matter in the very discourse in which He insists most on being born of the Spirit. “If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not [for which it was an essential condition to be born of God], how shall ye believe, if I tell you heavenly things?” Connected with these last, He says, “No man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.” Thus He confirms what has been said before, that He is presenting Himself as most truly man, the rejected Christ, the Son of man, but as certainly God. Heaven was that to which He belonged, or rather it to Him. This was an entirely new realm, and the surroundings are as new. As born of a woman, born under law, even He was seen and known on earth, and in time, yet spite of all His grace, power, and glory, man would not have Him; but He who was

now manifested in the flesh here below was really the only-begotten Son in the bosom of the Father, and claims even as the rejected One to be the Son of Man who is in heaven.

Observe the language carefully. It is not merely that He had been in heaven, for that is altogether short of the truth; He is there; it matters not when or where He is viewed-He is always the Son of man who is in heaven. His being the humbled man only gave occasion to a new glory for God and man, as it was the turning-point of a fresh and fuller knowledge of God by man. There was One who, Himself the Infinite, entered into what was limited, in order that they, men as they were, should enter into the knowledge of God, and see the Father in Him. They must be met by the word; they must hear One who is man, as He is God. It was grace, but it was truth; it was the only way in which the truth could be revealed. Before this there was only a partial manifestation; but the wonderful thing is that the full manifestation of the truth is found in man-One who is divine, but none the less man. Nothing therefore can be farther from the fact than the thought, that because Christ is come in the flesh, appearing in a limited sphere, the truth cannot be known In point of fact, till the Word was made flesh, the truth could not be fully revealed. It is precisely in the combination of seemingly incompatible elements united in the person of Jesus that the truth appears. For the law was given by Moses; grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. He alone is the One who conciliates God with His righteousness saving in grace, who at the same time humbled Himself and glorified God to the uttermost. It is this blessed man who is the pattern of all lowliness, who, nevertheless, blots out all the glory of man in one word

like this: “No man,” He says, “hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven.” Nor was it merely that He came down. Others might be caught up, as we know, by an act of power; but He could take it for His own proper portion, walking into it as simply as possible when the hour came. More than this, as we have seen, He is in heaven. It was not merely a question of going there, He was “the Son of man who is in heaven.” This therefore attaches to Him as a divine person, and could be said of none else; and more than this, it attaches to this one divine person, and to none other. As a man, I cannot rise above the things of man: such are the limits of the human spirit; it cannot per se reach up to God, or the things of God, who alone can reveal Himself-alone does reveal Himself in the Word, the Son, and this only efficaciously by the Holy Spirit. This is the reason why the Spirit of God is said to be the truth, as well as Christ; the one as objectively viewed, the other as inward power.

The Lord Jesus, then, having brought in His own divine person after this manner, next discloses the need of a work to be done, in order to give God a righteous title to bestow the blessing of His own nature on sinful man. Accordingly this He does thus: “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but”- what? be born again? No-”have eternal life.” Manifestly there is a difference, and of the most weighty and suggestive character. There is no need of strong language to set it forth; for indeed it cannot well be exaggerated. Again, I am not in the least denying, if one were born of God or afresh in the Old Testament times, that he has divine life, or that this life is eternal.

Therefore you will understand that in no way is the fact questioned that all the saints, from beginning to end, have life everlasting. Still, we are bound to believe that the Lord is wise, and had an all-sufficient reason for introducing at this point so marked a difference. For now, for the first time, after having already asserted the universality of being born again, when He comes to express the application of this truth to the believer, founded on redemption, observe, founded on His own death as the Son of man lifted up on the cross, He will not describe it simply as a new birth, but gives it another style and quality in His expression of it. Of course, He, the Son, is the quickener of all saints, and therefore it is to me no question whether the Old Testament saints have not been quickened as really as ourselves: assuredly they must be and were. I hold, that there never was but one Saviour, and consequently that the new birth, which all need for God's kingdom, is ever the impartation, by the Spirit, of the life which is in the Son of God.

Nevertheless, I maintain with equal certainty, and on the positive authority of the word of my Saviour Himself, that He, when pleased to describe our place, refuses, if I may so say, to merge it merely in what belonged to all at all times. Thus, even to this universal and common truth, in its application to us since redemption, He gives an uncommon expression. How marvellously, then, the Spirit of God has shown, in this simple way, the honour that He puts on Christ and on redemption, when He brings near this glorious fact, this work worthy of God- the greatest, so to speak, in which God ever showed Himself forth, even in speaking of what is universal (in the sense of attaching to every child of His, in all ages

and dispensations). Nevertheless, now the Saviour presents it in this new title and greatly enhanced quality. If we search into the Old Testament we may find eternal life spoken of, or what is tantamount to it; for we do not stand upon technicalities, but speak of things in a practical point of view-we speak of a reality which our Lord utters, and has kept in the inspired record as of the utmost importance for all of us to take heed to. I say, then, that the Lord does not vary phrases needlessly, but that if He gives another form, He means that we are to take notice of the difference. Have we meekness of wisdom if we do not?

This appears to me the sum of what we read in the Old Testament. Eternal life is spoken of in Daniel 12, for instance, and “life for evermore” comes before us in the end of Psalm 133; but we may remark this in those two expressions of “life for evermore” and “eternal life” - they are bound up with the hope of Messiah’s presence and reign, when He brings in the kingdom of God as a matter of visible display. But the wonderful truth that appears in John is, that the glory of the Son’s person, being now manifested, brings us into the blessing entirely apart from all such future display. We wait for nothing else: the reason is, because we have Him. Consequently, although the kingdom may not yet be come in this sense, although there be not yet the establishment of public blessing, although in fact the Jews, instead of being blessed, are still subject to the curse under which they put themselves, “His blood be on us and on our children,” and wrath come upon them to the uttermost (that is, the complete putting off of the promises, as far as they are concerned, for the time; and the postponement of the kingdom), in spite of all this,

we are ushered even now into an unbounded scene of rich and divine blessing, and for this reason, because we have Christ, and have Him thus and now.

What makes the thing so touching, as well as instructive, lies in this, that we have now the comfort and joy of personal association with Himself. If only “born again,” surely it is a great mercy; but it does not give anything of the sort. I find this indispensable qualification for God’s kingdom from and through Christ doubtless; but it does not associate me in terms with Christ. Nobody could speak of Christ being born again: the man who did so would be a blasphemer, and must deny the person of Christ. Therefore, in speaking or hearing of “born again,” if this was merely the expression, it rather keeps one from realizing identification with Christ; for it would remind us of the essential difference between what man acquires by grace and what was in Christ. But the moment He speaks of eternal life, I share in this at once. My portion in Him is eternal life; for He is that eternal life which was with the Father, so that instead of dissociation in the manner in which the Lord speaks of my participation in the new nature, this blessedness is now presented after a sort which is true of Christ Himself. Not merely is it a question of being brought into a common position, so to speak, of the body and the Head, which is not the point here (for there is always a deeper thing than this in John, who I believe in strictness does not treat of our corporate place): the point with him is community of life and nature, rather than the oneness of the body.

At any rate, such is exactly what we find here; that is, we now know that Christ speaks of His own manifestation here, His own bearing of divine testimony,

and this not as a mere instrument according, to God, but a personally divine testimony; for this is the scope of verse 11-"We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen." Thus we see the fulness of the blessing made ours. He is not content with saying, Ye must be born again. This was always, and must be, true; but now, who can deny that, although it was the same blessing substantially, the character in which He clothes it and brings it to my soul carries its own witness of the truth, that I receive by grace what He has and is? He, the Son, is the eternal life, as well as true God. But what availed it, as far as we were concerned, that God was thus manifested in Him here below? He abode alone; and man, too, abiding outside Him, was dead as well as in impenetrable darkness. He, the Saviour, died and rose; and I receive Him, and know that "he that hath the Son hath life," and that this life is eternal life.

But if I merely look at the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ as the necessary basis of divine righteousness, whilst it was also the fullest display of pity for me a guilty and needy sinner, this of itself would never settle my soul in perfect peace before God, still less would it give an adequate knowledge of Him. Therefore comes out another expression, repeating, it might seem, the same result, as in verses 13, 14, but really from a yet higher source; "for God," says the Son, "so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." There had not been a word about God's "love" before, any more than about "the world," in this discourse; it was purely the intervention of the Son of man, and this, of course, in view of what was absolutely necessary. Just as a man must be born anew to enter the

kingdom, so He must be lifted up on the cross, if there was to be an efficacious work in righteousness for the sinner. But now there is far more; for that never could satisfy God's love,-who is most defectively known if there be no more than a "must be." Not so. Let me see what He is; let me know what He feels; let me have the witness of His own grace in Christ. Is it a boon wrung out from God? Far be the thought! Does He, is He, not love? Let me listen more to that which Jesus tells us, who knew as none but He could know or tell. Yea He, the Son, knew Him perfectly, and would make Him known as He is and feels even about the world. And so, therefore, He adds, crowning this blessed revelation in Himself of God's grace and truth, shown in His work as in His very person too,-crowning it, I say, with a declaration truly divine: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

How blessed, my brethren, to have this eternal life; and to know that we have it; to have it, too, not merely as that which is to come to us as the hard-won spoil of redemption, but also as the free and full- and spontaneous fruit, so to speak, of His love, given us in Him who was Himself the most intimate object of the Father's love. Thus to those who deserve nothing less God would display what He is in the best gift even He could give; not merely because I could not be blessed otherwise, but because He would according to His own heart bless me to the full. He has given me that life, which is never said to be in any other, in His Son, which in Him I see to be absolutely perfect, which having in Him I am capable of fellowship here below with Himself.

Surely, however blessed it is to have our sin and misery met, it is incomparably more to have the positive side of the blessing, to have that in which He Himself can and did delight in Jesus as He beheld Him walk in all dependence and obedience, in light and love-the more wondrous because in man on earth. It is that life which reciprocates His mind and feelings, enters into all His joys, takes part in all the grief with which He looks upon rebellious man and a ruined world, and now, alas! we must add a guilty Christendom. “In Him was life.” How blessed now for us to have in Him that very life already proved, spite of all and in the midst of all, to rise up to all that is in God; and yet exercised in every circumstance that can befall the heart of man! And this, brethren, is what, as possessed of eternal life in Christ, we are now partakers of in the grace of our God; for the life which we now live in the flesh, we live by the faith of the Son of God, founded on His redemption in love. It is, as a Christian, no longer the old I, but Christ that lives in me: such is its source and character. Christ, too, is the object; but along with the object there is life, and this life is in Himself, in the Son of God, even eternal life.

The Lord bless His own word, giving our souls to hold fast every truth that we have known, but to learn that God is still active in His love, and would impart greater freedom and fulness to us in realizing a growing sense of association with Christ. Assuredly this has been the secret; if indeed we have made already any real advance, it has always been in this direction. Such are our best blessings; such, I am persuaded, they will prove throughout all eternity. May we, meanwhile, be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith, being

rooted and grounded in love, that we may be able to comprehend the glory before us, and know His love that passeth knowledge, and so be filled with all the fulness of God.

The "Well of water springing up into everlasting life."

Lecture 2 - John 4

The preceding chapter presented, in connection with the subject now before us, the Holy Ghost operating on man — that new birth, not of man's nature, as men falsely say, but of God, though in man, that birth of water and of the Spirit, without which none can see or enter the kingdom of God. A nature which is of God is alone fit for the kingdom of God. A divine nature alone is capable of knowing and enjoying God; and no bliss that is outside man, no work (infinitely precious as it might be) that is wrought for him, could of itself solely suffice for the presence of God. It might vindicate God as to sin, and even glorify Him infinitely. Such, we know, is the case with the work of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ; but I am bold to say, that nothing simply external to man, were it alone, could fit man, being a sinner, either to know God now, or to enjoy Him hereafter. But the same grace of God, which gives Christ for the accomplishment of the work of redemption, reveals Christ by the Holy Ghost through the word, and thus the soul is born of water and of the Spirit. More than that: now, since redemption, he is entitled to know it in its fully revealed form, in the highest character of expression which suits even the Son of God Himself. That is, it is not merely being converted or born again, but having eternal life. I do not in the least deny that to be born again is substantially to have eternal life. I am only accounting for, as we ought in my judgment to account for, the language of the Lord, which, instead of resting in the most general expression,

or in the assertion of the universal necessity of being born again, deigns to give us the blessing since the cross enunciated in that character which suits Himself; for He is eternal life, even that eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested to us. Thus grace has wrought worthily of the Son of God.

But now we come to another part of the subject. It is not the wants simply of man, nor the necessity for a nature which he has not, and which comes from God alone. When God sends His beloved Son into such a world as this, He never limits Himself to that which is indispensable to His presence. He acts as God; He imparts not only the nature itself, but a suitable power to work in it; He gives that which is the strength of its action, and the spring of joy proper to the divine nature. In a word, it is not eternal life only, blessed as this is, and, as we have seen, the richest form of expressing the new birth; but He gives the Holy Ghost. Now, the circumstances were, as they always are, suitable to that which God was unfolding.

In the former chapter, the appeal of man was made with no common earnestness, in spite of the difficulties that seemed to be great, and no doubt were, as far as his mind could judge. But now there was a further step of grace in the path of the Son of God: He was virtually rejected. Instead of men believing upon Him because of the miracles that He did, the jealousy of the Pharisees was excited, and the Son of God in sorrow turns His back upon that Judea to which He came from God. He felt it, as He always did. It could not be otherwise; it ought not to be otherwise. Love could not but feel, for it was not merely that He was rejected; He felt for them forsaking their own mercies, rejecting God Himself —

rejecting Him, their Messiah; but this very rejection leads Him to the manifestation of such grace as was unheard of in Judea A woman of Samaria, no meet company (one might think) for the Messiah, a poor female of the town of Sychar, evidently ruined even in human judgment, meets Him alone at the well of Jacob, where sat Jesus wearied with His journey, who opens soon the pathway to her heart.

Jesus asks a drink of water. He ever comes near, not as the Messiah, though the Messiah, but as the Son of God who needed no glory, who did need to show grace; for man was lost, and God yearned over lost man; and there was but One that could meet the need — it was He. And so in His own love He stoops and asks. What would He not do to reach her heart? And the woman was astonished; for the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans. To her He was but “a Jew,” and herself “a woman of Samaria.” How short of the truth on either side! But said He, “If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.” She knew it not. She could hardly be said to know the law of God, though she might speak of it; but as to the gift of God — who had ever heard of such a thought? Who, in favoured Israel, had realized the truth that God gives? That to which she clung yielded a quite contrary view of God: human religion regards Him as a receiver. It is true that she was but a sinful and lost woman; but such an one may have religious pride, and share the jealousy of that which had superior claims. At any rate, to her spirit — nay, even to those who ought to have known far better — God is always a claimant, and not one who gives as only God

can give. Man's mind never rises above this; least of all in that which he seeks for his soul. He may know the effects of divine wisdom and power, but God Himself is unknown, and never can be known, save in Christ, His Son. This she had not yet learnt. Not a suspicion had she who it was that said to her, Give me to drink. If she had known who He was, God, as a giver, must have been distinctly and gloriously before her soul.

But grace was far from her thoughts; it was a Jew that asked of her a drink of water. She knew not the dignity of His person who was now a man on earth among men; she knew not that He was the Son, the only-begotten Son; she knew not the glory of Him who never proved His glory more than when He thus stooped down to sinners and their need; for what is there deeper on the part of God, or of God's Son, than this expression of grace, stooping down in love — not in condescension, but in real goodness? Condescension is but patronage, human and worldly; and to me there is something repulsive in the notion, save for the little stage of man. There is no such thought, nor could be, in Him who is true, and alone manifested divine love — a love that had no motive outside itself, which was love in its own nature. And this Jesus was, and was now on earth to show it. What was there in any way or degree to attract in such an one as she? It was God giving; it was the Son humbling Himself; in outward form, no doubt, asking, but asking that He might give, making her little gift of water but the occasion of that gift of living water, of which, if one drank, he should never thirst any more. This was indeed a new sound to her — this "living water."

I call your attention first of all to the expression. To be born of the Spirit is totally distinct from the gift of the Spirit. There is no connection whatever between the two thoughts. The one, of course, is just as true as the other. The first had always been. The Spirit of God had surely and unfailingly wrought in souls ever since sin came into the world; but the Spirit of God was never given till the Son was manifested, till God Himself took the place of a giver, and the Son took the place of humiliation in love to sinners, and asked the neediest of souls to give Him to drink, awakening confidence by His perfect grace. It is the great truth which everywhere shines out in this gospel; only thus and then could the living water be given. And you will mark, Christ is the giver. It is not a question of Himself, nor is it simply eternal life; we have had this fully, and Scripture repeats not itself. Although we most surely have absolute harmony in all the parts of the truth of God, still here we are on new ground in presence of another character of need altogether, deeper wants bringing out deeper grace. It is not a choice doctor, but an outcast and wretched woman, good for nothing in the eyes of any in this world. Such was the one to whom the depths of grace in the Son of God were more or less unveiled.

The woman, it is true, made it palpable that as yet she was wholly unprepared for the inestimable gift. Wonder not at this. I do not think that any one, fairly reading John 3 with the fourth chapter, could boast of the learned Nicodemus any more than of the ignorant woman of Samaria. In the former scene the truth insisted on was, if possible, still more incumbent on man to know. How much had the teacher of Israel known of it? How far did he take it in then? In the later incident,

the gift of living water was a truth that no one antecedently could have known. So far from being a matter of common need and urgently responsible knowledge, how could it be conceived? When had ever been given such a revelation of God and of His grace as Jesus had brought before this woman in John 4:10? Where had there ever been such a display of divine grace as God thus giving, the Son thus bowing down in love to one outside all righteousness, and the Holy Ghost this living source of refreshment for the heart? The woman however falls back upon that which is the constant resource of nature in this world, that is, tradition — "the well of our father Jacob." It was an effort to escape from that which was too vast and deep and divine for her to take in. Jesus had left the place where His people dwelt under the shadow of God-imposed ordinance. Higher purposes were in accomplishment. Our gospel does not trace Him as come to bring out what was destined for the land of promise; for, after all, what is the promise? It is measured grace. He was come in immeasurable grace, for all was lost, where there ought not to have been an object to be the hiding-place of the soul. But where will not a sinner find one? She retreats behind this covering of pride, even for a woman of Samaria — "the well of her father Jacob." He had drunk of it, and his cattle, as well as his children: who was it then that Jesus made Himself? Oh, the withering unbelief of the heart, so quick to darken the rich grace of God! Jesus, however, patiently bears with her folly, and says to her, "Whosoever drinketh of this water" — albeit Jacob's well — "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst." More

than this, “the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.”

This supposes everlasting life; but it supposes a divine source of joy which everlasting life in itself never is nor can be. On the contrary, it would destroy all the truth of this new and divine nature to maintain that the life itself was a spring. Such is not the nature of life; it is essentially dependent; but here I find a spring, a continual source of supply. That is, it is not merely a new creature which, by the simple fact that it is a new creature and of God too, leans on Him whence it comes, and finds its support and strength in Another; but here there is a living source of joy. The very figure of the well aptly conveys as much, and much more, when we think of that which lay couched under the phrase “living water.” For it is not some absolutely indispensable requisite for relation with God which we have here. Alas! what would in this case have been the sad truth of all that had ever lived up to this time?

It was a new privilege; it was a fulness of joy that was only appropriate according to the ways and counsels of God, when the Son came. It was impossible that God should not adequately mark the coming of His Son, and His own manifestation in His Son’s presence here in grace, as well as the accomplishment of the infinite work of redemption. Not that this work is spoken of here; but still it is involved in His humiliation. It is impossible, I repeat, that God should not mark this greatest of all things before His mind and heart with some fresh blessing, some deep accession of joy to the believer. Those who know Him ever so little will confess that it could not be otherwise. Man may wish to level the fair scenes in the ways of God, and to blot out the landmarks

He has made — always bright tokens of goodness in this world, always full of wisdom and blessing; but let man level as he may, and let his will intrude even into the things of divine revelation, God's word stands and shall stand for ever. God's design is to make everything for His Son's glory. And so when the Son came, it is not merely that a new nature was given; this had always been in grace, that souls separated to His name might be born anew meet for His presence. But now, besides this nature and His looking on to the mighty work which would justify Him in the passing over of sins — now the new birth for the believer is brought to light in its true nature and value, eternal life in the Son.

But we have seen there is even more than this. There is a divine power for him who receives everlasting life, a well of water in him, as it is said here, springing up into everlasting life. Thus, clearly, it is not only the fact but the power of eternal life; and this not so much in a nature conferred, as in an unfailing flow connecting with the source. I admit the personality of the Spirit is not yet brought out here: this would be treated in due season. We have this truth afterwards, and it will come before us suitably on another occasion, I trust. But here we have each intimation exactly according to the mind of God and the accuracy of divine wisdom. We have not the question of a person yet: when the blessed Son of God goes away, and this is intimated fully, then another person comes and takes His place; and so the whole scheme stands out beautifully and in order. What now we find is power, rather than personality; but an inward power for him who has the everlasting life, in order that his soul may feel the full joy of grace. Of this then the

Lord speaks when He says, “Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him,” etc.

Now let us turn for a moment to what man is since the fall, and to what God is as He has revealed Himself in and by the Son to a poor fallen creature, if ever there was one. What was the change that took place when man fell? When Adam was made, had he any thirst in the spiritual sense of the word? None whatever. For a sinless being there was no question of thirsting. This was a defect in the creation which our God did not and could not attach to it, when all was very good. I do not believe it was so even speaking physically; but I am sure, that in the sense in which our Lord discoursed, Adam had no craving after a food he did not possess; he was incapable of the thirst in question, because it supposes that the heart is not satisfied, that there is nothing around to satisfy it, that there is a continual desire after what it has not found nor can find. Not such was the condition of Adam then in innocence, made upright by the hand of God. His creature-satisfaction no doubt broke out, not certainly in spiritual worship, but at least in thankfulness to God. He enjoyed the goodness and wisdom of God in countless good things around and beneath himself. He sins, falls, and, along with the knowledge of good and evil that he acquired there came in this desire after what never could satisfy. And this accordingly is the condition of every fallen being. Put in its best shape, it is hope; for man does and cannot but hope: frequent and bitter disappointments of this world may crush the spirit; yet even so who does not know how it survives, still hoping against hope? But this it was that came in with the fall; for the best form you can give it, in the point of view now brought before you, is hope

as a constant pressure towards activity. Man, as was said in Scripture, is become as God. And so there was this desire to be some one — somebody — in this world, in fact, virtually to take the place of God Himself. Of course, the daring aspiration has checks from God, and even yet has not shown itself fully; but it is in the heart, and sure to do its best — really its worst — when God withdraws all hindrances, and Satan works all out. The time is coming, and coming fast; but from the first day of sin to this, it has been just this desire after what man has not got stirring him to activity in a lost world.

Contrariwise, Jesus comes and gives, not only eternal life, but the “living water;” and there is at once an adequate object for the heart, which there never was before, with fresh power to enjoy it. Of old, even that which awakened the heart still took the character of hoping for that which was in prospect. There was trust in God and in His promises, so to speak; but now a mighty change took place. Christ was come; the hoped-for One was present. God Himself was here in the person of that Man sitting thus weary by the well of Sychar, the lowliest of men; none the less, but the more from the very depths of His lowliness, showing Himself to be the true God in His love. For God in His gift would give nothing less than God. Not only would He give the nature which is of God, but a divine power to be in man of enjoying this nature and the relationships proper to it, the object suited to it, the worship and the service in accordance with it. Herein we find at once what meets the fall and its consequences, according to God; what meets it not in the meagre way of simple adaptation to human ruin, a bare remedy or a repair, but in such a sort as to prove and display God Himself, giving the fullest

scope to the resources that are in Him. It is the revealed grace of the Son in the power of the Spirit. It is Christianity in some of its simplest, highest, weightiest elements: a divine person come down in perfect love, if a Jew outside Judaism, with a guilty Samaritan woman before Him, asking not for His own sake but for hers, seeking the least thing she could give in order to arrest her attention, that He might bless her with His own greatest and imperishable blessing, and this now and for ever. It is not only a new nature, but a present power for and in man, but from God, and in itself most strictly divine. And this is just what we now have to rejoice our souls in. He has given us the Spirit of God; He has accomplished His word. God has sent the Spirit of His Son, as it is said, into our hearts, crying, "Abba, Father;" "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us."

Not merely is there eternal life, but, over and above the gift of that life, the Holy Ghost Himself is given to us. And mark, then it is we find that the believer shall "never thirst again." This is not said simply of one born afresh, nor even where we hear of eternal life alone; nor was it true in fact when souls were born again and no more; for up to the time of God's giving in Christ and by Christ the Holy Spirit of grace, there was a craving after the things of the world; and God Himself did not wholly condemn this in a certain sense, but allowed it — it might be for the hardness of their heart. But still a man might, so to speak, have this world and have the next too — that kind of thing which even now we know men, grievously blinded as to the truth and ignorant of Christianity, think to be possible. Believers were not then treated as absolutely dead to flesh and world. In

the Old Testament we find no such language even in the saints of God; we find it not in the fathers any more than in the children of Israel; we find the reverse more particularly in the whole form of the Jewish estate — a hope first in One that was coming, but at the same time no present deliverance from the course of the world as a judged system. There were actings of faith full of interest to us, in which saints rose above all that surrounded them by God's grace; and so it is that God instructs us by that which we are told of Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and so on. But for all this, I speak of what is a plain fact in the midst of these things; for along with a hope that had not yet the object revealed to it, still less the infinite work of redemption accomplished, and laid as a basis for faith, there was also a measure of cleaving to what was found here on earth, which was not yet utterly and in every respect a judged thing.

Now, if the heart is not satisfied with Christ, how is it? It is because the Holy Ghost is not given to us; it is because I have Him not filling my heart to overflowing with the grace of Jesus; it is because, though divinely attracted to Christ, I have no rest in Him — am still occupied with myself, grovelling in the mud of my nature, instead of being taken up by the power of the Spirit with that Christ who is my life. Thus I am not satisfied with Him only; I am also hankering after what is trash, what is worldly, what is carnal. What is the consequence? It may be, and indeed is, most sorrowful that it should and must be so; for God in Christ in the fulness of grace is not enough! The possession and knowledge of a privilege constitutes an added responsibility, but the first thing is for faith to enter in

and possess. Nor will He permit that our hearts should be occupied with these things merely as a matter of testimony, but of our own soul's delight in the object by the power that He has given to us.

But still what I do affirm now is this — that Christianity is perfectly brought out, and it is brought out, too, according to the wisdom of God; for, first of all, the divine nature is revealed in the person who is its fulness and complete expression, and, more than this, the power to enjoy is given. The consequence is that, while the heart finds in the revealed object that which alone is adequate to satisfy, because He is a divine person, and moreover the Son of God who loved me, the power of hope is not lost. For I have also a hope — not now a mere hope as it was when of old there was nothing else, but in such a world as this, being still in the body, God does not give it up for us, who need such a stimulus. There is no thirsting again when in the Spirit we enjoy Christ, but there is hope still; but then He whom I hope for is the very same that I possess. The Christ I long for is the Christ I actually have, and I shall never find in that blessed One a whit of difference. I shall know Him better and praise Him more, for I shall be in a condition where my infirmities are gone, and my very body will be incorrupt and glorious, and nothing shall annoy, distract, or obscure; but I shall find Him the same Christ who loves me perfectly now. Is it not blessed to know that this is even now true to our souls — that we have Him here as certainly as we shall have Him above? Thus while there remains in one sense the profit of something to be sought after, in another just as true our hearts have real rest as far as their object is concerned. We have not lost hope as a power for activity, rightly called

forth and exercised in a ruined world. This would be indeed a loss, whilst we are here below. But hope must pass away. In heaven it is no longer a question of either faith or hope, as we know, for they always suppose an imperfect fallen condition, as far as things around are concerned; but then the way in which we have the hope is, that we have in Christ revealed to our faith the perfect object for a renewed heart, and that we are ourselves blessed according to the perfectness of the work that He has done, so that conscience as well as affection have perfect rest. At the same time the old creation remains, and we in the body in the midst of it, so that we have in hope a blessed spur to the activity of love. May I not ask, Is not all this worthy of such a God as ours? And is it not God acting according to His perfect love with His children, whom He has thus blessed with and in Christ His own Son?

But there is more than this. I need not enter upon that which has been often before us, and which it would be a joy to press, were it a question of the need of a soul in its unconverted state. I pass over, therefore, that which evinces the necessity of reaching the mind through an awakened conscience. It is blessed, no doubt, that there should be the proof of love before this, for I apprehend conscience cannot bear to be probed unless there be a previous testimony of love; but who will maintain that any testimony of love could of itself suffice for a sinner? There must be a dealing with the conscience; and so we find it here.

But what it is of moment now to draw attention to very briefly is the connection of this blessed power of the Spirit — the divine spring of joy in the soul — with that worship on which the woman, little knowing what she

was about to draw out, questions the Saviour. She did so, indeed, as a speculation, perhaps even as a palliative for a conscience that was wounded, and that did not yet thoroughly bow before God; but whatever may have been the motive, the mixed motive, as I presume it really was (which, alas! we know too well), this woman does at least bring out for our edification a blessed and most important bearing of the gift of the Spirit. For indeed we are not only objects of divine love; we are not only possessors of eternal life and of the Holy Ghost, but there are worthy ends in it according to God; and that which claims our notice here is, I apprehend, the highest one necessarily — what goes up, not what comes down. We have our place of worship, we have our place of service; and worship and service are just the two forms in which the Holy Ghost, acting in us as the water springing up into everlasting life, leads our souls. The worship of God Himself, our Father, is first and supreme. It must and ought to be so: how could it rightly be otherwise? But still we are in this world where souls are perishing, and if not perishing, how many are most needy, and call for our service! I speak now of the children of God, and repeat that expression in the actual state of Christendom — it is penury indeed for them. And so accordingly the ministry of grace has its just application here below.

In the foremost place, then, for the saint, and as the sole topic I wish to dwell on now in closing to-night, stands this connection of the Spirit with worship as explained by Christ. “Our fathers,” says the woman, “worshipped in this mountain,” (for she had her opinion, and a very decided one,) “and ye say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Jesus saith unto her,

Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father." Thus, in the presence of the Son, not only false systems disappear, but even that which, as partial revelation, had its warrant from God: not only the mountain of Samaria, but Jerusalem itself. How comes this? It was even so. How could Jerusalem possibly hold its place in the presence of the rejected Son of God? The city of the great King! Had the great King been received as such, He would have taken His seat in that city according to the terms of ancient promise. But this was exactly what had been refused; and now His back was turned, as He Himself is despised by those who took the place of being the best and wisest there. This only brings out the fulness of divine grace, and, moreover, attests that fulness of grace here, as always, is attached to the fulness of glory. Such flagrant sin touched the glory and gave occasion for the grace of God. Do not mistake. There is no indifference in God, who resists every sin done against Christ, in the very love that He bears to His guilty people, as well as that which cannot suffer the dishonour of His own Son; so, if it were only in the interests of the Church here below, He refuses to make light of the smallest blot or stain, or allowed affront put on Christ. Besides, man, religious man, had proved, and would yet more prove, the utter hollowness of ordinances to meet his wants or God's glory.

This woman had heard of what might be expected of the Messiah at His coming. Little did she know that He was speaking to her. There was no pomp nor judgment. As King, He of course might have sent forth armies, and burned up Jerusalem. But as the Son, He need say nothing now but these words: "The hour is coming, and

now is," &c. He that had made everything by a word blotted at once out, as it was suitable He should do by a word, the place of Jerusalem from the earth as the centre of divine worship. Again, I say, not only the false systems, but even the partial revelation which merely dealt with man on the earth — what was suited, if one may thus speak, more justly to the first man — was doomed, and vanishes away, that the Son might abide — the Son of God. "Ye worship," He says, "ye know not what: we know what we worship; for salvation is of the Jews." There was presumption and ignorance in Samaria; nor does the Lord disguise the advantage every way of Israel. But it may be remarked, that Jesus never says so except outside: He vindicates the Jews when He was in the midst of their rivals, and Himself rejected. What grace! But the time was come for more; and you will always find something tantamount in the wonderful ways of God. The rejected Lord does not deny what had honour, even though active against Himself. He does not slight the line of promise; He does not forget in the smallest degree the great and profoundly interesting fact on which hung the blessing of all that had ever been blessed in the earth — "Salvation is of the Jews." But He does say, "The hour cometh" — yea, He enforces it and presses it out even to this moment, as it were, that was arrived — "and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship him." When God gave His law, He gave what was according to the relationship in which His people stood with Himself, as well as suitable, inasmuch as it was a moral dealing with the flesh in those that, as a people, had nothing else. But this is just the mighty change, now that Messiah is come and rejected, and the Father is calling

and forming sons by Him the Son — nay, more than this, is giving them the Spirit of adoption, the Spirit of sonship, that the true worshippers might worship Himself in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship Him.

What, then, mean the sights and the sounds of this earth which now come before God in His professed worship? How stands the worship of the multitude now, of a nation, be it what or where it may? A flat and flagrant contradiction to His face of the Son of God; and not merely of Him, though surely this were enough to grieve deeply the heart that loves Him, and fears His name. But God's word shows how serious a thing it is to trifle with that which so nearly concerns the Holy Ghost. He is the present witness of the Son of man, rejected of men but exalted of God, who therefore attaches so much the more value to His name, because He is despised for His grace and humiliation; and the Spirit is contemned, because He witnesses of a Son of man contemned of men. What a demonstration of that which God is, and what an evidence of man!

And now this day on which we are cast sees men rushing on madly, as if they were filled with evil spirits, whose only wish was to smite afresh the Son of God, and to do despite to the Spirit of grace. The most outrageous forms of superstition are followed greedily and taken up, and not merely by those that are accounted ignorant, but by many who plume themselves on their knowledge, refinement, acquaintance even with the Bible itself. Yet, in the presence of such a testimony as our chapter — the words of Jesus Himself, these legend-mongers take the place of being the people of God, yet worship God in such a sort as to prove them but worldly sects crusading

against the Spirit of God, and going forward in bold and blind and utter contempt of all that our Saviour here lays down.

None but a possessor of eternal life is competent to worship; but even so it is in the power of the Holy Ghost given. Thus it is one who, having the Son, has life; it is one who has the Holy Ghost as the spring of joy within, and owns the Father. There is no other worship that is now acceptable. The Father seeks none other; He does seek these. Let me appeal to you that are sitting around me at this moment, Are you thus true worshippers? Joy ever seeks communion. Sorrow may pour itself out alone into the only ear that is adequate to give sympathy, to succour as none other can, and to deliver as He only does; but joy finds itself the richer, because it is a sharer of itself with others. And when do you first find this out? Never before the Holy Ghost is given.

Thus, you see how all truth hangs together. As long as souls were simply born again, one might be here and another there; and so in the hope of their hearts, and in the desire of Christ's coming, they poured out often a lament to God, and sighs and groans rose up over the delay, and earnest cries that the time might hasten when the promised One should appear. But He is come in divine grace, He has put away our sins, and along with this He has given us eternal life; and, moreover, there is power according to the gift of God, the power of drawing near in the Spirit to the Father; for it is through the Spirit that Jew and Gentile who now believe have access to Him. It is according to the necessary character of the truth that there should be communion of joy, and consequently communion of worship. Thus it is, therefore, that along with this blessed truth (as we shall

find, and I hope to expound some other night) there is ample provision for common praise. There is the gathering of souls together; not only the blessing of each where it is, but now (and now for the first time in the world's history) there is the singling out in this world, and the gathering together, the seeking, as it is said here, of the true worshippers, that these worshippers might themselves pour out their thanksgiving and adoration in common. Why? Because they have one Spirit, who accordingly unites them to the praise of God's grace, separate from all that are not true worshippers.

Up to this time worship had been mingled. The Samaritans worshipped they knew not what. For the Jews it was God, Jehovah the God of Israel, it was the Almighty Lord God of hosts that they worshipped; but still there was one here and another there, and there was no attempt to bring out and join together, and it could not be so until the Son came, and the mighty work of redemption was wrought, and the Holy Ghost was given. The partition-wall yet stood. But now Christ is come, and what is it then to go back? What is it to distrust the Spirit of God? What is it to apostatize from grace and truth? Oh! be assured, it is coming — that falling away; and I warn you most solemnly, I warn you that have to do with others in responsibility, never let your children, even though unconverted, have anything to do with the false worshippers of this world. I say not that men as such are competent to worship, but that they are beyond a doubt responsible to feel that they are not true worshippers. I do say that you are wrong in giving children a rein in any respect, because they are unconverted, to mingle with the world and religiously

take its course. I beseech you to watch carefully, and never to allow any plea on the score of curiosity, or some other reason of a natural sort which may possibly be found, for there is no one so clever as the devil in furnishing good reasons for bad things; but, beloved friends, treat it always as the deceit of the one that seduced Eve, whether under the smallest pretence for good that is to be got, or for any reason under the sun, you are called to do anything that is not God's will. "The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father." Is there any worship but this that God allows?

I admit that His grace enters where you could not, neither ought to go; I allow that it can work anywhere; yea, I know not why it might not work even when the sacrifice of the mass is offered for the living and the dead; for it is not sin that could hinder the grace of God. Surely, if sin could have hindered the Son, here was an instance; but it was because there was sin, it was to meet and deliver sinners out of sin, that the Son of God thus came. And so, I doubt not, it is, or at least it may be, in the Spirit of grace. But, I beseech you, let none suppose that grace means tolerating or dealing lightly with evil: there is nothing so sternly and thoroughly condemnatory of it. There is nothing that at the same time can avail to deliver; for while Another bears the judgment, the guilty one is saved in real divine love — and this not in death only, but in the power of His life as risen from the dead. Thus the Holy Ghost strengthens in good, as He is the energy of blessing and gives delight in it. Thus He is the only real power against evil in this world.

Here is that which may well act on the conscience of a saint. Have you ever worshipped God your Father in spirit and in truth? Or have you been content hitherto to mingle with the world and take part in its music, its architecture, its ritual? You know well that anybody can take part in these things. An instrument of man's device that has no heart nor conscience does take a part, and a very lively part; and so naturally the world is welcome, and, in point of fact, worships. It is absolutely bringing back again the very substance and means of idolatry. Indeed, the apostle discerned this in the Galatians (Gal. 4) when they took up Jewish forms. But what would he have felt and said at the state of things now found — what is actively going on? And what makes it so especially solemn at this time is that it advances daily. And this will never cease till the awful close, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Are we not saved to worship now, and this in spirit and in truth?

I beseech my brethren in Christ, on the other hand, that it may be their hearts' joy, when assembled for the purpose, to rise up into worship, and not to content themselves with mere speaking about it. Sometimes there seems too much of this when we meet to praise the Lord. It is rather something said or prayed about worship than actually adoring Him. I may talk about worship in my prayer or from the word of God, perhaps even in the very hymn. Beloved, worship is not talking about worship. We do not come at such times to expound or enforce the matter: this may be all well to set forth at another time. If we are there to worship, let us be found engaged in the thing, adoring Him who

should be before every soul to praise and magnify and delight in. Christian worship is the outflow to God of hearts that have seen and found their joy and satisfaction by the Holy Ghost in the Son and in the Father.

The heart which has not a want that is not satisfied in the Christ we have found (given of God now in the midst of such a world as this) desires to praise, and cannot but praise, in fellowship with all that are thus blessed. It refuses to be associated with that which, being ignorant of grace or even sin, can have no communion with the Son and with the Father; it demands that the power which carries on the worship should be according to the will of God, who has sent the Holy Ghost down from heaven for the purpose. And who that knows such a power to conduct the children aright in worship could be content with any leader save the Holy Ghost acting sovereignly in the assembly by whom He will? The consequence is, that Christian worship always has for its central object the Son of God revealing the Father, and necessarily supposes the special gift of the Holy Ghost as the power in us of enjoying God, and of praising Him adequately. It is only for the true worshippers who know the Father. It is a low character of worship to be merely occupied about ourselves and one another, and ever singing about our own privileges.

Even edification, however precious, is not worship: it has the saints for its object, not the Father and the Son. Teaching is admirable in its way, of course; and I do not deny that, if we are really occupied with the Father of our Lord Jesus in adoration, there will be refreshment and edification; but it remains ever true, that the proper aim of worship is our common praise going up to God, of

ministry is the grace and truth of Christ coming down, and so building up the saints. Even thanksgiving, though a real part, seems to me the lowest form of Christian worship; and for this reason, that it is not so much the expression of our joy in God as in what He gives to us. Now, though this abides, and it is right we should ever feel what He has done for us and given to us, we are entitled as His children, and are so richly blessed as Christians, that we may yield our hearts to the Spirit's revelations of what our God is in Himself, and so rejoice before Him. All has its place, and room is left for the state of souls, and the actual guidance of the Holy Ghost.

Another thing too, brethren, I may just observe by the way is, that the Saviour does not speak simply of worshipping "the Father." He tells us that "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." Assuredly Christian worship is not formal, but it is not the less real because it is spiritual. There are occasions when the Holy Ghost would make the worship to be especially directed towards the Son as an object, and there are occasions, I need not say, when the Father is more prominently before the assembly. One knows times also when the Lordship or the grace of Jesus might predominate, or when the most striking thought before us is our rest in God Himself as such. I do not mean any one of these varieties taken exclusively, but I do say that the fact might be felt, that some one of these or of other presentations of our blessedness was giving tone and character to the worship. Form, of course, is blind to these differences, and would blot them out. Indeed, where the gift and presence of the

Holy Ghost is not entered into, souls are not in a condition to understand or appreciate this.

Surely, too, all is perfect grace; and I hardly know anything that demonstrates how blessed we are more than this, that not only can we rejoice in our Father, but joy in God, as it is said in Rom. 5:11. Reconciled to Him, and knowing His love by the Holy Ghost given to us, we have our boast in God as God, and for this simple reason, that all the nature of God, His whole moral character, has been so perfectly vindicated and satisfied as to our eternal blessing in Christ Jesus our Lord, that we know there is nothing in Him that does not range itself righteously for us now and evermore. He, who hates evil and has a perfect abhorrence of it in His nature, altogether intolerant of what He and we know to be still in us as a fact, has nevertheless been so absolutely glorified in Christ on our behalf, that He can rest in nothing but love, and we can go forth to Him in unceasing joy and praise. Not that we are spared from needful dealing: this, of course, would be loss indeed, and dangerous for us as we are in the body, and here below; and we have it from Him in the character of Father. The chastening we meet with now is from our Father. (Compare Heb. 12 and 1 Peter 1:17.) Undoubtedly our Father is God, but it is well to distinguish nature and relationships; and this is the way of Scripture. Most needful it is that we should know this near relationship of Father, which, as we are told by John, characterizes the very babes of the family of God. But it is of the utmost moment also to know that it is the triumph of redemption to set us in peace with God as such, and to make us boast in Him, now that all His nature can rest for us in Jesus, and in us by Jesus.

Thus we can delight that He is our Father, and justly so; only there is a danger of being shut up to this, and losing sight of our deep and perfect rest in God as such. (1 Peter 1:21.) Now I say that, where the heart has not submitted to God's righteousness, does not know fully the depth of redemption, there is more confidence in the relation of "Father," than in having to do with "God." There is a want of appreciation of the work of Christ, and it may be, also an inadequate sense of His glory, And as there is a defectiveness in the faith and state of the heart, so this betrays itself in lack of liberty and fulness in worship, as of course, too, in the practical walk; for these things hang together. "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire." (Heb. 12:28, 29.) For "Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come. By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name." (Heb. 13:12-15.)

I do not apologize for these general remarks of a practical nature as to Christianity and Christians, any more than for some of a similar nature with respect to worship. They all tend to show how our blessings and responsibilities connect themselves with the gift of the Spirit — not merely the new birth, as always, but the gift of the Spirit consequent on the Son's manifestation and rejection now. This blessing, that we have seen to be dependent on the presence of the Son in lowly love here

below, is given by Him in virtue both of His glory and of His humiliation. In the chapter before, the being born again had nothing whatever to do with any particular time, and is fully described by our Lord as the universal necessity for God's kingdom, before He utters one word about His presence in this world, much less about redemption. In point of fact, no intelligent believer doubts it was true from the fall onwards, and that the Old Testament saints were born of water and the Spirit no less than those of the New Testament; but here we find ourselves in the presence of blessing which awaited His coming, and is given in the full grace of God; for truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. It was also contingent on redemption; but redemption is not directly brought into the passage, I suppose, because the object is to present more undividedly the grace of God as He now is known, the glory of the Son (whatever, yea in, His humiliation), and the consequent gift of the Spirit to the believer.

"Rivers of living water"

Lecture 3 - John 7:1-39

Our subject of tonight cannot be severed from what we have had in previous chapters, from the whole of the circumstances in this chapter, and above all from the manner in which our Lord here comes into view. Indeed this is the secret of anything like an assured knowledge of the divine truth. It is not given us formally, but lovingly; it forms a part of those revelations of God, not to speak of the steps of His ways, which have Christ as the one great object before them, at least before Him. God would make everything to be for Christ; and where the soul is by His grace rendered simple, — not forcing truth, not taking it out of its own station in the divine route, not severing what God causes to flow from Christ and to exist for His own glory in Him. The progress may seem some what slower, but in truth there is no progress otherwise. How and whence can there be solid blessing for the soul unless it be thus gathered from God? And not only this, but God’s objects are kept before our eyes. Thus the truth is not only divinely received, instead of acquiring knowledge after a human sort, but our hearts are formed according to the scope of His word, and we are brought thereby into the current of God’s aims and purposes. If we thus look at the chapter read, we soon discern that our Lord’s declaration about the Holy Ghost has a character entirely different from that which has been already examined in chapters 3 and 4 of this gospel. There is an evident advance, and this, as always, is associated with the unfolding of Christ. I do not doubt that, as God reveals more and more of Him, there is a

corresponding progress in the heart's acquaintance with Him, and there is a proportionate increase of strength ministered by the word of God. First of all we had that which is necessarily foundation truth as to this subject; and this both in what is common to all saints of all times, and in what is a revealed peculiarity since Christ — common as to the great substance of it, peculiar as to the form which the blessing assumes now that God has revealed His Son.

This foundation was laid in John 3; and here I must briefly call attention to the evidently and perfectly beautiful order of the gospel; for we have Christ, the Word, traced from eternity, wherein He was alone with God, down to the kingdom — the full manifestation not only of His personal glory, and this in relation to man and saints as well as God, but also its display in this world, and the effect of this display upon souls pursued down the stream of time to the millennial period, when He shall both diffuse joy by His own power where emptiness and dearth had been, and clear away all that which is offensive to God by the judgment He will personally take in hand, where man had defamed and perverted the house of His Father, even at Jerusalem.

This it is plain brings us down regularly to the kingdom in which Christ will establish God's glory here below. Then comes the question, How is a soul of man to have part in this kingdom of God? The third chapter of John meets this great question, and accounts also for the fact, that all through God had those He was preparing to have part in the kingdom that was coming. Having shown this, He also discloses the specially blessed form which the impartation of this nature assumes when He Himself, the Son of God, is revealed. There is no divine

attribute or mercy to us that does not shine with increased lustre when Christ appears. Being the true light, whatever might be the blessings tasted before, as I need not say there were many, still let those blessings only come within the range of the light of Christ — and which of them does not present itself as an entirely new thing? — so rich, so sweet, so blessed is the new texture and shape with which He clothes all, even though it may have been substantially true before. All the saints of God, from first to last, were necessarily partakers of a new and divine nature, capable of fellowship with God: now they know it to be eternal life, their actual portion, in His Son.

But this is far from all our portion even now; for, as we saw in John 4, the humbled Son of God (in the hour that was coming and now is) gives the Holy Ghost — not a new birth as born of Him, but Himself — to be in us a power of fellowship with the Father and the Son. Christ was the promised One, but they would not have Him. The consequence is, that even promises, however blessed, give place to the revelations of the deep eternal glory of His person. Consequently, rejected though He be in a lower glory, the only effect is to bring out the higher glory — I may say all the glory of the Son of God, but of the Son of God revealed in perfect grace upon the earth. Hence, not sought out by some great Jewish doctor, but Himself meeting with a poor worthless woman of Samaria, the Lord leads into the wondrous grace and truth of the Holy Ghost, as given by Him, that the believer even now may have fellowship with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. The new birth in God’s mercy had always been true, and must ever be true, so long as He calls out souls; because man is a

sinner dead and unclean, by his very nature incapable of inheriting the kingdom of God. But now we have a transcendent privilege over and above that kingdom, and awaiting nothing whatever. And the reason is manifestly because the Son of God was there, and rejected of Israel, God would put honour on Him: everything must bow to His Son; nothing could be too good for Him to bestow. The Son of God coming in grace and humiliation, was only so much the stronger reason why it should be, and forthwith. Hence the heart enters by the perception of the Son's glory into a taste of the Father's love in the power of the Holy Ghost, whom Jesus gives as the revealer of all that love and glory.

Accordingly this inestimable boon is the real spring of proper Christian worship, which displaces the old things ordained previously of God, as well as, of course, the will-worship of men.

Now we enter on another topic. The Lord Jesus is shown us here walking no more in Jewry, because the Jews sought to kill Him. It is not merely that the leaders were jealous of Him, but now the people even — at least the people in Judea proper, for they are clearly meant. Their hatred was complete: only they lacked opportunity. They would be satisfied with nothing short of extinguishing this light of God as far as they could. But with the feast of tabernacles just at hand, His brethren call on Him to go into Judea, that His disciples also might see the works that He was doing. The Lord had been gradually driven away from the place of honour, of antiquity, of everything that boasted itself in religion. His works were now mainly in Galilee. His brethren were dissatisfied. They would gladly gain renown by the Lord Jesus; they wished to profit by His mighty deeds for this world. No

man that did what He did but must seek, as they supposed, to do it openly. “If thou doest these things, show thyself to the world.” It was man’s thought; and so much the worse, because it came from the lips and heart of the brethren of Jesus after the flesh.

But what had our Lord just shown in the chapter before? He had struck at the root of all such expectations; for the multitude had then wished to make Him a king. They had reaped present relief by the Lord, who had made them bread; and this had reminded them, it may be, for the Jews often spoke of these things, of the expectation of the Messiah according to Psalm 132. They wished to hurry on the kingdom; for surely here was the King. Our Lord absolutely refuses; and when the people still persist in addressing themselves to Him, He takes advantage of the miracle He had wrought, to point out to them the real object of His mission, which, in this gospel, is never the hope or thought of His being received as Christ. Of course, it was known to God from the beginning, that the Jews would reject the Messiah; and so even the prophets foretold clearly and fully. The offer was made, and man was put to the proof; and in his failure God did not fail to work greater things. It was not that He did not give the amplest evidence of His Messiahship, but the gospel of John looks at Him according to the divine nature and His everlasting personal glory. He was a rejected one. Deeper counsels were in accomplishment then, even redemption by His blood.

Man understands not, cannot and will not learn, if One were on earth who is really the King, if this was the land, and they the people, that anything could be wanting. These surely are the elements for all that is

good — the true King, the real people, the actual land — if it be a question of all the circumstances. But how comes this? God is not in their thoughts; sin is unjudged before Him. Contrariwise, Jesus only sought the will and glory of Him that sent Him. Therefore the kingdom now would have been an utter offence to Him. The kingdom with man in sin? with God's glory unvindicated? Impossible that Jesus should take such a kingdom! And therefore it is that the very point of our Lord's discourse was this — that instead of rising up to take the kingdom, He came down to do the will of Him that sent Him; and this will is to save — to receive whoever came, no matter how repulsive he might be to Himself. For He came not to seek His own will, or to choose any persons who might be agreeable to Himself. It was a question of eternal life now, and resurrection at the last day. When men were startled at these wonderful truths, He brings out a still deeper one — He was come to die. He came to give His life for the world, as He says. And more than that, — except they eat His flesh, and drink His blood, there would be no life in them. Thus it is the substitution of a descended and suffering Son of man for the expectations of a king, to bring in ease, plenty, and enjoyment here.

Observe that in John 5 He is the Son of God as working in communion with the Father, and so giving life. If people do not receive Him, they shall be judged by Him; for He is also the Son of man, to whom the Father commits all judgment. In John 6 a yet deeper thing appears. It is not the Son of man judging, but the Son of man coming to die, giving His flesh to be eaten, and His blood to be drank. There is nothing so blessed, so truly disclosing what God is, what Christ is, in perfect self-

abnegation, and in a love that proved itself divine even while He was most evidently man. Who else came to die? All the long-looked-for royal glory of the Messiah fades, and is completely put aside for death; and this because, first of all, God must be magnified, sin judged, man blest perfectly according to God, even now entering into communion with God's mind about the whole scene, communion with Christ Himself in His self-renouncing love and devotedness. This, I suppose, is what is meant by eating His flesh, and drinking His blood. It is not merely that He dies as an offering for them; there is more than that. There is communion with His death; there is entrance by faith into the death it writes on the whole scene, and even the promised glory of the Messiah for the time is eclipsed. I do not in the least deny that by-and-by He will take that glory and reign. Of course we all know, this is but deferred, and that Jesus will take it after even a more blessed sort, and founded on an immutable basis; but it is plain that, for the present, death is what was before Jesus, and this, with its results, He lays before the listening people.

His death having been thus brought in as the Son of man, and this, too, as the ground of communion with His own now — for they must eat His flesh, and drink His blood, or otherwise they have no life in them — we find in the next chapter (John 7) the feast of tabernacles, which typified the sure prospect of glory according to the promise of God.

The brethren of the Lord, then, pressed His manifestation of Himself. Surely, thought they, now is the time! The Lord declares the solemn truth, that their time is always ready. They were of the world; they spoke of the world, and the world heard them. But as for Him,

His time was not yet come. Oh, beloved brethren, when we think for a moment Who it was that uttered these words, when we remember that it was One who had made the whole scene, the rightful Heir of all promises, who was entitled to take all, to enter upon all, to enjoy all, what infinite grace is such language as this, “My time is not yet come”! At the same time, what condemnation of the sinner in “your time is alway ready”! what sentence of death on all the thoughts of man! Man’s time is the present — is therefore always ready. This is his one thought; for he loves to magnify himself. This is the life he lives in; this the spring of all his activities. What makes the Lord’s way to be the more blessed is, that there was no question of power in Him. His brethren, as we are told, did not believe in Him; but they were assured enough of His power. Not believing does not mean that they doubted His ability. Believing is not the same thing as confidence in His capacity to do what He pleased; but not believing was betrayed in there being no sense of what was due to God, no apprehension of His glory, no just judgment of man’s estate, no perception of grace in Christ, no feeling of the contradiction of all that was around to Jesus Himself. But He who had all the requisite power, who in an instant could have changed the face of things, awaits the right hour. His time was not yet fully come.

The brethren go up to the feast, and there we find the thoughts of men reveal themselves as to Jesus; and the Jews exposed their unbelief even as His brethren had done before. They murmur, they reason; but it was only the thoughts of men; it was only the dreams of those who were without conscience toward God. Man’s mind never reaches up to God’s love. Human ideas are human

ideas and nothing else. There is no force in them; they are as powerless as the being from whom they spring, and they bear the stamp of death and of lovelessness upon them. But in Jesus it was not so. Power there was, we know, but there was what I dare to say was incomparably more blessed than power; He was divine in His love. He came, already tasting in spirit that utter humiliation that was before Him; and when men sought to kill Him, assuredly He was not without deep reflections of what He was about to encounter and endure. A single eye sees clear. What was withholden from His gaze? It was not unpondered, still less was it unlooked for; but for all that Jesus hastens it not. There was calm waiting on God; there was nothing like rushing into the scene alike of danger to Him, of sin against, and of man's ruin; there was no despising what the world was going to do; for, alas! indeed, it was Satan's short-sighted success and man's own most destructive folly, supposing that the One was thus got rid of who troubled all here below. But love, God Himself who is love, was in all His thoughts, in all His feelings. Accordingly Jesus waits till the feast was begun; and when they were fairly keeping it, He goes up and presents Himself there, cost what it might First of all He announces that He was about to depart. Let me call your attention to this; for it is of all importance as a basis for the action of the Holy Ghost, of which I am about to speak tonight. The gift in question supposed the death and departure of Jesus; it supposes that He was going where man could not follow, where the Jews must be left entirely behind. In the last day, accordingly, the great day of this feast, itself the last feast of the Jewish year, Jesus stood and cried, etc.

Now let us reflect for a moment what this feast meant. It was that which was kept, as most of us know, in remembrance of the fact, that the people of God, having once been in the wilderness, were now gathered into the pleasant land. It was celebrated after the harvest and the vintage — the well-known signs in prophetic Scripture of the execution of God's judgment in both its forms. There is a judgment that first decides between the good and the bad; and this is the harvest. Next, there is a judgment that falls unsparingly on what is altogether evil and hostile to God; and such is the vintage. God thus always kept before His people an intimation when, or at least how, they were to expect deliverance. It was a vain thought to look for present glory according to God before judgment was executed. Judgment must have its full course, and glory afterwards fills the scene. But this feast, as we know, was not like an ordinary one of Israel; it had this extraordinary trait, that it was not bounded by seven days even, or that which sets forth the course of earthly time. There was a supernumerary day. There was not only the full week, that shows the ordinary cycle of human events, and even that blessed time of rest at the end, to which, according to the word of God, His counsels for His people and the earth turn. For God never gives up from His mind and purpose the rest that remains for the people of God. But it was not, in fact, on the seventh day, but the eighth, that Jesus took His stand. This was the day not of creation goodness, but of resurrection glory. On that day, then, Jesus stood and cried, saying, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink."

Nothing can be more evident to a spiritual mind than the force of all this, which I have been endeavouring to

present just as it comes before us in the chapter. Clearly it is not the Spirit of God, as He always wrought on souls even before Jesus came; neither is it the Holy Ghost given as power of communion with Jesus when He is come as the Son of God. Here we have an hour that was not come, nor could come, till Jesus went away. Here we have a blessing that is not in any possible degree or form enjoyed by a human heart till the Lord Jesus died; nay, till He rose and went up into glory. But the point that our Lord is here bringing out so forcibly and with such astonishing wisdom in all the circumstances of the chapter is this, — that the glory of Jesus at once — not the kingdom as yet, but while He is on high — brings into the scene the Holy Ghost given here below as all-overcoming and overflowing streams of blessing now conferred on him that believes. It is not what we have had already, but different from that. And no wonder; for what does God feel and do about the death of Jesus? What sign, what worthy token does He give of the value of that unfathomable humiliation to which His Son went down?

The grace of the Son delighted to give freely the Holy Ghost to the believer, in order that he should enjoy communion with the Father and the Son who gave Himself. Who otherwise could taste or in the least enter into the love, and delight in the dignity of His person? It would be to put ourselves upon a par with Him, could we pretend to have communion with the Son by anything that pertains to us; for even a new nature would not suffice. The Holy Ghost is the only adequate power, as we have already seen.

But here it is not in the quality of Son of God, but distinctively and emphatically as Son of man — as One

who has been rejected to the uttermost — as One who died, rose, and was glorified in heaven. All this, mark, is when the judgment is not yet executed; not a blow fallen on man; not a single act of God in the way either of separating the good to Himself while leaving the rest, or of pouring out unsparing vengeance on what was religiously hateful to Him. Before any of these judicial dealings on God's part, the Son of man departs from the world, leaving it entirely undisturbed; goes up into heaven, and from the heaven into which He has gone sends down the Holy Ghost to be a divine link between him who believes upon earth and Himself, that glorified man at the right hand of God. Thus, it is now the joy of the heart, by the power of the Holy Ghost, triumphing in the exalted Saviour, and then testifying far and wide. There is the One that I possess, and know to be my life. To purchase and cleanse me He died. He has now broken with this scene, having been rejected by the very people who ought to have received Him. The earthly promises have lapsed entirely for the time, though their centre and object and founder awaits another day to establish them gloriously; for nothing ever changes or fails that God is pledged to, though as far as man is concerned, all for the present is ruined in His cross. But God only uses the interval to bring forward an incomparably higher thing. Instead of the Christ, yea, instead of the Son of man, bringing in His universal reign — instead of any other glory connected with the earth, there is a new order of things for which man is totally unprepared. While I am on earth — and how blessed this is! — He sends down the Holy Ghost from Himself in glory, that I may be acquainted, as it were, with the scene into which I am going; that I may be habituated to it while I am on earth; that I may have the

Holy Ghost, who knows it so well; that I may have Him linking up every interest, every affection, every thought and expectation of my heart with Him who is there.

This is what the Lord Jesus sets before us in this passage: “In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst.” No matter what is to follow for others, He begins with the reality of man’s need for himself. In the things of God, what is more ruinous than theory? It is of all importance to beware of a mere plan or system of truth. We have souls, not minds only, though, when we have been brought to God in truth of heart, I admit that we may enter and delight in the precious things of God. But there must be reality — “If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.” It supposes that man begins, as he ought, at the beginning of his soul’s destitution according to what God sees him to be, who surely gives him in Christ the answer to his real wants; for if He produces a sense of the wants, it is for the express purpose of satisfying them in His own grace. “Let him come unto me,” says Christ, “and drink. He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.” Thus the thirsty soul does drink; and there is the heart’s satisfaction in that which the Holy Ghost ministers. But it does not rest there, and for this simple reason, — the humbled One that died in rejection, but in atonement, was now risen from the dead and glorified in heaven, whence is He the source of power — power of the Spirit — that carries, as it were, all before it. It may be a barren and miserable wilderness. This but enhances the wonder of it. The scene is not changed. The world, far from being made better, is manifest and judged in its true character as it

never was judged before. The evil of man here below remains; the hostility of the world to God is unchanged; the total absence of one feeling in unison with God had been fully proved in the death of Christ. Yet, in the midst of such a state, the Holy Ghost is given, not only as a well of water for the believer himself, but as rivers of living water for others all around. How blessed are God's ways and words! How worthily of Himself He meets the evil of the world, and the apparent triumph of Satan! The enemy is never more thoroughly defeated than when he seems to have it all his own way. The downfall of the Son of man, as it seemed to His enemies, was just the path in which He would finish the work of redemption, and, founded upon it, would enter into a new scene, from which He would give the believer present association with Himself, by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, and issuing in streams of refreshment for this dreary desert world.

Let me impress some serious questions on the souls that are here this night. How is it that Jesus appears to you, and how is it that you are related to Him, now that He is in heaven? Have you simply a hope that you are going to be there? This to the believer is a hope, and as blessed as it is sure; and more than this, — we shall be with Him for ever. But is there only a hope? Is there nothing now for the heart? Is there no present power linking us with Jesus where He is? This seems to me what our Lord was here making known to His own. Jesus would not have us simply yearning for the day of glory; He would even now give our hearts the taste of it; He would even now make the strength and the joy of it our own; He would even now carry us out through this world as those who are not receivers but givers, and givers according to God's

richest mercy; for such it really is. These believers, who had come to Him in their deepest distress, who had drunk where all was utter weariness and want before, find that although He is gone, although disappeared from the earth, He has left them rich indeed, beyond all thought of man heretofore, though in outward circumstances more exposed and desolate than ever. Thus all the portion stands in the clearest contrast with that which even saints or prophets knew or looked for here below. Take, for instance, those in Old Testament times, and how sharp and decisive the lines of divergence. Look at the yearnings of heart in the Psalms; search into the prophecies of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, or any other: is this their state? Why not? Not that they were not blest; not that they lacked honour from God, some of them being the vessels, as we know, even of inspiration itself. Yet for all that, when their actual experience is looked at, these saints of God, with bright visions of the future, had for the present no such power either of worship or of testimony.

I do not mean to say that the Christian does not know deeper sorrows now than ever an Ezekiel or a Jeremiah knew. I am far from saying that Christ, the great sorrower and sufferer, spares us communion with Himself; for I am sure He does not; nor would our hearts desire to lose the communion of whatever of His temptations our little hearts are able to bear. But of this be assured, that the deepest enjoyment of Christ, and of our union with Him, goes along with the deepening of the world’s rejection of God’s people, along with our being thoroughly cast out as evil, scorned as men never were of old; for nothing that assailed a Jew is to be compared with that which comes upon a Christian. And

the most painful part of it is, that the more one drinks into the place of a Christian — that is, really, the place of Christ; for it is the Holy Ghost associating us with Christ which is the whole matter of Christianity — the more a soul by the power of the Spirit enters into his place with Christ, the more thoroughly is he despised by this world. But then what glory, joy, and blessedness!

How is it that Christians are often cast down? I mean not so much pressed sore because of the toils, and the sorrows, and the griefs of the way, but downcast in heart as before God in their thoughts of the Lord, and forgetful of their associations with heaven. Why is there a cloud, a dimness, a want of the full and fresh joy of Him they belong to, and where they belong to, filling the heart? It is precisely because they fail to look up now into heaven by the Spirit, and so fail to look down on the world as a wilderness, however much the streams of living water may flow through them. They forget what Jesus has given them; they look on earth as a desirable place. Why should not Christ be exalted here? Why should not He and we have a name of glory here now? Not so: His hour is not yet come; nor is ours either; for we are one with Him. Here man's hour was to Him scorn, rejection, and death. This was His place. Ours, too, is to be nothing here; it is to be utterly despised now, and hated of men. This was Christ's lot on earth. Is there anything better in this world? Is there any even to compare with what Christ Himself had? He knew it as none ever can; but at least we may by His own grace be attached and cleave to Him, and so be drawn into and appreciate it in our small measure.

For this seems to be just what the Holy Ghost is here given for. Observe in this connection the expression,

“Rivers of living water.” The power of the Holy Ghost fills the heart with the glory into which Christ is gone. What can more precisely suit the wilderness when the wilderness proves most arid? When all around is utter barrenness, and there is not a single creature well of water to draw from, not a green spot to refresh the eye, not a palm-tree to find the least rest under? When a true sense of the desolation here below has entered into the heart, this is what fits and strengthens the soul according to God. Therefore do I raise the question, If in John 4 we have the Holy Ghost associating the believer with the Son and with the Father, which thus carries him into worship, what is the new and special blessing here promised? Undoubtedly it is connected more with service than with worship. “Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water,” is suggestive rather of that which goes out abundantly; but assuredly it does suppose the believer by grace in an absolute superiority to the wilderness through which he is passing. There is a communicating power to others from that Spirit, who fills himself intimately with One who is Himself in rest, and gives His rest to the heart, making heaven to be a home very near, into which grace has given him the entrée because of Christ who is there. Thus the Holy Ghost so knits him now with the Lord Jesus, that all this world has to offer is but the vainest bauble. There is also the consciousness, on the other hand, of riches which man’s heart cannot conceive, and which, if we know them to be ours, we know all to be the fruit of nothing but our Saviour’s grace to us. In short, what we have here is not so much the Spirit of the Son leading us to delight in His person and grace, as well as in the Father’s love, but rather the power of the Holy Ghost imparted by the Man who is exalted into God’s glory,

giving our own souls the consciousness of that glory as ours in Him, and filling us to overflowing in communications of Him to others here below.

This may remind one a little of the difference (though it be another subject, no doubt,) between “the holy priesthood” and “the royal priesthood” in 1 Peter 2. Let us refer to it for a moment, in order to make the point before us a little more sensible. The apostle Peter speaks of us there as invested with this double priesthood. Surely it is not a needless repetition in any respect. There is no vague heaping up of epithets, but rather a distinct perception of our place as brought nigh to God. What, then, is the function of the “holy priesthood “? Offering up spiritual sacrifices. As so consecrated one draws near to God, and accordingly we then hear of these sacrifices in relation to Him. But, on the other hand, we are also said to be a kingly priesthood; and there the object is no longer the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, but to set forth the excellencies or virtues of Him that has called us out of darkness into His marvellous light. Thus the one exercises itself in our praising God through our Lord Jesus; the other sets forth His worth among men, as One who has dealt with us after a sort which God alone could plan or effect. This conscious dignity the Christian does well to have before him ever in this world. To seek earthly glory is, in fact, the real degradation of a Christian.

Unquestionably many a Christian is called to pass through this world, earning bread for himself and his family. And it is well that it should be so. Few of us can bear not to be occupied thus. Nor is there any reason why our blessed Lord should not be served thus with all

the heart, why there should not be a true and energetic and affectionate service rendered to His name, while the hands thus provide (whether for the family or for individual need) what little is required here below. But then the believer does it simply as a bread-trade — nothing more. The moment you give it the dignity of a profession, and regard it as something of honour in the world, you are lost to the testimony of Christ on high. I do not deny that the grace of God may call persons actively engaged in that which is highly esteemed among men. You have known, of course, of men thus called of God, while they were entering on or engaged in that which the natural heart values. And you may have seen some under such circumstances exhibit very great simplicity there. I am not saying now that it is wrong to have what men call a profession; I am using the heavenly glory of Christ to judge the spirit in which all that is in the world is ordered; and I do warn you against the vain-glory of men in these things — the desire and hankering after earthly distinction, the valuing of things for self and family — carried away in our thoughts and feelings by that which the world thinks of them.

As Christ's hour was not yet come, so neither is ours. If we are His, we have nothing to do with anything, even the pettiest shred, of this world's glory. Be assured, it is only a patch of dishonour for the child of God now. It matters little what the world's prize may be. Why should we want it? Are not all things ours? Shall we not judge the world — aye, angels? I do not dwell on the fact, that these present objects so often bear the very stamp of their own insignificance and worthlessness upon them, that their sages confess that the good is in the chase, not in the game. Who does not know that even a

“ribbon” is enough reward for some men’s life-long exertions! These otherwise are sensible men. What would not the richest and noblest do or endure for a “garter”?

Suffer me, then, to press the importance to the Christian of watching against the world, and of looking to Christ on high, in taking up whatever he does, whether for himself or for his children. I do not mean anything so preposterous as that Christianity calls on all believers to seek one dead level of occupation, or that there is any faith in one’s abandoning the circumstances in which one is called, if one can abide therein with God, or in seeking an occupation that is entirely unsuitable. This I do not call faith but folly. But giving full weight to all this, let me press, that if anything, no matter what it may be, is to be done day by day, whether it be making a shoe, or making a deed, there is but one worthy motive for the Christian — doing all to the Lord. If assured that we are doing His will, we can do either the one or the other with a good conscience and a happy heart. The ruinous thing for the Christian is to forget that we are here to do God’s will, and to be witnesses of a rejected Christ glorified in heaven.

But what is the world’s greatest desire? Pushing forward, doing something great; and what we to-day achieve made a stepping-stone for something more to-morrow. All this is thoroughly a denial of the Christian’s place, and proves that the heart’s desire is in the current of the world. It may be natural for a man to wish to be something easier and greater in the earth; but, beloved, where is the heart’s allegiance to Christ? Is it so, that after all one prefers the first Adam to Christ? This is really the question:

“Do I value most the first Adam or the Second?” If my heart is given to the Second man, am I not to prove it in what I do every day? Is the honour of Christ only for the Sunday? Surely this is not fealty to our Chief! Have you then been called by the grace of God to have His Son revealed in you while in a position which the world counts mean and dishonourable? Be it so. What more admirable opportunity for the faith which judges by Christ in glory whether you can thus abide with God? I do not ask you to follow this man or that, but to search the word of God, and judge how far in your position you can honour Christ as He is. For are we not to be His epistle, known and read of all men? Is it not thus that the rivers of living water flow from Him out of us? Believe me, there is nothing of Christ in clutching what one has got, upholding one’s rights and dignities, even if ever so real in the world’s eyes, and resenting every inroad and liberty, in an age which slights authority. Quite as little of Christ is there in him of low degree, who keenly seizes opportunities to urge his way steadily forward to what he values in this world. On the other hand, whether you are high or low, as men speak, you have an opportunity of approving what you think of Christ. Whatever the trial may be, it is but a little offering to show what Christ is in our eyes.

But for guidance there is no criterion but God’s word. Vain and foolish is our wisdom in such things: it is a question of the will of the Lord. Everything turns upon this. The whole matter for Christian conscience, no matter what the position of the believer may be, comes to this, that each of us has an opportunity of doing His will, of being His servant, of showing that we value Him infinitely above the world. My blessing is, no matter

what the Lord gives me to do, therein to be content. Of the circumstances which are best for His glory, and for me His servant here below, He is the only good judge. Let me value them simply as an opportunity of setting forth His praise, prizing most of all what the world hates. As to any occupation, I must repeat, that high or low in men's eyes, it should be in mine nothing but a bread-trade. Undoubtedly the world dislikes this. What! an honourable profession only a bread-trade? Exactly so; a crucified Saviour now in glory makes short work of the world and all that is in it. Take an example. I am going to work as a shoemaker. Is it my aim to be the best shoemaker in London? Suppose me a doctor: do I covet the largest practice in this city? Is there anything of Christ in these wishes? Is this practically to own the glorified Jesus? Am I really taking up my work from Him and doing it for Him? Our hearts know well, if the Lord actually gave us anything to do for Him, how love would express itself in doing the work well. Far be the thought that Christians should count it a virtue to be loose and negligent in the way they discharge their business! Certainly there is nothing that becomes a man, not to speak of a saint, in being a sloven. The point of faith, whatever we may have to do, is this, — that, be it a little thing or the greatest, it is all done for Him.

Thus we testify, even in daily conversation, too, that we are not living to self or the world, but to Him who died and rose; and we shall surely have the power of the Spirit with us in all. Sweet testimony, though in the otherwise perishable things which pertain to this world; but it is a testimony which shall not pass away. We are but passing through a strange land: our home is with Christ; but we are where the Lord has called and put us

for the present. Here we stay as long as He bids us work for Him; we journey at the commandment of the Lord; at the commandment of the Lord we abide. And so it is we are for Him to dispose of. We are in the wilderness; but meanwhile, instead of only drinking of a rock outside, we have a well within, yea, rivers of water flow out of us. It is the joy of Jesus reproducing itself here below — the power of the Spirit of God giving the heart now its present delight in Him above. There is the abounding sense that we belong to Him who is there now. All the glory of this world is judged as the meanest trash — as only the delusive tinsel of the devil to amuse a judged and perishing world.

Beloved, I would ask how far your souls are seeking this, and this only. I would ask myself the same thing. I desire grace from God that none of the truth which He is pleased to bring before us may degenerate into words of barren knowledge. Pardon me if I feel that none have to watch against this danger so much as ourselves. The mercy of God has been awakening His children, has called, or rather recalled, them to this truth, and much more — to the faith that was once delivered to the saints. It is an immense blessing, but along with it is just the responsibility and the danger. Who are most exposed to losing it and of becoming its bitter foes? Those who having known truth like this cease to live in it and to love it. How can it be lived in, unless Christ and not self be the object of our souls? Substitute for Him any thought of our ease or reputation, and all is defiled, all becomes polluted in its very spring. The Lord only knows what might be the end of such folly, save only for the grace of God which, as it took us up when there was not one right affection towards Him, and maintained us

despite all our wretchedness, so can intercept the full results of our unfaithfulness and ingratitude. That blessed God who has Christ before Him, and has now the glorifying of Him by us in hand, does at the same time allow a sufficient play of moral responsibility in proof of what unbelief does even with a saint. But He can and does restore. May we count on His grace to keep as well as restore, while discerning His judgment of things and persons, and treating unsparingly all that which slights His word, and takes advantage of grace to deny the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

May the Lord make and keep us lowly! May He so give us to see Himself in glory that all which is of this world may be ever judged in our eyes as awaiting only the hour of the harvest and of the vintage which is not yet come. Our joy is come in His glorification meanwhile, and in the Holy Ghost given to us before that hour. Jesus we know in heavenly glory, and that He has already sent down the Holy Ghost to bring us into the present power of glory. May we be vessels of His testimony; it may be, needing to be broken that the rivers may flow out the more freely, but nevertheless channels through which the rivers of living water flow, to the praise of His own grace and glory!

The Paraclete, or Comforter.

Lecture 4 - John 14:26; John 15:26, 27; John 16:7-14.

We enter on a sensibly different province of truth, relative to the Spirit of God, in the chapters of which a few verses have been read. It is no longer a question of the new birth, nor yet of the Holy Ghost as the power of fellowship with the source of grace — fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. Nor is it, again, the Holy Ghost as a power that flows from within outwards, giving the true testimony of a world-rejected but heavenly Lord before the hour comes for Him to show Himself, and them along with Him, to the world. These are the three subjects, as far as the Spirit of God is concerned, of John 3, 4 and 7.

What, then, is the great commanding truth which our Lord brings before us in the chapters now read? What is it that most prominently strikes the mind subject to the word of God, as one hears or reads these passages? There may be differences, and there are, in every one of these communications; but nevertheless they have, whether the fourteenth, fifteenth, or sixteenth chapters, one grand truth in common, which has not been presented in any part of the gospel before, of such immense value in itself, of such immensity, too, in its consequences, that we should in no way have been able to gather it from any of the previous communications of our Lord. The common principle in these chapters (14, 15 and 16) is this, — that it is not merely a source which imprints its own character on the new life that is given to the believer, nor a power working, whether inwardly

or outwardly, and this in worship as well as testimony, but there is much more. We have the testimony of Christ strongly marked in these chapters; but there is another truth that rises above not only what we have had in the early part of John, but also which stands out in every one of these communications that come before us now. There is a divine person prominently brought before us. It is not merely a source or a power, but a person.

And the occasion evidently accounts for this difference. The Lord Jesus was leaving — that blessed person who had called them to Himself, who had been forming their hearts during His earthly ministry by revealing the Father to them. The scene was about to close in His death, wherein God should be infinitely glorified. As He says Himself, “Now is the Son of man glorified, and God” — not merely the Father (the Father was glorified, but there is more conveyed in this truth, and another thought altogether) — “God is glorified in him.” Sin was against and before God; consequently, it was impossible for God to overlook it. The moral nature of God must break forth in all its strength and indignation against sin. Jesus, the Son of man, the rejected Christ, takes the sin upon Himself, and becomes responsible for the iniquities of His people. Hence, in the cross, God acquired a glory which He never had before, and which it was impossible that He should ever receive again. God was glorified infinitely, and for ever. The consequence is, that, from that moment right out into eternity, the grand, and at the same time precious, task lies before God of displaying, in every possible form, His estimate of the infinite suffering in which Jesus has glorified Him. The immediate result of that work was, that Jesus, being raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, takes

His place at the right hand of God in heaven. Nothing else would have been for Him an adequate witness of the value of the cross. There are results which shall be accomplished in their day; there is no blessing that God ever has given, or ever will give, apart from the cross of the Lord Jesus. But, at the same time, the cross has so perfectly met all God's justice, holiness, majesty, and love, all His character, in short, as well as His affections that God now has simply before Him, as far as Christ and those who receive Him are concerned, the happy task of gratifying,, His own nature to the full in the blessing according to all that is in His heart. This it is that alone accounts for all that He is now doing. In virtue of this, not only does He put Jesus at His own right hand, but sends forth the gospel — a thing He never did before — sends it to every creature. Thousands of years had rolled over this world (and God is the same God), yet had He never sent out such a message to man. There might be this gospel or that, good news to Abraham or to the children of Israel; but there never was the glad tidings of His grace spread abroad to every creature before. It was not God began to be love: Jesus Christ or His cross never produced love in God. It is the distinctive character of love in Him, that it is increase, uncaused, and unmoved by that which is outside itself. It is in His own nature. Love would be and was there if there had been no object of it, for objects do not make love; but at the same time, in the sovereignty of God, His love goes out: and to the neediest, the most deplorably guilty, the most distant from Himself, the most hostile, He can afford to show love. It is the cross of Christ which vindicates Him in so doing.

But this is not all. Jesus disappears from the world. It must be so. The world was not good enough for Him. Not even anything that God could do in it, no accomplishment of providence, no bestowal of the throne of David, nor yet the universal dominion of the Son of man over all nations, tribes, and tongues would have been a sufficient reward on God's part for the cross of the Lord Jesus. Accordingly, God takes Jesus to His own right hand in heavenly glory; and this, it is evident, gives occasion to the wonderful teaching of John 14. First of all, our Lord presents the certainty of His coming back again; for if He was going there, it was no abatement of His love. He went to prepare a place for them. As surely, therefore, as He went to the Father's house, He would come again, and receive them unto Himself; that where He was, they might be also. He had manifested the Father to them; He had shown Him here. They had known, or ought to have known, not only that the Father was in Him, but that He was in the Father. He was a divine person; He was the Son. This, of course, was in itself independent of His work; but at the same time, it gave infinite value to that work. Now, He goes farther, and shows that, during His absence in the Father's house, He makes a provision suitable to His love, and worthy of the cross — an unheard of blessing, transcending anything that had ever been known by man upon the earth before. He opens it thus: "If ye love me, keep my commandments." He would not have them spend their breath and affections in unavailing regrets for His absence, but prove their love in a real and substantial way — "keep my commandments." On the other hand, He would prove His love in a characteristically divine way. "And I," says He, "will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that

he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you." Farther down He adds what makes the personality so very evident — "The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name." Remark the words "will send in my name." It is not merely "will give;" for we can understand the giving of mere power; we can understand a divine source of blessing springing up within; we can understand infinite supplies of blessing flowing out. But here there is much more. It is unequivocally a divine person, "whom the Father," He says, "will send in my name; He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."

On this let us for a few moments dwell, considering what it is, or rather whom, God has given to us — whom the Father has sent in the name of the Son, the Lord Jesus. I do not deny that the Holy Spirit is sometimes presented under the figure of being poured out, or that which is shed forth. It is familiar to all and unquestionable. In such figures the thought is clearly the profusion of the blessing, the rich and lavish extent, if I may so say, of what God the Father is giving for the glory of His Son. But besides the riches of the gift, and the abundance of the grace, here we have an altogether different thought. Here we have distinctness and definiteness to the very last degree. And no wonder. It is a person — not merely power. It is no question of fulness of blessing only, but of a divine person. Accordingly the language employed seems intended of the Lord to enforce and point to this

grand truth, which, alas! He knew would be so readily forgotten by the Church of God.

I admit also as certain, that by-and-by men here below shall receive another outpouring of the Holy Ghost. I admit the latter rain, even as the former. I admit the accomplishment of the beautiful type of Exodus 28, where the sound of the bells goes forth, not while the High Priest is within the holy place, not merely when He goes in, but also when He comes out again. And so, as one testimony was rendered when the High Priest went in, there will be another testimony of the Spirit when the High Priest comes forth once more. Just as when Jesus went into the heavens, there was the sound given forth by the power of the Spirit; so when He comes out again, there will be a new form and fulness of the Holy Spirit's blessing diffused upon all flesh, as it is said in the promise; the only difference being, that the future thing will surely not be for the same body that has received the first blessing of divine grace from the Holy Ghost, but, as we know, the ancient people of God shall be the object. God will revisit Israel in grace; not, of course, confining the blessing to Israel, but even as God now has been pleased to seek out of every nation under heaven, so, only more largely, will it be in the days of Christ's second coming and reign over the earth.

In all this it might seem that we are only on vague ground; and if this were all, we should be far from clear light as to the Spirit of God. Even so I know not that it would be lawful to speak of the influences of the Spirit as some now do. We are in the presence of an infinitely greater and commanding truth, but it is the very truth of which the Lord Himself speaks here. For indeed it is not a question simply of influences for the good of the soul,

nor of springs of divine favour, nor of powers that flow in or flow out to any imaginable extent. Above and better than all this is the glorious fact, that now for the first time, and, as I fully believe, according to Scripture, for the only time, the personal presence of the Holy Ghost is known on the earth — the Holy Ghost actually come down from heaven, and here below as the fruit of redemption and of the Lord Jesus Christ's departure to heaven.

It is admitted fully that, along with this personal presence, there is a plentiful dispensing of power, as we have said. Nor do I doubt for a moment that by-and-by, when the Lord Jesus comes from heaven, there will be a larger effusion, a still more extensive spread of God's blessing all around; but where do we read of His sending the Spirit for that time? Where do we read of the Father sending the Comforter in the name of Christ the Son? In no other period. It is here, and now only. I mean not that these are the only Scriptures that refer to it, but that these are the only times and circumstances and conditions in which the word of God puts not only the gift of the Spirit and His outpouring, but the mission of the Spirit. It is a question here, I repeat, of His own personal descent from heaven; and nothing can be plainer from our Lord's own words, as will be proved as we pass on.

The key to all these statements lies in this: — the presence of the Comforter. That personal presence of the Holy Ghost, which is here spoken of, is intimately connected with, as it is founded on, His own personal absence after redemption. On the other hand, the bright day of the Lord that is coming will be marked, not by Christ's absence, but by His presence; not by His being

in heaven, but by Himself coming to reign over the earth; and it has no such personal presence of the Spirit attached to it. Greater powers there may be in a certain way, — larger, if not deeper; but it will be another state of things altogether, and one of the most striking differences is found in a fact which may be passingly stated here; namely, that the Holy Ghost in that day will not lead a single person to worship God in the holiest of all. This state of things ceases. The veil is no longer rent in the millennial day, when the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ shall be over the earth. Possibly such a statement as this may sound strong, and interfere rudely with doctrinal prejudices. To some theologians what could be more shocking to hear than that, after the work of redemption, there ever could be a recurrence to an earthly sanctuary, and a separating veil, and a human priesthood, and outward sacrifices over again? But in my judgment nothing is more certain, if indeed we bow to the Psalms and prophets, than such a state of things on earth under the millennial reign of the Lord. Gentile doctors may explain it — or rather attempt to explain it away — as they will; but there the fact stands before them in the word of God imperishably, in the prophetic word evidently unaccomplished. It is in Scripture very particularly bound up with this mark, that when that day does come, and God renews His dealings with His ancient people Israel, there is no Pentecost among the renewed feasts. There is the Passover, as well as the feast of Tabernacles; but there is no feast of weeks. This evidently falls in with what I have been saying, that there will be a most copious effusion of the Spirit; so that even some outward gifts, communicated on the day of Pentecost and afterwards, should be designated powers of the world to come. Why are they called

“powers of the world to come”? Because they are a sample of that energy which will work in unhindered effects then, making the vast universe to know the mighty deliverance which the Saviour has accomplished for “all things,” as well as for those that believe. The powers that were conferred by our Lord through the Holy Ghost, after He went up to heaven, are rightly therefore called “powers of the world to come,” such as healing diseases, cleansing the lepers, raising the dead, giving the blind to see and the lame to walk, and the like, because they were expressions of that power which will be known far and wide in the great day of the Lord’s reign, when He will heal all their diseases just as truly as He will pardon all their iniquities. Then He will bring in and unite both blessings. It is clear that this is altogether a different state of things from what we know now.

Accordingly, now there is this surpassing privilege that God gives to make known His exceeding value for and delight in the work of the Lord Jesus. How comes this? That work without doubt has in God’s sight unending and infinite worth. How comes it that there should be now such an impressive and altogether divine estimate of it? The reason I believe to be this. The day that is coming will be the accomplishment of promise and prophecy. The time is arrived for making good what God positively brought out in that form of detailed blessing that was given to His people on earth. They were an earthly people; and accordingly the promises in their literal bearing regarded them as such. Hence it is, that when that day comes, it will be of that which God definitely put before them, it will be of the earthly people and the earth (and especially the land of Israel)

as the centre of their fulfilment. But God never limited Himself merely to the accomplishment of what He has promised; and, in point of fact, so far from your getting at the depths of God's grace, by grasping at the promises, as people say, on the contrary, one only gets to the limits, so to speak, of that which was suited to a man on earth, or a people on the earth, or the earth itself; but as surely as the heavens are higher than the earth, so the grace that lay, as it were, unmoved in His own bosom, that which never was measured out in promise nor defined in prophecy, must be according to the depth of the goodness of God Himself. And therefore it is on one side that He retained this blessed reserve; not, of course, for the purpose of hiding it always, but nevertheless it was hidden from ages and generations — "hid in God," as He elsewhere says. Now on the other side the secret is hid no more, and this because God can freely act now. He has the world-rejected Christ at His own right hand; and at the very sight of Him as He comes there, if one may so say, fresh from the cross, as there He comes bringing all the value of redemption into His presence, God gives not according to the measure of an earthly people's need, or according to that which is suitable to this poor world, but what was worthy of Himself and of Christ. He gives what would be an honour in heaven itself. What can attest or prove this more than sending down the blessed Spirit, who knew heaven so well, and could enter into and reciprocate all the feelings of God the Father about the Son and about redemption? Hence it is we enter with such fulness into this infinite blessing.

Accordingly, therefore, with all this weight of truth before us, these depths that were as yet unfathomed of

divine grace, the Lord Jesus Christ speaks to His disciples. He would lead them into the counsels and reveal to them the mind of God the Father, the grace of the Saviour-God; but the means by which He pledges His name, and promises on His Father's part to more than make up for His own loss to the saints, is by the presence of "another Comforter." But I apprehend the word "Comforter" sometimes fails (perhaps to most fails) to give an adequate notion of what it is that our Lord Jesus really meant us to gather from thus speaking of the Holy Ghost. We might very naturally draw from it, that the term was in relation to sorrow, that it intimated a person who would console us in the midst of the distresses of this lower world. And, indeed, the Holy Ghost does console us and comfort us. But this is only a very small part of the functions here conveyed by the word "Paraclete." This is the expression, if one would give an English reproduction of that which is in point of fact the very word our Lord employed. But the meaning of that word "Paraclete" is not merely "Comforter," but one who is identified with our interests, one who undertakes all our cause, one who engages to see us through our difficulties, one who in every way becomes both our representative and the great personal agent that transacts all our business for us. This is the meaning of the Advocate or Paraclete or Comforter, whatever equivalent may be preferred. Manifestly, then, it has an incomparably larger bearing than either "advocate" on the one hand, or "comforter" on the other: it includes both, but takes in a great deal more than either. In point of fact it is One who is absolutely and infinitely competent to undertake for us whatever He could do in our favour, whatever was or might be the limit of our need, whatever our want in any difficulty,

whatever the exigencies of God's grace for the blessing of our souls. Such the Holy Ghost is now; and how blessed it is to have such an One! But remark here, that it never was known before. I have already hinted, and indeed plainly expressed the conviction, that it will never be known again, fully allowing that there will be, as to extent, a larger outpouring of blessing in the world to come. But the personal presence of the Spirit here below as an answer to the glory of Christ at the right hand of God!. such a state of things never can be repeated. While the High Priest is above, the Spirit sent down gives a heavenly entrance into His glory as well as redemption; when the High Priest comes out for the earthly throne, the Spirit then poured out will give a testimony suited to the earth over which the Lord will reign.

If we bear this in mind, what a solemn impression is given as we look over Christendom! I have no doubt of the fact; but if it be so, it is a pregnant one, and full of serious reflections. It is always the great test-truth, if I may so express myself, which is the first to disappear, and, I think also, the last truth to be recovered, once it is lost; for it is invariably what most reflects God's glory. What can be, then, dearer to the Spirit, who is here to glorify the Son in glorifying the Father? And what should be of deeper moment to the saints? Wonder not if Satan strains every nerve and practises all his wiles to blot and misrepresent, to pervert or corrupt where he cannot destroy. If I judge Christendom by such a standard as this, what must be the sad conclusion? If one thing more than another ought now to characterize the children of God everywhere, what should it be according to these words of the Saviour? The presence, the personal

presence, of the Holy Ghost; the certainty that this divine person is come to replace Himself. Granted that sense does not see Him, and that mind cannot enter in, as it is said here of the world. Evidently, if it were a question of either sense or mind, the world might be adequate. But contrariwise “the world seeth him not, neither knoweth him; nevertheless ye know him.” We know Him, and know Him also to be present, first, on the simple word of the Lord Jesus; but, secondly, too, from the conscious enjoyment of the presence of the Holy Ghost.

I must begin by simply receiving Him on the word of the Lord; but when I do receive the truth into my soul, am I without the sense of His presence? Am I without the taste of the joy of the Holy Ghost being either in me or in the assembly of God? Surely our hearts can attest far otherwise. Therefore it is never confined simply to belief. “Know ye not,” says the apostle, “know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost?” That is, it is not merely a matter of faith. First of all, I do not doubt that a soul is brought into the blessing by the faith of Christ, and nothing else; but to leave no room for the enjoyment that is found in Him subsequently, to reduce all to a bare matter of acceptance on God’s word of the Lord Jesus, would be indeed a poor witness on our part to the power of the indwelling Spirit, or to the revelation of the Saviour’s grace. What would be thought of one who had nothing to assure him that his wife really was thus related to him, except the fact that her name was so entered in the registrar’s office? It would be an extraordinary and a sorry pass to which things had come. And do you suppose that the Holy Ghost, a divine person sent down expressly to give us the power and joy

and blessing and refreshment of the grace of God in the knowledge of Christ — do you suppose that this is less real for the new man, than the comfort of a companion that God has given a man for all that pertains to this present life? Far from us be such a thought; and therefore it is, I repeat, surely a matter to be noticed and weighed.

No doubt, if my soul, when awakened, only accepts the bare word of God in the gospel, and cares for, looks for, no more from Him who is here to glorify Christ, I must not wonder if I stop short of enjoyment which others taste; for the Holy Ghost resents such despite to His grace, such contentedness to know the least possible of Christ. There must be loss, if I will indeed be obstinate enough not to look for aught more. As far as it goes, it is in principle rationalistic, thus turning the very word of God into a mere letter; the heart refusing to go onward into the enjoyment of His blessed presence and power, simply because the gospel of salvation was believed on the word of the Lord. On the contrary, we find particular pains taken to show that individually there is a divine consciousness by the Spirit's power of our relationship to God; also, in the assembly of God, I am entitled not only to believe that He is there, but, believing, also to taste the sweet and mighty effects of His presence. Hence it is that in Romans 8, which refers to what concerns the soul's new standing in Christ, it is not merely said that the Holy Ghost dwells in me, a believer, but that He "beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God.'' Does this mean no more than that a man believes the gospel? Matter of faith of course it is; and with this we must begin — with bare faith in God's testimony of His own grace to our souls — a faith that

rests on nothing else on not a single emotion or experience of any kind, but God's word in the glad tidings of salvation by Christ. But suppose I settle down that this is all to which grace now entitles me, is this not a mistake on the other side almost as bad as to confound faith with feelings, or with experiences? Where faith is real, it leads into a deep experience, both for the soul and in the Church of God. However, this may suffice for the subject on which I am now treating. It seemed to me the more incumbent to refer to it, because the return from the ordinary muddle of inward evidences to simple faith exposes souls to limit everything as to the Holy Ghost to the bare word of the Lord. This is true as a ground-work; but we should look for more. And we must beware, in avoiding one error, not to fall into another and an opposite one. That the Lord sends me the word of life, I accept entirely as the starting- point of the Christian. It is a blessed and admirable thing that the Lord gives us to know, when hard pushed, it may be, by the adversary — to take the gospel on His naked word. But as surely as He who comes down and really dwells in us is a divine person — to suppose that He does not give the sensible enjoyment of His presence in our souls, and in the assembly of God, is a very great mistake indeed in my judgment.

First of all, then, the Lord prays the Father, as He says (for He takes a mediatorial place in this chapter), "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever." We are thus in presence of a grand truth as to the Holy Ghost. Not only was He given, but besides, when He comes, He abides for ever, as it is said, "that he may abide with you for ever." There is not a word about anybody else; it is

the Christian that is in question here. Throughout these chapters of John we have invariably, as the anticipated basis, redemption accomplished on earth, and Christ exalted in heaven. These are accordingly the limits of the blessing here. It is not so much redemption indeed, in any of its manifold applications, but that truth as the ground of Christ's glorification on high, and of the Holy Ghost's coming down to the earth. Accordingly, here the Spirit is promised, not to be a visitor for a time, as the Lord Jesus was, but in contrast with that transient stay, "that he may abide with you for ever."

This at once leads one to feel how solemn is the sight which everywhere meets our eyes in Christendom. If there be one truth more than another that has been abandoned, it is this personal presence of the Holy Ghost. There is no adequate testimony to it whatever; and this is not said unadvisedly. I say it not merely of that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth, but of smaller cities that kings have built themselves to reign over, or those yet smaller cities their subjects love to reign over as rivals and an improvement upon both. I say it of the Protestant bodies, no matter what, no matter where, national or dissenting. It is a remarkable fact, that if you look at their confessions of faith, many of which were drawn up when men, no doubt, were far more simple and thoroughgoing than they are now — at the time of the Reformation, or at any subsequent great crisis — if there be one truth more especially absent from every one of these confessions that has come under my own observation, it is the testimony to this truth. You will find other truths: the necessity of being born again, the value of the work of Christ, the glory of His person as God and man. Not that they deny that the Holy Ghost

is a divine person — surely they do not. But I am not speaking of His personality, or deity either, but of His personal mission to the earth, and of His presence now with Christians, both individually and collectively — the presence of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. Is it to be found anywhere acted on or confessed? Where is it set forth? I have never met with any approach to it, even in my reading; and of course I do not wish to give anyone the impression that I have not read a good deal upon the subject. I have searched diligently for it, and I have desired to learn what is really held by Christians universally; but never, in any one confession, creed, article of faith, or rule, have I discovered the smallest expression of that which is evidently the great characteristic truth of Christianity — that truth which ought to be continually sounding out, and continually in practice within the Church. Is it not, then, a solemn consideration that this, the glory of the Christian, the strength of the Church of God, and the especial privilege for which it was expedient that even Christ should go away, is never attested in any one system of Christendom known to me?

It will be said that there are excellent persons, and good preaching, etc., at any rate among orthodox persons. Is this denied? Does it supply the lack? Perhaps it may be urged by some that at least the society of Friends, or Quakers, as they are commonly called, do make a great deal of the Holy Ghost. They are the very class which, with all respect to themselves personally, are, in my judgment, and unwittingly on their own part, most ignorant of the truth of the Holy Ghost’s presence. The reason is manifest why they are so thoroughly distant from, and so antagonistic to, the truth of the personal

presence of the Holy Ghost. Their doctrine, which I surely ought to explain after having given so strong an opinion about that society, — Quaker doctrine is wholly inconsistent with the truth the Lord lays down here. They hold that the Spirit of God dwells in every man without exception; that, whether a Jew or a Turk, whether an infidel or a believer, not a single soul is without His indwelling. The consequence is that they cannot believe in any special personal presence of the Holy Ghost; for they conceive that as it has always been, so it is the essential means whereby he who makes a right use of it can be saved. Thus evidently along with this error goes another: they make justification to be gradual and progressive, not complete by faith of Christ and His work, but in proportion as men follow the inward light. I do not speak of all the members of that society: no doubt gospel truth has penetrated among not a few of them; and there are those (I do not care to name such now) who have lately preached without as well as within them, and are much to be respected, and have been somewhat used of God to the conversion of souls. But what they received for their own souls, and preached to the blessing of others, was not the proper doctrine of the Friends as set forth in the remains of their founders or Barclay's Apology, but a certain measure of evangelical testimony which penetrated their enclosure, and was thence given out to others.

But as to this doctrine, the fundamental tenet of the Friends is, that the Holy Ghost is given to every man without exception, that he, making right use of that manifestation of the Spirit, may have his soul saved at last. Now is not this the very antithesis of the truth of God? For Scripture does not say that the Holy Ghost is

given to every man in the world, but teaches that the manifestation of the Spirit is given only to every man in the Church. The Christian alone has the Holy Ghost. Not even the Old Testament saints knew this; nor will the millennial saints, as I believe, possess it as we do now, though there will be an outpouring on all flesh, we know. Even the people of Israel will not have Him as we now, blessed as they may be by- and-by, and endued with powers as extensive, and, indeed, outwardly transcending, I presume, anything ever known in the bosom of the Church For the millennial day will see the most marvellous displays of divine power that have ever wrought among men permanently in this world. I doubt not at all that the efforts on which man so prides himself now, — his inventions, his electric telegraphs, his railways, his steamships, etc., will disappear from the world to give place to what will incomparably surpass them; for God will never allow that man is able to exceed Himself. He will not leave room for the delusion that a day of sin, self-will, shame — a day when Jesus is rejected and the Spirit slighted — is to furnish the due materials for the reign of His Son over a reconciled earth. Who that knows the character and word of God can admit the possibility that He will let Israel, under their Messiah, be indebted to the monuments of rebellious Gentiles, when He sets His people up, and causes the light to shine, and the glory of Jehovah to arise upon Zion? Impossible, to my mind, that God should make use of these effete means of man in that bright day. Just as Jericho of old must fall, and all the ancient centres of the holy land must give place, and God would mark out new ones for His people, so in the day that is coming, I am persuaded, the Holy Ghost will teach man how infinite is the power that He will put

forth in the earth; for this will be the peculiarity of it: the Holy Ghost then will act on the earth and for the earth. Of course there will be no suspension of what He undertakes; but the display of the power will be suited to the Lord as then reigning over the world, and the objects the Holy Ghost will have in hand.

Now the Holy Ghost works after a different way, and to other ends. There was a great manifestation of power in apostolic days; but the great starting-point was the Holy Ghost sent down by Christ glorified at the right hand of God, and giving to souls vital association with Him who is there. This, too, ever goes on while Christ is on high. It is the heavenly One making us heavenly by the Holy Ghost, the divine link between Him and them upon the earth. This is what our passage speaks of here (and accordingly we have the believer contrasted with the world). He, says Christ, is "the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive." The false doctrine I have referred to insists strongly that the world does receive the Spirit, and that it is in no way peculiar to the believer in point of fact. Here, on the contrary, it is a special possession of the Spirit; it is His personal presence which only the Christian possesses, which the world cannot receive, "because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him; but ye know him." It is exclusively the privilege of the believer here below; "for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you." Instead of merely giving them a transitory taste of blessedness, the Spirit dwells with them; and more than this, instead of merely dwelling with them, "he shall be in them." There is this double truth, the dwelling with and also the being in. These two things are of importance. From the time that He comes down He dwells; yet not merely does He dwell with them as One

outside of them, which is true in an assembly of saints, but He was to be in them. That He dwells with us is of immense moment for the believer to hold — that the Holy Ghost does not merely visit occasionally, but really dwells with us, and that we may look to Him, knowing that He really is here. But besides, as the Lord adds, He shall be in you, intimating that there would be the closest possible presence of the divine Spirit “in” as well as “with” those He was coming to; and this “for ever.”

The effect is next shown. “I will not,” says He emphatically, “leave you orphans” (that is, by His departure from them); “I will come to you.” “Yet a little while and the world seeth me no more, but ye see me; because I live, ye shall live also.” Is not the Holy Ghost forming us into a body, uniting the believer to Christ as the head? There is more than this. Community of nature is here taught; and not the unity of the body, as we have in the epistles of Paul. “Because I live, ye shall live also.” Nothing can be more intimate than this. Further: “At that day,” says He, showing the manner of it, “ye shall know that I am in the Father, and ye in me, and I in you.” But “that day” is come. This again shows how totally this presence of the Holy Ghost differs from His outpouring in the millennium. Will this verse be true of the saints then? It is clear that nothing of the kind will appear. I do not deny that suited blessings will be given in the mercy and power of God; far from it. I do not deny that there will be divine goodness working in the people of God, the objects of His grace. Surely it must be so. But it is plain to me, that the state of things, taken as a whole, here described by the Lord, will be perfectly impossible in the millennium. “At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.” This is only

applicable now. The basis on which it depends has been accomplished now, and now only. Christ has taken His place above, not merely in heaven, but, as He says, “in my Father.” “At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me” while He is there, and, at the same time, “I in you” while we are here. It is evident therefore that this (verse 20) is the decisive proof that our Lord makes the wondrous gift of which He speaks here contemporaneous with His presence in heaven. Then only is made good our association with Himself on high by the Holy Ghost sent down. When our Lord Jesus Christ leaves heaven, and takes the kingdom, all these elements will be changed, and there will be a new state of things in accordance with the new position which our Lord is to take. The Holy Ghost acts or is given always in relation to the place of Christ. During His personal absence there is the personal presence of the Holy Ghost; and as His own personal presence characterises the age to come when He returns again, the action of the Holy Ghost is necessarily modified by that new and fruitful fact.

On the latter verses I shall not dwell, having wished, first, to present as distinctly as possible the truth, and to this end comparing what now is with what has been, or may be in the days that are coming, so as to bring out the peculiarity of our blessing. Faith always enters into the present mind of God, His counsels and ways, from looking at Christ. Therefore it is that, where Christ’s presence at the right hand of God in heaven is kept steadily before the soul, every thing falls into its place. Where this is not the great key-truth of our souls in relation to God as well as to the world, all is lost — I mean, all that is distinctive of us as Christians. Of

course, there may be faith in Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and for a measure of peace with God; but I am not speaking of the soul's comfort, nor even of our being brought through this world and saved for ever and ever by Christ. My thought is of the glory of God, and of that which suits His affections; of that which is good and holy, full of strength and blessedness for the Christian in relationship with God. Assuredly none of these things can be, unless the eye of faith is guided, and continually fixed upon Christ where He is. To have the eye continually directed toward Him where He is secures the free work of the Holy Ghost in the soul; and hence it is you find that those who do not believe in the personal presence of the Holy Ghost here below have no right apprehension of Christ Himself as the Head of the Church in heaven. They do not deny, nor so much as question in the least, that He is at the right hand of God. They formally proclaim that they believe in the Holy Ghost, the communion of saints, and so on. But it is no question now of repeating the words of a formulary; nor am I confining my remarks to any particular system, because, in my opinion, the dissenting societies are every one of them founded with aims and views wholly irrespective of the Holy Ghost's presence and operation in the assembly. Thus the present state of Christendom, in every form of it, whether national or dissenting, is founded on unbelief in the main distinctive truth of the Church, as far as the Holy Ghost is concerned.

This is of capital importance to impress on the children of God. The question is not whether or where they may have got good for their souls. The Spirit of God blesses in the midst, and often in spite, of these systems. There are those dear to Christ in every one of them; there are

in all not only living members but ministers of Christ, as I firmly believe, wherever the grand foundations of Christ's person and work are acknowledged in any measure. But it is another thing altogether to say, "Am I where the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven can act freely, according to the intentions of the Lord and the word of God? Am I where He is believed to be present? Is the meeting, the assembly, of which I form a part, the expression of the presence of the Holy Ghost?" I do not speak of preaching now, nor even of meetings for instruction, whether in the form of lectures, or of reading the word of God together All these things have their place; but there remains distinct the great central occasion where the Church, the members of Christ, gather round the name of the Lord Jesus. Now, on such occasions, is this leading truth before our souls, that we have One who is competent for every difficulty; One who cares for the glory of Christ; One who (for the love He bears Christ, and the value He sets on this work, and His grace toward us who, by His own power, have received Christ, and rest upon His work,) maintains our interests, looks after us, gives all our joys, helps us in our sorrows, fortifies us against the wiles of the devil, enables us to be simple, lowly, truthful, faithful, by His own grace, and deals with us by the word of God where we are letting slip either what is due to Christ's person, or to the truth of God?

Now, I maintain, that of all truths none can, as far as the Christian body on earth is concerned, take precedence of this for urgency and moment. The reason is quite simple. If men believed there was a divine person sent down from heaven, and that He was really present with us, to be looked to as directing the assembly, working by

whom He would, do you think that this would not be the great prominent fact? I do not mean His merely operating; for the Holy Ghost may work in a Wesleyan chapel, or by an Anglican clergyman. I entirely admit that, without the operation of the Holy Ghost, none could be converted, or get any truth from the word of God. Thus the operation of the Spirit is like His own sovereign grace; or, as the Lord compared it, to the wind, blowing where it lists. This is altogether another thing from the recognition of the presence of the Holy Ghost, and His acting freely and sovereignly by such of the members as He is pleased to employ in the Christian assembly.

Do Christians believe that there is such a presence of the Spirit to be counted on? Surely the word of God is plain; and this is what the saints of God are called to own, and find their blessing in. Can this be fully known except where there is faith in it? I do not mean that every individual Christian has got a right measure of faith — perhaps not one of us has; we are all too feeble about this and every other truth. Therefore, of course, the assembly of God does not mean to claim all it desires for each of Christ's members. It is not that all have arrived at that fulness of confidence and simplicity of reliance on the presence of the Holy Ghost that becomes us, especially as this is, we may say, one of the highest truths, though after all a very simple truth; for, as is usual, the highest truths are apt to be most simple when seen. What, for instance, can be simpler than Christ at the right hand of God in heaven? Yet, after all, is it not the kernel of the mystery, the choicest blessing of God in Him? So I know nothing plainer, yet profounder, than the presence of the Holy Ghost on earth — the answer to

that great truth of Christ at the right hand of God. At the same time, however simple it may be, it is most weighty. Every Christian, no matter where, should be instructed in this great truth; and I conceive we have a serious charge from God to labour for the instruction of the children of God wherever we meet them, as they have received Christ, that they should really believe also in the presence of the Holy Ghost on earth. But holding this, I do not admit it to be of God that every one who is received should be required to possess previous understanding or exercised faith in His presence. There are many individual members of Christ who are but feeble in it, and do not enter into its preciousness in any appreciable degree. But so long as the meeting as a whole, is guided by the Spirit; so long as there is a recognition of His presence, without any known, fixed, or sanctioned hindrance to Him; so long as there are no human devices or rules of men, or other arrangements which interfere with the action of the Holy Ghost according to the word, there, I am persuaded, all children of God are bound to be, and may be, thoroughly happy. Possibly, no doubt, mistakes may be made — we are all liable to err; but our comfort here is to know that we have One present who is alone equal to the correction of all errors, and who, in His own grace, has come down from heaven for the express purpose of seeing to the saints. Therefore, we need never despair, no matter what the difficulties; we should never give up our soul’s confidence that the Holy Ghost, who is present with and in us, will see to every hindrance and danger. Let our faith only be towards Him; let us only call on the name of the Lord; let us only be sure that He is here for the purpose — I will not say of honouring our faith, but, what is surer and better, for glorifying Christ.

This can never fail. At the same time, if there be faith in His presence, as that which after all is the great thought of the meeting as a whole, though not necessarily of every member of it, divine power will be there. But unless the meeting be so far governed by this great truth, it is evident there may be all kinds of human rules brought in which contradict the action of the Holy Ghost there. Details as to this we find in the epistles, and some, at least, will come before us, as I trust, on another occasion. I only refer to the subject to connect it with John 14 passingly, as showing the all-importance of this great truth of the personal presence of the Holy Ghost.

Allow me to repeat my question here. Supposing a Protestant Christian, or any other you like, believed a divine person to be present, do you think all would not take shape and be governed by so immense a truth? If it were only an earthly sovereign among men, I should like to know whether you or I would be anxious to appear to take the lead in any place where the ruler might be there for the purpose? Is it too much to say, supposing the king passed through his dominions or entered any scene of his government, that the duty of a subject, even the highest, would be so much the more to pay him honour? At least such is my opinion. And I think nothing temporally is happier, speaking as a man now, than for a people to feel, and own, and respect the rights of the sovereign. I fear to too many it is a mere name, and that every trace of authority, even revealed truth, is coming to little better in these days — everything, both outward and inward. But wherever there is the real understanding and the right feeling of what the will of God is in the matter of earthly authority, it is manifest that no man or woman who had the sovereign in their

own house — mark, even in their own house — could overlook such a fact, and behave as if he were not there.

But, beloved, when we think of the Church of God, it is not our own house, but God's; and what is due there? Surely, if anybody may act there in full right, it is One who is God. Accordingly it is too plain and palpable to be mistaken, that there is not, nor can be, faith in the presence of the Holy Ghost, without giving Him the place of precedence, and expecting His action in the various members according to Scripture. Indeed this is rarely pretended; for it is argued that in former days in the Church there were miracles, and apostles, and so on, but that all is changed now; so that these Scriptures are practically obsolete. Thus, when these people talk of the Holy Ghost, mostly they mean such great powers and wonderful officers as once existed; but as for a divine person for the first time deigning to come down and to be present on earth, and to act in the midst of the assembled saints of God, — the assembly that comes together to worship the Lord, and take His supper, or any other of the acts of Christian worship or edification, it is not believed. And the proof that it is not believed is, that every arrangement is made by man to take care that the machinery shall work just as if He were not there. They hope that God will bless the means used, will work by the instruments they arbitrarily set up; but the object is to make all things go on thoroughly well to the evident ignoring of His own personal presence there. Now no man would act thus who had the thought even of an august human personage present. This would cause a change of tone. There would be a line of conduct entirely different from ordinary habits. No man would walk about his house so much at ease if he knew that

the King was there; at least I should not admire the man who would, he would seem to me uncommonly full of himself. At the same time it is evident, that if there was the sense of a divine person present, all reverence, all the sense of His love, all that could be done to be subject to His direction there, would be the simple expression of one's faith.

Therefore it is, I feel, that owing so much as we do to the Lord, we need look well to it when we come together, that we act as those who believe in the presence of the Holy Ghost. Let us try our ways and deportments. Even small things betray how far we have faith in His real presence. Still more let us take heed if we venture on a hymn, or pray, or say a word, or whatever the act may be. The Lord grant that we may not bring into disrepute that precious truth which He has given to our souls! I am persuaded that no attacks, no reproaches from without, no persecution of enemies, no detraction of false brethren, no scorn of the world, can ever cast down those who have faith in the presence of the Holy Ghost. But of this I am equally sure, that our own practical unbelief, our delinquencies, our frequent grievous shortcomings, may and do open the door for the enemy; and these things more than any other circumstances are used of Satan to stumble such as are looking on in the present agitated and chaotic state of Christendom, anxiously looking out here and there to find some haven of rest in the midst of their trouble. And I do strongly press it on my brethren — for we all have a part, and, I do believe, not brothers only, but sisters also. I beseech them then to remember to what a place of dignity and responsibility they are called. Let them look well to it that their spirit, their very looks, their

behaviour, their words, if indeed they do say anything, may never be inconsistent with faith in the presence of the Holy Ghost.

A very few words before I close on the other two chapters. The end of John 15 presents the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, in a slightly different way from John 14. “When the Comforter is come” — again I call your attention to the strong impression that it is a personal Being who comes — “When the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me; and ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning.” The particular point that I apprehend is taught here is this — the heavenly character of the Holy Ghost’s testimony. In chap. 14 the Spirit brings to remembrance what Jesus said; in chap. 15 He testifies of Christ Himself, and they testify because they have been with Him from the beginning. What the disciples saw, when they were with Him from the beginning, was, of course, the earthly side, and the Holy Ghost comes and gives His heavenly supplement. Thus, it is the Holy Ghost who comes from heaven, who knows the place and the glory of Christ, and who is sent expressly, not merely to help them in the remembrance of what they saw and heard upon earth, but to bring down, for the knowledge and joy of their souls, what He alone could tell them of the heavenly glory of Christ. In a word, therefore, we have the Holy Ghost here regarded as the bringer of fresh knowledge — of a new and heavenly testimony of Christ, they, of course, not losing the previous earthly testimony, in which the Holy Ghost indeed also strengthened them to bear witness of Christ.

In John 16 we have still more advance as to the Spirit of God. Our Lord had told them in chap. 14, that instead of sorrowing because He was going away, they ought to rejoice; a word of wondrous grace, because it shows how highly the Lord thinks of our love, and how He counts upon our unselfish delight in His own blessedness and glory. Surely it was a blessed transition for Him to step from the deepest sorrows and sufferings of the cross into the presence of God the Father in heaven! No wonder, therefore, that the Lord counts on their sense of all, and that they would rejoice because He was going to the Father, though a great loss in itself to them. But now He takes up the other side, and says they ought to rejoice for themselves, too, as it were. Sorrow had filled their heart; He says, “Nevertheless, I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away.” Chapter 14 says it is expedient for Him; the sixteenth chapter shows it is expedient for them; and for this reason, that if He did not go, the Comforter would not come — clearly proving what has been already stated, that there is a necessary absence of Christ from the earth in heaven in order for the Holy Ghost to descend. “If I go not away, the Comforter will not come; but if I depart I will send him unto you.” Thus, we find the personal mission of the Holy Ghost, though in different connections, common to all these chapters. “And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment.” Here we have, first of all, His relation to the world. The Holy Ghost, in most important respects, takes the place of the law. In the dealings with Israel the law was the great reprover; now it is the Holy Ghost, who, instead of being limited to a particular people, is come to reprove the world, no matter where, no matter in what state; it might be

moral, or religious, or zealous for the law; but He reproves the world of sin — not merely of sins, but “of sin.” It is the state here below of sin. Again, He convinces them, it is added, “of righteousness and of judgment.” “Of sin” — not because they broke the law, but — “because they believe not on me; of righteousness” — not because I have kept the law for their righteousness, but — “because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more.” Righteousness now is inseparable from Christ; He is the only righteousness that is valid for a soul in the sight of God. One does not speak of what may be of social worth, what has its place on earth, or among men here below — all this, of course, has its proper place; but now eternity comes into view, and accordingly Christ is the only life, or way of life. Hence, not to believe in Him is fatal, no matter what else there may be. So, again, no matter what apparent righteousness there may be, there is no other righteousness at all for God. And even so it is not as displayed here below, but Christ glorified at the right hand of God the Father. This is righteousness, that the Father had put the earth-rejected Christ there. In Christ, who Himself receives honour from the Father on high, do we find the righteousness we are made by grace. (See 2 Cor. 5)

Then there is another and very solemn addition to the verse — “and ye see me no more.” The world has lost Christ. He came, and this not to judge, but to bring in blessing. He had all power, and could have introduced the kingdom, as far as His power and glory were concerned. But the state of the world in relation to God was such, that to have done so would have slighted sin, and slurred over the glory of God that had been totally

compromised. Therefore, in point of fact, although the Messiah came, and there was no defect in Him — although man was responsible to receive Him, nevertheless, man being guilty before God, it was quite impossible, morally, that the kingdom could be established then. It would have been a denial of man's ruin and of God's glory, and neither could be on the part of Jesus. Therefore it is that Jesus never presents Himself, as has been observed in this gospel, as the Christ. Others may so speak of Him, but He never speaks of Himself as Messiah (save as acknowledging the truth when it was confessed); and for this simple reason, — in the gospel of John He has ever the consciousness of being a rejected Christ, yet withal God Himself, the Son. Hence, therefore, although He may be on earth, and accomplish prophecy, and others call Him Christ, the Son of David, and so on, yet He styles Himself the Son of man, who, in His own glory, is the only-begotten Son of God. There is everywhere the calm distinct sense of His own personal glory, which no rejection or shame could possibly interfere with for a moment. Accordingly our characteristic and proper blessings are built upon His rejected but most glorious person (see Matt. 16), and are the answer to His glory as the exalted man in the resurrection power of the Son of God.

Thus, then, the Spirit of God takes a function at this present time towards the world, suitable to Him to whom He bears witness, making the Scriptures, as it were, the text on which He preaches of Christ. The world accordingly, not believing in Christ, is convicted of sin; and such, too, is His demonstration of righteousness and judgment. The righteousness is out of sight, and so

slighted; the judgment, too, is not executed here below, where the world has its own way; but the cross as well as exaltation of Christ is the standing proof that the prince of this world is judged in God's sight. This world, as such, has never been worth a believing man's heed since the cross of Christ. Up to that time there had been long and gracious patience on God's part: since then God regards it as His enemy; it is what the intelligent saint knows to be the deadly enemy to God; and just as flesh found its character. so the world also; both were decided by the cross of Christ. To the world the Spirit keeps up this testimony; and how? Not according to the doctrine which supposes all the world to have the Spirit, but by the express contrary, by being outside the world. If the world believed in Christ, the Holy Ghost would dwell there; but, being unbelieving, the Holy Ghost is outside it; and consequently He is a reprover of the world, and not one who dwells in it as a Paraclete. Such alone He is among the saints of God.

Accordingly another point follows — how the Spirit deals with the disciples. This, being wholly different, is described in a new manner: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth." The Holy Ghost will bring all things to remembrance. It is not merely testifying to Christ in His heavenly glory, but now there is no limit; it is Himself personally come, with and in the saints, as we saw. Accordingly He leads them into all truth. Here Christ says, "He shall not speak of himself." Bear in mind, this does not mean that the Spirit shall never speak about Himself. I suppose there are many who imagine such to be the meaning of the clause; but I must assure them

that they are mistaken. The Holy Ghost speaks a great deal about Himself in the epistle to the Romans, in the epistles to the Corinthians, in the Ephesians, in the Galatians. I may say, that in almost all the epistles the Holy Ghost gives us a vast deal of instruction about Himself. This, then, is not the meaning at all, but that He does not speak from His own independent authority. He is acting in communion with the Father, and for the purpose of glorifying the Son. Accordingly this is what evidently falls in with the context — “He shall not speak of [or, from] himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak.” He comes down to do honour to Christ: what He hears from the Father, as well as from the Son, this He tells us. He has on earth been pleased to take, if we may so say reverentially, a place subject to this design; even as the Son took a place here below subject to the Father. The Son was divine equally with the Father; nevertheless, He came simply to do His will as a servant on earth. So the Holy Ghost deigns now to be the servant of the Father’s purposes and the Son’s glory, even as the Son was the minister of the Father before.

Hence it is said, “Whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come.” Nor is it merely to lead us into all the truth that Jesus had revealed before. There were things we could not then bear. Also, He speaks of “things to come” — an important word for souls that despise God’s revelations of the future. It is not, I apprehend, merely that we have the revealed word of God, but, by virtue of His revelation now complete, and having the Holy Ghost Himself in us, the Church ought to be the interpreter of everything around in this world. There is nothing that the believer is not now competent by the Holy Ghost to

understand, if he only use the word of God in the power of the Spirit. The Christian has, in a certain sense, a prophetic as well as a priestly place. He is called to discern the times; he may read what passes in the world, and ought to do it. His senses, no doubt, may not be exercised to discern good and evil; and so he may be dull of hearing, as the apostle reproached the Hebrews; but I speak now of what, by virtue of the Holy Ghost, we are regarded here as competent for.

“He shall glorify me,” says the Lord. Here we find the prime object now made most apparent, — whether it be revealing the truth, speaking what He hears, or showing things to come; this is the centre around which, so to speak, all His offices and His functions find their full operation. “He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you.” For this and other reasons, I believe, it is that we never hear, as far as I know, of the government or rule of the Holy Ghost. Among some it is a common expression, and commoner among intelligent Christians than any others; but I do not think the better of it for this. The fact is, we cannot coin or consecrate a phrase for the truth. The acknowledgment of the presence of the Holy Ghost is a truth of the gravest character; but presence and sovereign operations are not the same thing as rule. I believe I am subject to Scripture in this, as I certainly desire to speak also with all worthy respect of those whose language in this does not to my mind agree with the word of God. But I may observe that the reason seems to be, that the Spirit is making good the lordship of Christ: He is exalting Him, not glorifying Himself. Hence it is that the Spirit of God is never presented as ruling the Church. It is perfectly clear and sure He is the

person who acts sovereignly. This I admit, and hold unqualifiedly; but when you speak of “government,” you assert something else, which does seem to me not according to the exactness of truth, and which tends to displace the Lord from His rightful position, and to disorder the relation of the saints towards the Lord. The rejected Jesus is the one Lord in the official sense (for in another the Father and Spirit are, as being God). The Holy Ghost is present to maintain this, the will and truth of God. Hence He acts in the midst of the saints to exalt Christ before our eyes. The Spirit works in and with and by us; but the Lord Jesus is our Lord, and is so revealed of the Spirit to us, who, therefore, puts us in the position of subjection to Him. He has taken the place of glorifying Christ now, and imprints the character of His bondmen on us.

However, this is only by the way. My main object tonight is to leave the distinct, and, I trust, full impression that these words of the Saviour are intended to let fall on the heart, of the personal presence of the Holy Ghost sent down from Jesus Christ at the right hand of God the Father. May this precious truth not merely have increasingly a place in our hearts as individuals, but more than ever be prized in the assemblies of God on earth. The Lord keep a single soul from abandoning that truth, no matter what the difficulty, as well as from practically acknowledging any assembly where the Holy Ghost is not allowed His due place according to Scripture.

"Receive ye the Holy Spirit"

Lecture 5 - John 20:17-23.

If there is no part of Scripture, perhaps, which has not suffered from being dislocated from its context, there are few portions which have been injured more by this unnatural divorce than the one which I have just read. It is impossible to enter into the force of the particular communications, the dealing of the Lord with Mary Magdalene, and the words of the Lord as well as His acts on the same day at even, unless we bear in mind that it is in the strictest connection with His resurrection from the dead, and this, too, as the Son of God. It is by raising dead men that He is defined as such. (Rom. 1:4.) This emphatically is the view the Holy Ghost takes of Him in this chapter — not as raising others, but as rising Himself. The perfect ease of the circumstances, the undisturbed clothes, laid not confusedly but in their due order, the napkin that was about His head in one place, the rest of the linen garments in another, — these were the evidence to any one, who looked upon them with the least discerning eye, that all was done as peacefully, whatever the glory of it, as when a man rises from the bed on which he has spent a night of rest. In truth, it was the Son of God that had accomplished that work of grace on which He had been sent of the Father. It was not merely as an object of God’s power raised from the dead. This is true in its place and season, and elsewhere enforced. God did raise Him from the dead; and Paul and Peter insist on it distinctly. But it is also true that He Himself arose from the dead. “Destroy this temple,” says He, even in an

early part of this gospel, “and in three days I will raise it up.” “I have power,” He says again, in John 10, “to lay down my life, and power to take it again.” At the same time, He takes care to add, “This commandment have I received of my Father.” Thus there was not only the perfect blending of obedience to His Father, but the divine power which determined Him to be Son of God by such a resurrection. There was the very same power, only put forth still more blessedly, in which He had raised the dead Himself, as for instance, Jairus’s daughter, the widow’s son, Lazarus, and others. As He said, looking on to Lazarus, “This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.”

So now He raises Himself. But even Peter and John (and the latter is the one who records it) show how feebly the truth of His resurrection, according to the Scripture, at first penetrated their minds. John tells it, albeit to his own shame and Peter’s too, that they saw and believed. They were true children of God, as we know; nevertheless they had but poorly entered into the revealed mind of God. They had not apprehended the “must be” of the Scriptures (Luke 24:44-46); neither had they yet beheld the grace or the glory of God in the person of the Son of God as alone adequately expressed in His resurrection. They saw the facts; they discerned the evidences; and they returned to their own home; for such is the powerless result, even where such facts are weighed by the mere human spirit, however just the conclusion that may be drawn.

It was not so with Mary. She might be as little acquainted with the glory of the resurrection, or the word of God about it, as Peter or John; but at all events

there was an answer to her heart's wants in Jesus; and, consequently, there was such a sorrow within, that she could not but hang over the place where His body had lain: she could not be contented so easily as the two apostles. In point of fact, there was no home for her in this world, and therefore it was that she lingered over the empty tomb of the Saviour. And what brings out, too, the perfect absorption of her spirit in her thoughts and love of Jesus was this that when she looks again into that tomb which she had known to be empty just before (for so she had brought the word, and truly), and now sees two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain, she feels and manifests no such alarm as the women described elsewhere. Under ordinary circumstances, what surprise and fear such a sight must have been to her! Our evangelist attributes to her no such emotion in the smallest degree. Her heart was so possessed with the want of Jesus who was taken from her, that the presence of all the angels, I may say, would have left her comparatively unaffected. The two angels who were there say, "Woman, why weepest thou?" And she tells out the feeling of her heart — "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have lain him. And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus." But at first, not recognising the Master, and thinking it was but the gardener, she answers His question too: "Sir, if thou hast borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away." One word breaks the spell, recalls her to the truth, and reveals Himself. It was His voice, the Good Shepherd's, calling His own sheep by name. "Mary," says Jesus. She, at once turning herself towards Him, confesses Him her

“Master;” and then it is that we have the words on which I propose first to dwell a little.

Let me observe that “Touch me not” is not by any means an adequate rendering of the expression; and inasmuch as I am addressing those who are familiarly acquainted with the Scriptures, and among them many individuals who, I presume, have more or less the power and means of judging what I say, I feel the more free to speak out plainly that which I believe to be the truth The fact is, that the word which is employed here implies much more than simply a touch. It is the verb which should be translated “handle.” So, too, it should be in Colossians 2, to which I call your attention for a moment. The apostle refers to the contrast between the dictates of tradition and ordinance and a dead and risen Christ for the purpose of putting aside what only diverts from Christ. We have done with such language as “touch not, taste not, handle not,” which may suit men alive in the world, not those dead in the Christ. But, as every one knows who has considered at all the matter, the climax is really inverted in our common English Bible. The order appears in a way exactly contrary to the truth; for the real thought is, first of all, “handle not;” then, “taste not;” and finally, not even “touch.” Thus, it is a descending climax, if I may so say, the most familiar thing of all, the handling, being put first; then the tasting, which might be considerably less; and, finally, not even a touch. This is the manner of human safeguards; this is man’s way of preserving flesh in this world. He has no other means. What device but this can nature adopt to keep itself from being overwhelmed in an evil world — what but these various restraints and negations of evil? Christianity is of a totally different

nature. It is the revelation of a Deliverer, God and man in one person, who comes into the world, and dies to the evil in atonement, wins the victory over all, and rises victorious into the presence of God, where He eventually brings all that are His. This associates the Christian with Christ on the foundation of His work of reconciliation to God, and His triumph at the right hand of God. Thus Christianity is the practical carrying out of this into effect by the Holy Ghost first in the souls of Christians, as by-and-by in their bodies also. And this manifestly is the great doctrine of the epistle to the Colossians as well as of Ephesians. What had those thus blessed with Christ and dead to the world to do with such ordinances as “handle not, taste not, touch not”?

That this account of the word is correct I have no doubt whatever, as indeed it is one that would not be disputed by any who are competent to judge of such a matter. It is, of course, entirely apart from any views that might be considered by adversaries to be peculiar (though I know not why such sounds should be heard: I cannot on any account admit that a fair interpretation of God’s word should be treated as a peculiar view). I hope it will not be regarded as a question of the number of those who really accept it. But however this may be, what I am now saying would be, and has been, admitted by persons of the most diverse views, provided they really search into and examine the matter of which I now treat. If this be so, the expression of our Lord to Mary Magdalene is not exactly given in “Touch me not.” It is rather, “Do not handle.” He tells her not to yield to her impulse in familiarly laying hold of His person. What confirms it is this, that the particular part of the word (μή μου ἅπτου, and not merely μὴ ἅψῃ) supposes a continuous handling

of Him. In Colossians it is not so; there it is a single act, which might be ever so transient. But here it is a continuous act; that is, it would give this force, “Do not persist in clinging to me.” Such is the idea conveyed by the word and its form here.

This appears to me to give much more force and distinctness to the passage, because Mary of Magdala here represents one who is still looking to Jesus according to the hopes of her nation, as well as the desires of the heart; one who could not but sorrow over His bodily absence, who would have had a mournful pleasure in thinking of His dead body even still there. Thus we can readily understand the instinct, as it were, with which she laid hold of the Saviour directly that she knew Him. But at once He forbids it; and this is the more striking, because, as has been often remarked, in the gospel of Matthew, when the Galilean women seized His feet, He does not refuse it from them, but, on the contrary, accepted their homage. Nay, more, in this very chapter of John, we see how the Lord invites incredulous Thomas eight days after to reach his finger, and thrust his hand into His side.

Surely then we cannot fail to learn the weighty lesson that is conveyed under actions so various and even opposite, performed nearly about the same time, the Saviour refusing in the one case what He accepts in the other, and in a third even demands. There was certainly some wise intent in His mind. Nor is it to be allowed for an instant that our Saviour loved Mary Magdalene less than the others who followed Him from Galilee. To what, then, are we to impute the difference? and how are we to account for the fact, that the same Holy Ghost should give in Matthew the acceptance of bodily homage, and

in John this renunciation of it? The reason is as simple as it is instructive. In the first gospel we have, it is true, the rejection of the Messiah by His people the Jews, and the purpose to which God's grace would put that rejection, in meanwhile sending out the gospel to the Gentiles, and calling disciples out from them all, just because the chosen nation had refused their King. How blessed that God's grace refuses, as it were, to be inactive! It must go forth in the energy of His own love, and if the Jews refuse, it is impossible that He should not take fresh measures, and bring in even better blessings. If the ancient people forsook their own mercies, there are others, poor and wretched, who had been left comparatively unheeded by His love in times past. If they were so unbelieving and ungrateful and blind to the day-spring from on high that had visited them, and if they had consummated their unbelief in the rejection and death of their own Messiah, God, who had turned that very rejection into the accomplishment of redemption, sends out the glad tidings to all nations under heaven. Yet, with all this development of the resources of grace to the Gentile, Matthew gives the Galilean women holding Jesus risen and worshipping Him. What a testimony, that though the Messiah was rejected by the nation, and though God would turn that rejection to the account of His grace, there is the greatest care taken to maintain the hopes of Israel on an immutable foundation. Granted that their rejection of the Messiah was their ruin; but was this all? It was righteous; but what would grace do? The time was coming when the mercy of God would turn their impenitent hearts to Him whom they had too long scorned, and so bind their hopes and weld them, so to speak, to the throne of the glorious Son of man in such a

manner, that when the moment came for God to judge the world in righteousness, they would be received in grace. The chain of divine mercy would be found to be so strongly riveted to the death and resurrection of the Lord, that, though there might be a postponement of their hopes, there would be a basis never to be shaken, and the grace of God will then bless them to the full extent of His sovereign purposes in the latter day.

This is to my mind fully intimated, as elsewhere, so in Matthew. Hence, the final chapter of this gospel furnishes a pledge of this, given not merely in word, as in the prediction of Matt. 24, but in the typical worship of Matt. 28. I believe that the facts conveying this are before us in the action already alluded to. The Galilean women are a kind of foreshadowing of a remnant of the Jews, who in the latter day will be brought by grace and cling to Jesus, will seek and find in Him the Lord, will look for Him and cleave to Him. Nor will the Lord reject their worship, the form of it too implying His actual and bodily presence, after He comes again and meets with His chosen people. The Jew, as such, is hardly called on to “walk by faith, and not by sight,” as a Christian is. For he will literally see the Lord; as it is said in Zech. 12, “They shall look upon him whom they have pierced.” But they shall look upon Him. It is not merely believing; they shall look upon Him. Accordingly, the fact of these Galilean women receiving the Lord and thus holding Him fast, and of His accepting their worship, cannot but bring before us, in my judgment, the pledge of the Lord’s great mercy towards a remnant of the ancient people in the latter day, when He shall appear to reign over them here below. And for this reason it is, as I suppose, that there is no ascension scene described — a

great perplexity to critics, but as plain as possible to the believer. His ascension inserted here would have taken Him out of this connection, whereas, on the contrary, the having Him here bodily in their midst, and not a word said in the chapter about His departure to heaven, leaves Him to be, as it were, the everlasting joy of those whose affliction He will have visited and banished in His mercy. But in John 20 we have exactly the converse of this. We have a woman who was fully imbued with Israelitish feelings, who evidences still a clinging to these expectations, which the Jewish heart would naturally indulge in now that Christ had reappeared from the grave, and with the more keenness, because the cross and the grave had for a season deprived her of all hope. She accordingly was not for letting Christ go. In this instinctive love she lays hold of Him, but He bids her not thus to cling to Him; “for I am not yet ascended to my Father.” It is otherwise He is going to be known. He is about to quit the only scene which the remnant of Israel would connect with the Messiah. That hope would not fade, but bloom in its own time and place. But now He was taking a remnant out of Israel. In point of fact, it was thus that Christianity began. “The Lord,” it is said, “added to the Church daily such as should be saved.”

Mary Magdalene was a kind of sample of this. She was one that up to this time had been cleaving to the hope that the Lord would come and bring in glory and blessing here on earth in the midst of Israel. But the Lord let her know that that is not the way in which He is pleased to bless now, nor is this the sort of blessing that this gospel reveals. The way in which He was to be known by the Christian is as ascended to His Father. Therefore it was unseasonable to think of keeping Him

here. Even if it could be, how far below that which He had in His heart and was now intimating to the disciples through the astonished woman of Magdala! So far from being more distant from the saints, on the contrary, there is no such nearness as when we are united to Jesus at the right hand of God. This may seem to be a strange method of effecting union. It is anything but meeting the thoughts of flesh; but, in point of fact, flesh is not the means nor the manner of our association with the Saviour. If we look at Israel, it is thus after the flesh; for He was born of them, being a Jew naturally by descent and birth. It is not thus the Christian knows Him, but expressly in contrast with it; as St. Paul says, “Though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more.” After a far better sort do we know Him. To know Him here below, the Messiah, was true blessedness; and Christ gave in the case of the Galilean woman a pledge of this as it will be accomplished in a day still future But it is not, for all that, the pattern of the knowledge of Christ that is found in Christianity.

The essence of our privilege is, that when the work of redemption is done, Christ takes His place as the heavenly man at the right hand of God. Accordingly, Christianity is not merely blessing coming down into the earth, though this was perfectly true, as preparing the way for itself. But the scene and character of our blessing is heavenly — the person of that blessed One who came down being now on high; and we know our blessing in Him there. There is nothing more blessed as the manifestation of God than the Lord Jesus seen here below. But the special position which gives our place and association with Him is found only in Him on high,

after He has done the work of putting away our sins, and of vindicating God's nature to His glory about everything that could compromise His nature in this world. Christ is now gone up into heaven, and there He is revealed to our souls, and there we, too, are united with Him. Consequently, as He needs to go on high in order to it, so, too, the Holy Ghost needs to come down. Hence the presence of the Holy Ghost on earth is the necessary answer to the absence of Jesus at the right hand of God after redemption; and these two are the great and necessary constituents of Christianity.

Accordingly, then, our Lord in the spirit of this bids Mary Magdalene not to be clinging to Him; for He was not yet ascended to His Father. Thus He was now to be known. Thus the believers were to be put in relationship with Him, — taken out of their old thoughts and expectations, and put in connection with the love and glory into which He was just going, even the Father's house on high.

Let me refer to a scripture in the Old Testament which may help to give a little clearness as to the present work of God — a scripture, too, which is not always understood If we turn to Micah 5, there is the well-known passage relative to the birth of our Lord: "Thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." Here we have His human birth of Israel, as well as His eternal glory — One who, though born of a woman and a Jew, was, nevertheless, "from of old, from everlasting."

Who this person is, there is not the smallest difficulty in determining. It is the same that is described in the first

verse. He is the ruler of Israel of whom it was said, that they should “smite the judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek.” Clearly it is the humiliation of the Messiah — One born in Bethlehem — One belonging to Judah, and who, though here born, was nevertheless from everlasting. He was divine as truly as He was human. We have evidently thus, in that verse, a group of the most weighty and blessed truths about Jesus Christ, which no wit of man could ever have anticipated, which God in His own absolutely perfect knowledge gives beforehand in all simplicity and fulness. This is what manifests the gravamen of Israel’s guilt; that He being what He is in His own person, as well as their Judge, should be smitten, and above all by them, with the rod upon the cheek. “Therefore,” it is said in the third verse, “he will give them up.” This is exactly what has followed. The smitten Judge of Israel has abandoned Israel for a season, “until the time that she that travaileth hath brought forth.” In Rev. 12 a woman destined to great glory is seen bringing forth. Great is the purpose of God for the last days. This is first presented; then the dragon falls, and the struggle for the earth and about the earthly people goes on, when the Judge of Israel returns, and the ancient people once more resume their place, but thenceforth under their Messiah, here below. So here we learn of a return to Jewish purposes in the ways of God for the latter day. How far have we got in fact? Christ has appeared and been rejected by the Jews, whom He has given up. From the cross, not only are they given up nationally, but God has been calling out from among them a certain portion to be united with the Gentiles who believe as the body of Christ on high. These are they who are said to be added together in Acts 2 — “added to the Church1 daily such as should be

saved.” But when the moment comes for the accomplishment of God’s future and everlasting purposes for Israel on earth, then, says He, “the remnant of his brethren [instead of being taken out as now to form part of His Church] shall return unto the children of Israel.” Now they lose all their Israelitish character to form the one new man; then they will go back again to the old plans and ways of God about His earthly people. Nothing can, to my mind, be plainer than the wonderful way in which all truth, old and new, harmonizes together. It is just the fruit and proof of having got hold of the truth, that it gives us additional means of seeing new beauty and order in that which, without this fresh knowledge, looks disjointed — an immense mass of materials that we have no means of rightly assorting. But the moment that God says to our souls on any part of His truth, “Let there be light,” then, indeed, we find all begins to change; and although there may be accessions of light, still God in His own glorious way shows us how blessedly the new fits into the old. Nor is any one thing so much a key-stone as that which seemingly has brought in confusion, disruption, and the apparent breach of His purposes. But, in point of fact, no purpose ever fails. There may be the need of waiting, and long for the longing heart seems the delay. Unbelief seems to have it all its own way; but faith alone is always right; and every word that God has spoken shall be accomplished, every purpose infallibly effected, and this by Christ’s death.

Our Lord here discloses in principle an entirely new thing, beginning with the Jew who would feel it most. You will observe in the gospel of John how all is connected with His person. It is not a question of

dispensation, but of Himself, and here in ascension. Indeed, there is nothing more important to understand, after we rest on His redemption, if we would go on to enter into Christianity. If you look at anything else, the persons connected with it are all comparatively insignificant; but take away Christ out of Christianity, and what is left? Besides, will the Holy Ghost put His seal on any dishonour done to the Lord Jesus, or any omission of His person, any slight of His work, any forgetfulness of His glory?

Jesus, then, makes first known to Mary that He was about to ascend to the Father, and that, therefore, bodily homage was inconsistent with the manner in which He would reveal Himself, as shown in this gospel. For John's account, if you look comprehensively at his testimony and take a general retrospect, you will find to consist of two great parts. The first is the revelation of the person of the Son of God, and of His work; the next is the revelation of another person, equally divine, who, when Christ goes away, takes His place with the disciples here below. Evidently in this you have Christianity; for you have Christ Himself the object of faith, and the Holy Ghost the power for making good the glory of Christ in the Church as well as in the Christian;

Of these it is particularly the Christian part which we have in the message Mary takes from the Lord to the disciples. "Go to my brethren." Here we find the first distinct putting of the Christian in relation to Himself. "Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; to my God, and your God." Thus, besides placing us in relationship to Him (a fact itself of immense value), He assigns also their relationship to God. And this is not at all according to

the ancient forms of blessing. It is not the revelation of His might as protecting His poor pilgrims upon the earth. The Almighty God is nowhere spoken of. Neither, again, is there His governmental way in the midst of Israel, where He was the Jehovah-God of that people. Here all is in relation to Christ, who is going above. Therefore, says He, “Go to my brethren, and say, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.” How blessed! What the Father is to the Son, He is to the sons. What He, who was His Father, was as God to the blessed Man who had put away sin, such He is, and nothing less to those whose sins have been put away. God was not only revealed fully in relation to Jesus as God and Father, but such He is now to us by His redemption and in resurrection.

I do not speak now of any vague knowledge of God as fatherly in His ways. We know that when Israel shall be in great distress, Isaiah the prophet says for them, “Truly thou art our Father, if Abraham acknowledge us not.” This language clearly is in no respect intended to describe their relationship, but to furnish comfort, to them; just as one might say to a little ill-used orphan in the street, “My child, you have been treated ill indeed; henceforth let me be a father to you.” This does not, of course, mean, nor would it be understood to mean, in the strict sense, as when there follows a formal adoption into a family as son and heir. It was only nationally Israel could claim such a place, as we see in Exodus 4, etc.; but there is more than this here. For One had come down to earth who was Son, and knew the Father as none other could know Him. One had been here who was on earth, and in humanity, as perfectly the object of the Father’s delight as when simply God in His presence.

For never had He said a word, never felt an emotion, never had a thought passing through His breast, or a motive that actuated Him, which was not the perfect reflection of the goodness of God Himself. Jesus alone answered morally in mind, in nature, and in ways, to all that was in God; so that He looked down from heaven to find that one Object ever for Him to delight in. There was not a creature in heaven that could detain His eyes and heart for an instant. He looked down upon this world in the midst of all its sins and iniquities, which were ever steaming pestilent vapour up to heaven, and occasionally drawing down blows of stern judgment on guilty man. But now, for the first time since the world began, there was not merely a catching, as it were, some distant gleam of His glory, and God delighting in an Enoch or a Noah, onward to that blessed One; but there He was Himself, so that heaven opens and God the Father sends down the Holy Ghost, and, mark, on Him as man; for how can it be otherwise? It was not a question of sending down the Holy Ghost on Him as God; as man He was anointed of the Holy Ghost. “Him hath God the Father sealed” — “the Son of man.” And this is what is so blessed, that God Himself had to look upon a man to find what for the first time met His every judgment and every feeling — all the moral mind of God — all the affections of God. Of course I speak now figuratively alone.

And now over the Blessed One had passed an immense change. A new scene is found, and the heavens are veiled in blackness, and God Himself within that thickest darkness deals with Him. It was the very hour when man was permitted, led on by the instigation of Satan, to rise up and overwhelm the rejected Messiah; and in the

midst of that scene God breaks forth against sin (charged on His holy person as an offering for it) in all His majesty and absolute abhorrence of evil. The dread reckoning time was come. The divine judgment of all iniquity and indifference, of wrongs against man, and of rebellion against God, fell on the Holy One. Thus it was not simply man's hour, nor was it only the power of darkness; but also and above all it was God's hour, when His unsparing holiness broke on the head of the Sin-bearer, even His own Son, who gave Himself up, the responsible victim, the sacrifice, to bear the judgment of our sins on the tree. The consequence was, that all that God could feel, without a single mitigating circumstance to break the force, so to speak, of His wrath and indignation, spent itself on the Son of God; and therefore is this redemption through His blood absolutely perfect. God has not a single word to say more — not an act further needed to vindicate His character, that has not already fallen on the Lord Jesus Christ. Hence it is that the revelation of God's nature, and of the Father's love, has no reserve. The holy character of God has kept back nothing. All that He feels against sin has been expended on the Lord Jesus. The consequence is, that everything that is in Him, as Father and as God, now turns to be exclusively in our favour. For our evil having been so perfectly judged, it is a question now for God, not merely as Father, but as God, to show His perfect satisfaction in the redemption that the Lord Jesus has accomplished.

Hence it is that our Lord Jesus speaks thus in the message to the disciples. They had known Him turn to His Father when there was not a single person that could sympathize with His sorrows, even while the Man

of Sorrows in this world, and not yet atoning for sin. They had known how before day-break He was with His Father. They had known, too, how, when others slept, He was still before His Father. They had known that not a single burden which met His eye, not a single grief of men that passed before Him, but entered His heart here below, and led Him out towards His Father. (Matt. 8) But another and deeper thing came out now — what God felt against our sins imputed to Him, not against Himself; for, on the contrary, He never was more the object of God's ineffable delight than at that very moment when He was bearing the judgment of our sins. Nevertheless, God's character was concerned that it should be no make-believe suffering, but as real an endurance of divine judgment on His part who entered that place before God and in behalf of us, as before it was a real enjoyment of absolute communion with the Father through all His life.

It may thus be seen how blessed is that which we have in the message by Mary. What He knew as Son of God, born into the world, He turns over, as it were, to us. It is not, of course, that we could have that which pertained to Him as a divine person. He is and was the only-begotten Son before all worlds. There clearly we could have no place along with Him, because in this He is to us simply an object of worship and loving service. But He, the Son before all worlds, was born Son of God. He was Son of God as man here below, and this among men it is the province of the evangelist Luke to trace. Alas! I, on the contrary, was a child of wrath, and so were you. We were every one children of wrath naturally. He was in His human nature, as well as in His divine, Son of

God. “That holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.”

With man as he is, there was no communion possible for God. On the contrary, there was an absolute contrariety between Him and man in relation to God. His relationship was one of perfect delight to God the Father. Man, being a sinner, was in a condition of evil and wrath. But redemption delivers him that believes from all the evil and all the wrath. If it has not done this and more, how is it possible to trust the word of God? Where is the meaning of its constant and solemn warnings to faith? If it has thus testified to me of the cross, does my soul rest upon it? Am I satisfied on God’s authority that in His sight there is no evil left on me as a believer in Christ — that it is all blotted out and gone? I do not speak of it as a matter of experience. Of course, all who have a conscience feel their evil, and we feel it the more because we are believers. We must detest sin the more, the more we know His love. We should judge all sin precisely because we are not going to be judged for it: if we were judged, we must be lost for it. Thus, what Christ has done puts us who believe in the position of judging it now. The Christian is responsible to pass, so to speak, God’s sentence upon it now; in ourselves, of course, especially, but also when we come across it in those who bear the name of Christ with whom we are united as members of His one body. If evil be detestable anywhere, it is especially so in the child of God. Now this is precisely where we need the comfort of redemption and the power of the Spirit.

Accordingly we have to weigh what the Saviour here intimates. It is not merely remission of sins, nor is it only that we are born of God. There are a great many

Christians who seem never to get beyond a certain measure of blessing, the least which consists with living to God at all. But they seem never to apprehend the new relationships of the grace in which they stand. The basis and form of these relationships, both with God and Himself, we have seen in the previous message. “Tell my brethren, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; to my God, and your God.” Thus I can look up as one that Jesus is not ashamed to call His brother. I can look up and see His Father and mine, His God and mine, with the absolute certainty that I am thus brought to Himself in all the value and nearness of Jesus, and that the work He has finished and God has accepted is the moral ground of my salvation and blessing. To this work God, so to speak, is now in His grace to us doing justice. Is it too much to say decidedly that justice would not be done to that infinite work of the cross, unless He so accounted us according to the words of Jesus? Indeed, this was no hard-wrung return; for it is what God Himself designed. He desired to have objects that should enter into His love; and more than this, to have these relationships, and none less established. He had beheld the Son a man on earth; and now He says, as it were, “I must have sons; I must have souls, once sinners, made children to myself. I had a people once, and they, in spite of untold goodness, were as wretched and shameful as sin could make any; but now I will form to myself, as a new people, a family not of the world, even while in it.”

This is what God is now occupied with in His love through Christ the Lord — the freshly-accomplished work of the cross, and the resurrection of which it is the occasion. But these are the relationships in which those called are to stand. Jesus owns them as His brethren,

and this after His death and resurrection. Why not His brethren when He was here below? Why is it that rationalism, why is it that legal religionism, opposed as they may seem, always make our relationship to be with Jesus here below? For this simple reason, that, whether it be religionism or rationalism, they know not God, and judge not sin according to the truth. They talk much about both, no doubt; but we know there may be a great deal said without the reality; whereas all thoughts of God and of sin are totally short of the truth until I bow to God's judgment of sin in the cross. Therefore it is that the only thing that makes it possible to have holy relationships with God according to His mind, is that foundation which is laid in the cross of Christ.

See this in the case of that system known as Irvingism, if I may refer to such a thing, and it may be wholesome in such days as these. It is not its frenzied movements, its false prophecies, its ecclesiastical idolatry, that ought to be so grievous to the child of God, though I need not say how pained one should be at all these things in those bearing the name of Jesus. But what is it that makes it so evil? Why, first and foremost, this — the dishonour done to the person of Christ in order to make out union and sympathy with us. We being sinful, and having actually sinned, it was supposed, in order to make Christ united to us, that Christ must take our humanity in the fallen peccable state in which it is in us. Such was Irving's fundamental tenet; and this, as it sacrificed Christ, so made redemption impossible. The direct consequence, apart from such ruinous heterodoxy, was the abandonment of God's judgment of sin on the cross as the basis of salvation. Incarnation takes the place of atonement. Jesus here below in this world was looked at

as united with us, instead of seeing us united with Him in heaven, which alone is Christianity, consequent on the putting away of sin by His sacrifice.

To confound incarnation with union is confusion, and a device of the enemy. Nor is it found merely in a system so extravagant as Irvingism; but in all sacerdotalism, Puseyism, “Ritualism,” or whatever persons may choose to call the system of earthly ordinances and priesthood, which is not confined to any one particular section or country either, but spreads everywhere, and will, I doubt not, lead to the final catastrophe of Babylon. What, then, is the object of their regarding our union with Christ to be His incarnation? Why is it that they should make His birth to be the great pivot which determines our relationship? For this simple reason, that, when Jesus was here below, He was under the law. He owned the temple, and went up to the feasts, and owned sacrifices, and priests, and people. Just so; those who uphold the systems I am speaking of want Christians, or the world at least, to own temples, sacrifices, feasts, fasts, priests, and people, in the present day. It is Judaism revived. They depart from the truth of Scripture, and go back to the beggarly elements of the world, which prefigured Christ indeed, but are now nailed to the cross; yet do they imagine that this resuscitated round of figures and shadows is Christian worship, and that the state before the cross is the way in which the Christian is united with Christ.

Scripture invariably founds our link with our glorified Head on His death, resurrection, and ascension. Thus union with Christ is in no way a connection of flesh, but of spirit. “He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit.” Far from being a question of “one flesh,” this very Scripture

puts it in contrast with anything of the sort. “One flesh” has got a very bad character in that chapter. In point of fact, the Lord’s association in flesh was with Israel, not with us. His incarnation had also the deepest significance and most weighty ends; but union, the union with Christ as the body of our head, is never represented as its fruit. If Christ had not taken flesh, doubtless there could have been no union; but Scripture teaches that our union follows redemption, and consists in our being members of His body as now exalted in heaven.

Again, though as real a man as any other, He partook of flesh, and blood in a different condition from that of any otter man. Undoubtedly, He partook of it by the miraculous interposition of the Holy Ghost, entirely apart from sin — “Tempted,’’ it is said, “in all points like as we are, yet without sin.” Not only were there no sins, but no sin. There was no proclivity, no inclination, no striving with sin in Christ — all was good and holy. I am thankful that the ordinary creeds of Christendom — such as the Athanasian, and so on — own this publicly, because, though they be only a human bulwark, the mass of men in these lands hear so far what is true. They confess that the immaculate humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ is of the substance and essence of all orthodox faith.

This, then, was necessary in order to exhibit a perfect man and divine person, the Son of God, here below; but redemption was accomplished to bring us into His relationship, as far as this could be. Nothing less than this was proposed and done by redemption. For the righteousness of God, which, without the cross, must have taken vengeance on us, now righteously puts us, as

far as possible, in the position of Christ before God. How good and wise is our God! How efficacious the death and resurrection of Christ, raising believers in title (now enjoyed by the power of the Spirit) to His own position as Son of God and risen man! It is not, I repeat, that His place of Son, object of eternal worship to us, is forgotten, but He gives us to be sons as objects of delight and affection in that nearness of relation, as contrasted with being simply saints or members of a people with special earthly privileges. This is what our Lord Jesus first lays down.

But there is more than this. The same day at even our Lord finds Himself in the midst of His people gathered together. And this brings me to the point I wish to speak of more particularly tonight. The first word He utters is peace, — "Peace be unto you." Precious word! It was not remission of sins simply, blessed as this may be, but "Peace be unto you." Peace is much more than sins forgiven; and "when he had so said, he showed unto them his hands and his side." He showed them that which was the sign and witness of the shed blood of His cross, by which He had made peace. "Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord." But speaking to them again, He repeats the words, "Peace be unto you." Only this second time, remark, it is not now so much personal as prefatory to their mission; for He adds, "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." Thus the first words of peace would be for their own enjoyment, as I conceive. The second declaration comes as the introduction to their mission. It is this with which they are sent to others. It is therefore repeated to them, that in the renewed strength of this peace they may go forth. As the Father sent Him, so the Son sends them; for He

always speaks as the conscious Son of God in communion with the Father.

But there is a notable sign appended. “When he had said this, he breathed on them, and said unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost.” Probably there are many in this place who are not ignorant of the correspondence that has been carried on but recently on this very passage. It has clearly proved the conflict of opinion, even in leaders of the same religious system. Nevertheless, many more now present will be surprised to learn the total uncertainty of professing Christian teachers, and that they only agree in being all far from the mark. You, who are accustomed to read the Scriptures in faith of God’s teaching by the Holy Ghost given to you, will hardly conjecture the aberrations of Christian men from the truth. We all know that in our day most flatter themselves that there has been a great advance in the knowledge of the things of God. What means, then, this inability to gather and give out with clearness the revealed mind of God in a matter of such moment as these words of our Saviour? How is it that, now eighteen centuries and more since, one hears no better than the crudities of the fathers or the guesses of their children?

There are two contradicting theories which claim to be received: one, that our Lord here establishes a kind of sacerdotal authority, by virtue of which those whom He then addressed and their successors were entitled, in His own name, to give remission of sins to every one who confessed his sins duly. I wish to put the view as fairly as possible. They all admit, of course, that there may be a failure in the conditions, and, after all, the remission come to nothing; but still, where there is uprightness on man’s part, they hold that the Lord

pledges His part through His servants (that is to say, His absolution pronounced by virtue of this commission through certain authorized channels to the end of time). “No,” says the opposite party, “nothing of the sort. There is miraculous action here supposed. If men now-a-days profess to absolve people from their sins, why not cleanse lepers and raise the dead? why not perform the other miracles which the Lord empowered the disciples to work?” Now does it not seem amazing that Christian men should broach theories so miserably short of the truth of God as both of these? The one seems to me just as unsatisfactory as the other. Even the latter view, which emanates from the Evangelical party, really concedes what is worst in the former, while it falls into absurdity as well as evasion of the truth, by bringing the performance of miracles into a passage which alludes to nothing of the sort. For it is clear that the argument just spoken of assumes that, if men could cleanse lepers and raise the dead, they are competent to absolve sins. But I deny that it ever was the title of disciples to grant such absolution as is contended for. Thus, whether we take the Tractarian or the Evangelical theory, it is hard to say which is farthest from Scripture.

Do I then insinuate that the passage has no determinate meaning? Far from me be such a thought. But that which gives a clue to the subject is the Lord’s resurrection as here presented. If men knew Christ better, and the power of His resurrection, they would understand that which is a fruit of it. Hence, ignorance of resurrection privileges leave men, whether on one side of the quarrel or another, in gross darkness as to the truth which is here revealed. For let it be observed, that after our Lord sends the disciples out with peace,

He breathed on them. I am not aware of any action in the Bible to which this can be supposed to refer but one; and with this it stands in marked and instructive contrast. If we examine Genesis 2, a very striking difference on the Lord God's part appears in forming man as compared with any other animal. When He made the various beasts, birds, reptiles, etc., each became, as it is said, "a living soul" by the simple fact that it had been duly organized. But in man's case it was not so. Man was made out of the dust of the earth, as we know; but he did not become a living soul by being thus fashioned. There was an essential difference between man and every other such being then created.

It is not merely that all the rest of the animal kingdom were put under man here below, but he alone had his life direct from above. "The Lord God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul." No other animal became a living soul thus. Man and man alone enjoyed the breath of the Lord God. Such is the true source of the immortality of the soul; and this is the reason why man alone stands in direct moral responsibility to God, and must give account of the things done in the body to that God who thus gave his soul and spirit. In the case of a beast, though he has a spirit, it goes downward, not to God, because God never breathed so into it. The living principle of a beast, I mean, perishes, because it is a mere question of what is connected by God's will with its material organization, Therefore an irrational animal, when it dies, perishes; but in man's case there is a soul and spirit, which abide distinct in origin from the body, having a far more intimate connection with God Himself. Accordingly, therefore, the soul partakes of an immortality which the

mere body, alive here below in its own nature, does not possess. This was a question of the will of God, but that was a thing which indelibly and intrinsically belonged to the soul and spirit; and therefore it is that the body of man will be raised up in the resurrection to be reunited to that soul and spirit, and so every one of us shall give account of himself to God.

Now the Lord Jesus Christ stands before us, and in this gospel alone characteristically unites these two characters He is man, and here He is the risen man; but He is also the Lord God, even as Thomas immediately after says, “My Lord and my God.” He is One who, in His own person, united both divine nature and proper manhood. He stands the risen man, “the second man,” on the first day of the week, and as the quickening or life-giving spirit, He breathes into the disciples. That is, it is the Spirit of Christ Jesus risen from the dead. It is the Holy Ghost accompanying this resurrection-life, and the power of it, which the Lord, as the head of a new family, conferred upon the members of it. They had believed on Him, and had life eternal. Now they had life more abundantly.

Accordingly this is the all-important change that came in with the action of our Lord Jesus Christ. I can conceive persons reasoning upon this subject, and saying, “If people get eternal life, I do not see what great difference it makes that it should be risen life — that this life in resurrection with the Lord Jesus should so signally mark it.” Very possibly you do not; but allow me to tell you, that full victory differs from life struggling with death, life struggling under ordinances, life struggling with the evil that surrounds it, seeking after what is good, though failing, striving to avoid what is

bad, and constantly drawn somehow or another into it. This is precisely the state of man where the delivering power was not. But it was closed for the believer, as far, at any rate, as showing the new place into which the believer is put by the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. The life that I receive now in the Lord Jesus is life not under the law — life not having to do with the earth or its ordinances. It is the life of One who has brought me into perfect peace with God. It is the life of One who has put me in possession of His own relationship with God. Accordingly, it is as giving this in its most condensed form and its fullest power, that our Lord Jesus Christ thus breathes to show the new character of life, so to speak, that they had — that the life that they lived in the flesh was really by the faith of the Son Himself. “Not I, but Christ that liveth in me.” This, then, was given by the very fact that He thus breathed upon them. It was a partaking of Himself as He then stood — a participation in what He was, specially in the life that was in Him, after all questions were settled, and perfect deliverance was won by Him and given to them.

Hence it is that the apostle Paul, referring to this, says, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.” Why? “For,” says he, “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.” “The law of the Spirit of life,” says the apostle Paul. This is the very thing, as John tells us, that was here given. It was the Holy Ghost, but it was the Holy Ghost as the Spirit of life. It was not the Spirit of power simply working miracles, or any such energies — things which to men might appear to be far greater. Much less was it anything so wanton as men taking the

place of God, and professing to forgive sins on the earth: no apostle pretended to it ever. Nevertheless it is a real privilege, and as true now as on the day when Jesus rose from the dead. What the Holy Ghost then did was simply communicating life according to its resurrection power and character through Jesus Christ, the second man risen from the dead.

This, then, I take to be the meaning of the expression, “Receive the Holy Ghost;” for the Spirit of God always accompanies the life that Christ gives. It is, no doubt, Christ who is the object of faith, and who is the giver of life; but He gives life by the operation of the Holy Spirit. Whether given during His lifetime or now, it was always the Spirit of life that accompanied that life, and, consequently, this is put forth as the power of it.

But He adds more, “Whosesoever sins ye remit, they are remitted; and whosesoever sins ye retain, they are retained.” Some will ask, “Well, do you believe that?” Assuredly I do; and more than this, I believe that you Christians have got the power, and are responsible to God to walk in it. Put this is a high claim, some will think — this power of remitting sins and retaining sins. Without doubt it is so. But to whom did the Lord speak on that day? Not to the apostles only, but to the disciples. “Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled.” Surely if it had been some restricted prerogative confined to the body of apostles, some care would have been taken to make this appear. It is thus that even a sensible man acts. If there were a special communication from the Queen to her cabinet ministers, it would not be made to the House of Commons, or to the House of Lords either. There would

be no propriety in such a course. Whereas, on the contrary, if we suppose a royal message were delivered to the House of Lords, or to the House of Commons, to whom would this be understood to be addressed? If meant for the whole house, it would be addressed accordingly. And so it is here. Our Lord was speaking to the disciples; He was addressing the whole of them. The moment we take the word as it is written, we see clearly that what He said applies to all. Will any man say that the resurrection-life of the Lord Jesus Christ was only for the twelve? Shall I be told that the peace the Lord gave so solemnly and repeatedly was only for the apostles? Nothing of the sort (though, of course, the apostles shared it, and it must have had a most valued place in their souls).

There was indeed special authority from the Lord to form assemblies confessing His name, and to rule them when formed, not to speak of powers which were personal. There was a post of authority in laying the foundation; there were acts initiatory and regulative, which Scripture assigns to the apostles. But it is so little the aim or the character of John's gospel to dwell on what was official, that the very word "apostle" never occurs throughout its course. The spirit, form, and substance of it are devoted to what is intrinsic and essential, and what passes not away. More particularly, we shall have reason to gather in a moment, that this very portion is the express setting of Christianity on its proper basis, and stamps on it a very distinctive character before God and man. For various reasons, therefore, I am persuaded that we are not to look for the accomplishment of these words in anything that was personal to the twelve, or to any others who should

succeed them: still less are they to be construed of the function of elders or presbyters, as if they were officially entrusted with remitting and retaining sins, as is most deliberately assumed in the standards of certain religious bodies. The truth is that the Lord Jesus has the “disciples” as such before Him, and to them He imparts the Spirit; them He thereon charges with this great commission.

Does the inspired history, then, do the epistles give no light how the apostles understood, and how we are to interpret, Christ’s words? Take, for instance, those converted on the day of Pentecost, and others whom the Lord added from time to time: by whom were their sins remitted? They were not satisfied with individually believing the gospel; they submitted their confession of the Lord’s name to those who were Christians before them. And a most important thing this is. I am not entitled to set up to be a Christian on my sole opinion of myself, on my judgment of the faith I confess. I am bound to submit my pretensions to those who have been in Christ before me. Miraculous as may be the call of St. Paul, even he was not exempt from this; he was baptized by a certain disciple; he was subsequently received by others. This is full of comfort, and it is real presumption to shrink from or weaken it; because the more really a man has faith, the more willing he is to let others examine it. Even the apostle Paul had to taste the bitterness of this at first, for some were in doubt of him. Surely if this most honoured of Christ’s servants had to bear with a little that was trying to him, it is not for any of us to count ourselves too sure confessors of His name to yield for a little our own importance, and, at the same time, to submit to that which is the Lord’s will, and of

vast moment for the blessing of the Church of God. Think how the enemy might take advantage if you supposed it was a question of setting up to be a Christian on one's own sole and independent warrant. It is good to be subject to one another, and this from the first, in the fear of God, who is wiser than men, and has laid down His will through these words of the Lord Jesus.

This, if we accept the apostolic writings as a comment, is the manner and practical working of it. When one professes to turn to God in repentance and faith; when he believes in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, it is not. enough that he should rest upon that blessed Saviour for the salvation of his soul. I must "confess with my mouth, as well as believe in my heart." This confession may and should, of course, go out as a testimony to the world; but it belongs to those who are the confessors of His name to judge of it. I may admit something that is derogatory to Christ; I may overlook that which is injurious to my own soul, and offensively evil to others. Then comes in the all-important function of those in the faith before, to which scripture attaches no small weight, and regulates it for God's glory, as we find the apostle Paul doing in Romans 15. I affirm, then, that the disciples, as the assembly of God, did warrant the remission of sins in certain cases, and did retain sins in others. Since they received heartily and simply, owning as the brethren of Jesus those that before then had been wallowing, perhaps, in sin of every kind, and suddenly (it might be, in an hour) turned to God, was it not of exceeding moment that there should be a body in this world constituted by the Lord, having distinct authority, as well as possessed of His own life, even the

Spirit as the power of more abundant life in resurrection? And that they should endorse the confession of the true, while examining the pretensions of all who professed? It is not, of course, that this could possibly be injurious to a real child of God, but, on the contrary, be a great comfort, and an additional joy to his heart — the welcome of others in owning him here below, as the angels, instead of man here, rejoice over the repentant in God's presence. But it would be a serious check where there was any reserve, or where anything evil lurked underneath, or where a desire might appear to bring in things privily.

We find that in this spirit, accordingly, the assembly of God did act. They remitted and they retained sins I speak not now of the solemn case where a man was struck dead on the spot, but of instances in which there was a putting away of those that sinned, and their public restoration on their repentance. There was the other case also, in which a man who had been received, and had his sins thus publicly remitted, was put away as a wicked person. (1 Cor. 5) Thus the two epistles to the Corinthians illustrate both sides. "Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was indicted of many. So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him." (2 Cor. 2:6-8) In these we have the cases of remitting sins on the one hand, and of retaining sins on the other; and I have no doubt that one of the reasons why Christians have failed to carry out their separate place in this world, and thus to walk in their own joy and delight, and as a rich means of blessing to others, is,

that they have lost sight of this responsibility, treating it as either ministerial, or as a power long passed away.

Alas! the cause is as obvious as it is humiliating. The Church has not kept its place of being a separate people, endowed with the love and glory of the Lord Jesus. They have taken in all the world in the judgment of charity; but no judgment of charity can avail unbelievers, nor is it in question for believers. Thus the great public landmarks of grace and holiness have been broken down; and, consequently, the very pretension to retain or remit sins, except for superstitious people as a sacerdotal act, is scouted with contempt, if not wholly ignored.

I maintain, on the contrary, that the Lord's words make it to be of the essence of the Christian congregation in this world to stand forth as publicly owning what grace has done, by receiving those whose confession satisfies, and as publicly refusing what does not approve itself to their conscience. Let me, however, press with decision, that what we receive is not a certain amount of intelligence. It is not for me to make light of spiritual understanding any more than others. Unquestionably it has its place, season, and value; but of this we may be assured, that what Jesus breathed on the disciples was not merely intelligence, but His own resurrection-life. This, then, is what He would have us own; this is what we are bound to recognize in those that come forward. "You hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses." I do not mean thereby that we are to sanction what is sinful along with life in Christ. But we are bound to accept the sheep and lambs of Christ, and to be very tender in dealing with mistakes, the fruit of a wrong position and of bad teaching. Let us

beware of playing into the enemies' hands by even seeming to mix up the ground of reception with points of attainment in practice or in doctrine. Hold fast the grand, simple, but infinite fact, that Jesus breathes the Spirit of His own resurrection-life on the disciples. We are to treat the feeblest as a part of the Christian assembly. But if we receive on the one hand, let us not fear to reject on the other, according as the confession may or may not be suitable to the name of Jesus. If a man really has the resurrection-life of Christ, look for holiness with a purged conscience; but also for another thing, that Christ should be the standard of all his judgments, as He is the source of all his blessings, and withal the object to be kept before his soul. And, therefore, the name of Jesus, which is the sole and sufficient passport to the simplest possessor of eternal life in Him, is the same name by which we can reject the loudest pretension that compromises His glory. Let the Lord Jesus be for us, as in truth He is, the perfect and only standard. If Christ is owned and honoured, it is well and safe and blessed. The attempt to unite Christ with sin is fatal. All thought of having Christ and playing fast and loose with His name be far from us! What can be more offensive to God? Therefore, it is of all- importance that we should steadily hold Him before our eyes, and avoid the snare of building up the ecclesiastical plans and theories we have left behind. I believe that all ecclesiastical theory is false, when in any measure allowed to shroud the value of Christ; and I utterly refuse to treat ecclesiastical mistakes as calling for such dealing, as would be demanded were it a question of Christ dishonoured or positive known sin allowed. If there be so much as the connivance at the holding of what is not of Christ — if one bring not the doctrine of

Christ, it is ruin. The man might appear to be as sound as an apostle on ecclesiastical truth, and have every other New Testament doctrine at his finger-ends. But what is the value of anything where the name of Christ is put to shame? And where Christ is the object of the soul, though His confessor may be uninformed, Christ has breathed His life there, and our course is clear if we be subject to Christ. Let us welcome such a one to the heart in His name. It is the Church's business to take all such up, and to foster them; for how are they to acquire more light, and where can they get the crooked joints adjusted, if it be not in God's Church? But if we hold aloof till they get all right, this is alike an impossibility on their part, and to forfeit our own place of help and duty. Methought that the Church of God was the pillar and ground of the truth, and that there only can the truth be truly learnt where it is lived in; and that those I have described, having received Christ, have Christ within and Christ without. Do I want or boast of more? Why, then, should there be the smallest hesitation?

The Lord enable His own to be thorough in removing difficulties, and hearty in welcoming souls where there is no question of ungodliness in faith or ways. I do not say where the doctrine of justification by faith is held. There is many a wickedness that consists with holding and preaching even that doctrine. These words of our Lord Jesus Christ are a standing rule, and we are responsible for acting on them. If we are met together in His name, let there be a plain unswerving expression of our place and privilege. Our action, our corporate action, should be as firm for the truth as our individual walk — that we have and value Christ — that along with Christ we are bound to remit sins, and, whenever there

is anything inconsistent with Christ, to retain sins. We disown the pretension of doing either as between God and man: the Church never claimed such a right; the apostles never aspire to such an action. But Jesus clearly called the disciples to discharge the retention as well as the remission of sins; and this, as we have seen, was verified in the Christian assembly which exercised both, not as an eternal question between God and the soul, but administratively as a duty to Christ, of receiving the true or rejecting the false, of putting away or restoring before men.

1 Or, “together,” if the various reading be preferred to the received text.

The Gift of the Spirit and the Gifts.

Lecture 6 - Acts 2:33-38

The time was now fully come. God had made Himself manifest. Israel ought to have confessed today Messiah to be Emmanuel, even God with us. And faith should have seen in Christ dead and risen how God is for us. But He was now about to assume a new character, and to take an immense step in advance, even God in us. This could not be without the shedding of the precious blood of Jesus. Where that blood was sprinkled, the Holy Ghost could come and dwell. And therefore they gathered together, according to the word of the Lord, expecting, as He had said to them, to be baptized of the Holy Ghost not many days hence.

“When the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.” God introduced this new thing in a manner suitable to His own wisdom. Suddenly there came a sound from above, for it was the Holy Ghost coming down from heaven, and God was pleased to vouchsafe an outward sign accompanying this unprecedented fact — “a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” It is true that the Holy Ghost had descended before, but this was to dwell in one man — the man Christ Jesus. In His case there was no preparatory work; but the very manner of the descent of the Spirit, as well as of that appearance which He chose to assume in

descending on the Lord Jesus, attested the immense difference between Him, in whom was no sin, and us, however blest and delivered. But we are delivered from our sins and sin; and this mighty work of God's grace is through the suffering unto death under judgment of Him who had no sin, and through the power of His resurrection.

For Jesus the Holy Ghost appeared in the form of a dove — a beautiful expression of self-adaptation on the part of the Holy Ghost toward that man whom He could come to and abide in without blood. That well-known emblem of purity the Holy Ghost could adopt in thus coming down to be in the Son of man. But in man's case — that is, the believers who were assembled in Jerusalem awaiting power from on high, as the Lord told them — the form was not as a dove, but tongues; cloven tongues, and as of fire also, were the suited image. Cloven tongues, because God now would send forth a mighty and far-reaching testimony. Whatever the responsibility of Israel, whatever the witness to be borne in that land and to that people, God, who knew the end from the beginning, had His eye on, and even in this very fact looked to, the spread of the good tidings, and the going out to Gentile as much as to Jew. The tongues were "cloven;" but they were "as of fire" also. There had been the judgment of sin in the cross. There was that in man which needed to be judged, and which, in fact, was judged of God already in Christ as the offering for sin. Hence the tongue as of fire was the witness that (whatever might be the display of the power of the Holy Ghost, and however evidently in the fulness of grace) it was grace, here as everywhere else where sin is

concerned, reigning through righteousness by Jesus Christ our Lord.

Hence, then, the Lord was accomplishing that for which He had been preparing the disciples. In the different tongues to which men of old had been doomed in the just displeasure of God, His mercy was now about to reach them. The wonderful works of God were thus to be proclaimed to every nation under heaven. This attracted universal attention. All kinds of speculation as to this strange unheard-of phenomenon filled the ears and minds of men. But Peter explains how it was that which ought to be looked for according to the sure word of prophecy. He does not affirm that it was the fulfilment of Joel's declaration in its full and precise force; but it was "that which was spoken," and no other kind of thing. The fulfilment in any complete sense awaits another day. Nevertheless, it was not what ought to bear an evil name among men, but was rather to be weighed, accepted, and prized as of God. It was "that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh." It was only the principle of the prophecy; for, in point of fact, although there were these various tongues spoken, and although men were there from every nation under heaven, they were but Jews. Nevertheless, the languages embracing Gentile tongues though the persons might be Jews, there was in this the intimation to any discerning eye of what God was going to carry out in due time.

But there is a very important statement to be made at once, made, indeed, according to God's word, which we do well to heed and never to give up. There was not one thing only, but a variety in the display of the Spirit's

power put forth on that day. We are not to limit what the Holy Ghost wrought to any one particular part of His operations. First and foremost, there was the accomplishment of the promise of the Father. There was the great and infinite truth of the Holy Ghost Himself sent down from heaven. Next there was the special assurance of our Lord accomplished in His baptizing them of the Holy Ghost, the effect of which was “one body.” They might and did not yet know what the one body involved; indeed, I think I might be bold to say there was not so much as one believer who did. The doctrine of the body was as yet wholly unrevealed; it awaited another ministration and a suited servant of God, who speaks of himself as one born out of due time. In fact, it was not, and, one may say, could not be, duly, according to God’s wisdom, revealed until the Jew had rejected the testimony of His grace. Then when the Gentile was actually called or in process of being called, the one body formed out of Jew and Gentile, joined together by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, could be brought out consistently with the ways of God. Still, that which was the power of this one body, that person who alone was adequate to form, was actually then and there given: “Ye shall be baptized of the Holy Ghost [without drawing out the consequences of it] not many days hence.”

Then, besides this, there were to be signs and wonders wrought according to the prophet, and they were wrought. Further, there was the impartation of various gifts from the Lord for His work here below. “When he ascended up on high, he gave gifts unto men” — “some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers.” This was clearly by the Holy Ghost, or, as

it is written in 1 Cor. 12, “The manifestation of the Spirit was given to every man to profit withal.”

All these distinct things, not in the least degree to be confounded one with another, were concurrently accomplished on that day. Further, the Spirit of God was given as the indweller to each one that believed. This was clearly a consequence of the same great truth. Thus we have what was individual and what was corporate, what was universal and what was particular, all made good on this day of Pentecost, but, nevertheless, each to be distinguished from the other. The epistles take up some one, some another part of this vast subject. We shall have a little more detail as to each on some future occasion; but what I wish particularly to dwell on tonight is the grand truth itself of the gift of the Holy Ghost, and this distinguished from any workings of His power by particular members. These gifts differ, but the gift itself is and must be the same Holy Spirit. There are many and wide differences elsewhere, but there can be none here; and this is manifest when the truth is understood that we speak of a divine person, who comes down to dwell in each Christian and in the Church. It is evidently destructive of the truth for one to speak of differences in Him. There may be a variety of forms and measures in which His power is displayed; there may be and are different degrees in which the joy of His presence is entered into; but the fact remains, (and what can be more glorious and blessed than the fact?) that, as to Himself, He dwells equally in every believer who rests now on finished redemption in Christ Jesus.

Besides, there is also, as we know, the circumstance of His being not only in us, but with us. Accordingly, we find from the first and all through, that while the

tongues of fire rested on each, there was also a rushing mighty wind which filled all the house. There was thus what may be called a double sign of the presence of the Spirit of God, — that which abode upon each person, but also that which in a general way filled the house where they were seated. Thus it is that we may see every now and then in this book of the Acts, without going farther, that the fact of the Holy Ghost being there, as well as the Holy Ghost being in each of them, is kept before the mind. For instance, when the house shook where they were, (Acts 4) what had this to do with the particular fact that the Spirit of God was in this or in that person? The Holy Ghost was there, and He made His presence felt in their midst. So, again, when Ananias and Sapphira lied, who can say that it was to any one believer more than another? It was “not to men,” indeed, we are told, but “unto God,” they had lied. But it was God present in the Church. It was God who had come down, who could now righteously, and according to His full grace, and the most blessed expression of that grace conceivable now for the earth, dwell even in those that not only had been sinners, but still had the deepest possible sense of what the natural evil was which they had inherited from Adam. But yet, in spite of all this, in spite of what they had been, and in spite of what they felt they were still, apart from Christ, so blessed was the grace of God in the gift of Him, so rich the manner of His love in the death and resurrection of the Lord, that the Holy Ghost could righteously, and for the glory of the Father and the Son, come down and be in them here below.

Hence it is we find all through that the Spirit of God is spoken of thus, not only as one that really dwelt in each

believer, but that was with them when gathered together, or when acting in the work here below. Thus we read of the Spirit (Acts 8) saying to the evangelist Philip for instance, “Join thyself to that chariot.” An angel of the Lord had previously told him the direction that he was to take. It was not, however, the angel, but the Spirit that spoke to him when it was a question of direct dealing with souls. The angel expressed merely the providence of God shaping his path for him: this, of course, still abides. We may not see angels or be conscious of their action, but it is just as true now as ever it was. And so with the Spirit of God. We may not hear Him as Philip did then; but the fact is as certain now as on that day. According to the promise of Christ He works. He waits, of course, for a suited state, though it be a state of heart which He alone can bring about; but He works as truly now as ever. So we find, a little later on (Acts 13), the Spirit said, “Separate me Barnabas and Saul” to the work that He had called them. Thus we have most clearly the Spirit of God acting not merely in — for we are not told that it was in Saul or Barnabas that He wrought; and indeed the impression, I think, that one would fairly gather from the chapter is that it was outwards. That is, it was a word about them, not so much a word to them, still less anything working in them. We know, of course, that all these things are true in their season. The Holy Ghost really was in them, and was there before; but still, the Holy Ghost here displays Himself as a divine person who had come down, and was there giving effect to the work of grace and to the glory of the Lord. And so it is to be traced throughout the whole of the book, as we may readily see. So the Spirit of Jesus on another occasion directed

Paul where to go. (Acts 16) I need not, however, multiply instances.

But there is another point of immense importance which is often a perplexity to souls, and that is, the difference of the manner in which the Holy Ghost was conferred. Unbelief, especially where it takes the form of superstitiously exalting man (as, indeed, it constantly has this character, unless it take the still baser form of distrusting and denying altogether what is of God), works actively on these materials. But whether unbelief goes out in the exaltation of man as such, or in indifference to God and open utter carelessness as to all that concerns the soul, in both ways it is apt to take advantage of the various modes in which the Spirit of God was conferred, to deny that you can have the Holy Ghost now as of old, or to claim credit for some specific of religious quackery, in which alone one may infallibly look for the gift of the Spirit.

Now I shall for these reasons review the great occasions which the Holy Ghost records for our instruction, and hope to show, I trust plainly, to any man who is subject to the word of God, that there is nothing capricious in the manner in which the Holy Ghost was given, that there is nothing which gives the smallest importance to man as such, that there is nothing to weaken the confidence of the feeblest child of God, and that there is everything flowing from a full, or comparatively full, acquaintance with the revealed mind of God to comfort and steady the soul, enhancing our sense of His grace and wisdom; for we shall have abundant proof of His holy considerateness in all possible circumstances. What an evidence that simplicity in the things of God is the real secret of seeing things clearly! For simplicity is not

occupied with our own things, or burdened by the thoughts of others, but has confidence in God, and knows that He has always before Himself His own grand design of bringing glory to Christ, who glorified the Father.

On the first occasion, the day of Pentecost, we have much the largest, and, in a certain sense, the richest form of the giving of the Holy Ghost from above. Therefore we do well to take especial heed to God's inspired account of it We are informed by the highest authority, that Jesus "being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear." That is, there were palpable tokens before them, and evidenced by them, of the accomplishment of the promise of the Father. The promised Holy Ghost was not in itself a thing of sense, but, nevertheless, there was external power which accompanied it. This is of great importance to distinguish, because otherwise men are in danger, in consequence of the absence of these outward signs, of overlooking and denying that incomparable gift which was always above its effects. Whatever the importance of these signs, they were but the accompanying voucher to man of the gift and presence of the Spirit as a new thing upon the earth.

But further, we have considerable light as to this truth in the answer of Peter to the distressed enquirers at Jerusalem. In agony as to their state, finding themselves so plainly arraigned by the apostle as guilty of rejecting and crucifying their own Messiah, and that too in the presence of a God who had exalted Him to His own right hand, the apostle says to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the

remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Attentively weigh the words. He does not call on them simply to believe. There is, I need not say, the wisdom of God in using here the call to repent rather than to believe. There is nothing in vain in Scripture. The converse we hear on another occasion, where the apostles Paul and Silas called on the alarmed jailor at Philippi to believe rather than to repent.

Of course, my wish is not at all to produce the slightest perplexity in any soul, but, on the contrary, to remove it from the weak, who may see but do not understand this difference. It is not man that did or would have set down these words. God has written thus, and He is always to be trusted. We are not to suppose that it is a matter of indifference which is employed. Freely is it allowed and insisted on that, without faith, there never can be real repentance Godward. There may be a spurious faith, as there may be a spurious repentance. Wherever there is the one by God's power, there must needs be the other. But still, every one knows from experience (and we see the same thing in God's own word — the key to all we know and experience) that there are differences in the manner in which the soul feels and expresses itself before God. For in one the deep moral work in the conscience more predominates; in another, peace and joy in believing would be more apparent. But still, there can be no real work in the conscience of spiritual value without faith, and there cannot be faith according to God without a genuine work of the Spirit in the conscience. If Peter calls on the Jews at Jerusalem to repent, so does Paul tell the men of Athens that God commands all men everywhere to repent. On other occasions both Jews and Gentiles were invited and

urged to believe. The truth is, both repented and both believed; but there is ever a meaning, and an important meaning, where one is pressed rather than the other.

What was needed on this occasion — what was suitable according to God's wisdom — was the humbling of these proud Jews. Hence repentance, as that which puts down flesh and treats man as good for nothing, is put forward. "Repent," says the apostle Peter, "and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus" — that very man whom you crucified and rejected. There is the only source of blessing for any: He is the sole hope for your souls. They were brought down and made willing. It was the day of His grace, if not yet of His power according to Psalm 110. Grace had touched their hearts; it made them receive and endorse God's sentence against themselves. They could believe ill of themselves — the very last thing a man is willing to believe. They were really brought to that point that they were willing to believe themselves evil in the sight of God. He therefore presses this home. He does not take pity on them because they were justly pricked in heart, but he calls, so to speak, for the entrance of that which would humble them still more before God. Peter could press it the more readily, because he knew in Jesus such ample grace. As he says himself, "Be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ." The more grace is proclaimed, the more we can afford to urge, and the more other souls can afford to bear; a thorough-going sound repentance. And, indeed, we need to enforce it, not leaving it vaguely and saying, "People must repent if they believe." This is not the way God does leave it. He causes them to feel their real state before Him. It is always a great blessing for any one, and if it be not charged home at an early day,

let me say by the way, that a most humbling and painful process remains for the soul another day. For, instead of learning with simplicity what we are at the start of our career, instead of having as full a sense of our sin then as could be supposed compatible with so young a convert, there may be the need of proving it by a deep fall, by open sin, by flagrant departure from God, by a painful return, after having wandered the farther from Him, because there was so little sense of sin at the beginning of our Christian confession. How many a soul has known this! Perhaps I ought to add, that there are none, it seems to me, in greater danger from this omission than those with whom we have most commonly to do. The greater the sense of the Lord's grace, if there be not also a commensurate sounding of the conscience before God, the greater the danger, and more particularly for the young.

When in this case, then, the apostle exhorted them to repent and be baptized every one of them in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, you will remark what follows, — "and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Surely when they repented, it was not without the Holy Ghost. When they received the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and found in Him remission, and were baptized thereon, — baptized in His name, which, of course, would be altogether worthless in these souls now before the apostle unless they believed in His name, — it will not be doubted that the Holy Ghost must have given them repentance and faith in His name. Therefore it is evident that the reception of the Holy Ghost as here spoken of, has nothing whatever to do with the bringing men to believe and to repent. It is a subsequent operation; it is an additional separate blessing; it is a

privilege founded on faith already actively working in the heart. So far is it from being true that a man receives the gift of the Holy Ghost the moment he believes, that it may be well doubted whether there ever was such a case since the world began. I do not mean to deny that the gift of the Holy Ghost may be practically on the same occasion, but never in the same moment: at least, I should like any one to produce me one proof from the word of God, or one instance from practical experience. I have never seen, nor ever heard of such a case, and (what is more) I believe that Scripture precludes the possibility of it. The reason is quite simple too. The gift of the Holy Ghost is grounded on the fact that we are sons by faith of Christ, believers resting on redemption in Him. Plainly, therefore, it supposes that the Spirit of God has regenerated us. We may find the importance of this remark in looking at some of the epistles on another occasion. Here I merely touch on the point, because it is very evidently involved in this very verse. Thus the gift of the Holy Ghost is not in order to repentance, nor to receiving Christ by faith. The truth is, that when the souls did repent, and when they were baptized in His name for the remission of sins, they received the gift of the Holy Ghost, as a subsequent privilege.

Another thing I would just observe, and one quite as momentous to bear in mind as any other: “the gift of the Holy Ghost” never means the gifts. There are many who confound the gift with the gifts. They are never mixed together in the word of God; they in no way convey the same thought. There is even a different word — not in our language, but in that which the Holy Ghost employed. The two things are invariably distinct. Both

might of course be given on the very same occasion. A man might have the gift and enjoy the presence of the Spirit of God in his soul. He might also be empowered of the Spirit to carry out the gospel to the world, or be made a teacher or pastor in the Church. Still the gift of the Holy Spirit is another privilege altogether. It is the Holy Ghost Himself given, and not merely the power with which He invests a person for special purposes. There might be this too; but the gift of the Holy Ghost was that common blessing which was then and there conferred on every soul that repented and was baptized.

This is followed up immediately after by the glad reception, or, at any rate, by the reception of the word; for “gladly” is of doubtful authority. “They received his word.” This is certain; and it may have been with solemnity, as much as with joy, as the characteristic feeling; and they were baptized in the name of their once despised Messiah. “And the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.” And these are found full of the grace and power of God, as described in the latter part of the chapter.

Turning to the next great crisis, we have a wholly different scene. Stephen had borne his testimony, the result of which was utter rejection on the part of the Jews, — he full of the Holy Ghost, and they resisting Him. As their fathers did, so did they. Stephen sealed his testimony with his blood, and the persecution that broke out on him as its first victim scattered all the Church that was in Jerusalem except the apostles. The very men who had been called of the Lord to go out to all the world were the exceptions to the dispersion, and the only ones. So remarkably slow is man, even in the best estate, to enter into and carry out the purposes of God’s

grace. But God would carry them out, even if it were from a painful cause propelling. If love, if the power of grace, if the sense of the need of souls and of the glory of Christ, did not rouse those that were commanded, God would take care that feebler vessels, yet filled with the mighty tidings of His grace, should shed the sweet savour in all directions; and so they “went everywhere preaching the word.” Among the rest, Philip, who had been appointed by the apostles, as well as chosen by the people, to take care of the daily distribution, now that this was summarily closed, gains a good degree, and goes about preaching the gospel. He visits the ancient rival of Jerusalem, even the city of Samaria. There the Jews, having entirely failed to establish the authority of the law, shrank into isolation, and had no dealings with Samaritans. They had not won their confidence, nor commended that form of knowledge and of the truth in the law which had been committed to their charge. But the gospel was now to prove its power where law had been unavailing; and Philip preaches Jesus with such simplicity and force, and was so blest of God in it, that the whole city was filled with joy. Even the most wicked man that was there, long versed in the ways and wiles of the devil, was impressed by the holy influence which, it is true, had not penetrated his conscience nor governed his heart. But, at any rate, the current was too strong for him. Simon Magus bowed to the truth of the gospel, intellectually, at least, and was baptized with the rest. But, note it well, there was no gift of the Holy Ghost as yet to any there.

From such a fact we gather the clear distinction between the gift of the Holy Ghost and His working or operation, which enables a soul to repent and to believe

the gospel. There is no question as to the mass of the Samaritan converts that they were real believers, though Simon was not. Nevertheless, the Holy Ghost “as yet was fallen upon none of them.” It is not merely that they had not spoken with tongues, nor that there were no wonders done, save by the evangelist himself (verses 6, 7, 13). The Holy Ghost’s coming down is a totally different thing, though accompanied by these outward expressions of His power. They must never be mixed up together as if they were the same. The greatest wound that could be inflicted on the standing capital truth of the presence of the Holy Ghost would be received by confounding them; because, if this were so, we have in this case no Holy Ghost any longer present, inasmuch as we have no more such outward displays of power. It is evident, therefore, that it goes far indeed in unbelief to mingle together signs and tokens by the Spirit with the Holy Ghost Himself. I repeat, that it was not merely that the powers had not been given, but the Holy Ghost had not yet come on them. The Scripture affirms it, and so it is said here, “When the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: for as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.”

At once we meet with a notable difference which stands out in marked contrast with the day of Pentecost. Then, when they repented and were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, the Holy Ghost came upon them. Here He had fallen upon none, though they had believed and had been baptized. How comes this? I am persuaded for

a grave reason and worthy of God. Had there been the descent of the Holy Ghost upon these believers at Samaria at the preaching of Philip, such is human nature that I cannot doubt the ancient rivalry of Samaria would have still remained. Samaria would have lifted up her head once more, and the very grace of the gospel would have been a support to her religious pretensions. It was true, Jerusalem had enjoyed this new and singular blessing; but had not Samaria it also? Thus Jerusalem and "that mountain'' would have still reared their heads in opposition to each other, and the effect that God intended to produce by the presence of the Holy Ghost would have been altogether frustrated. Instead of bringing about oneness in love, instead of maintaining not only one head, but one energy, — one head above, and one power below working in one body as an answer to the glory of Christ, — there would have been a new Samaritan institution as well as a new society at Jerusalem. God made this impossible — at least impossible to one who heeded His ways. There was no appearance even of a sanction given to independency — the most destructive principle possible to the truth of the Church of God on the earth.

Accordingly, then, when the Church at Jerusalem, or, at least, when the apostles heard of it, (for the Church was now scattered abroad,) they sent down two of the chiefs, two that were pillars — Peter and John. They prayed; but there was even a closer intimation of what God intended by this delay in the gift of the Holy Ghost — there was the laying on of their hands; and this imposition of hands was both an act expressive of blessing from God through the apostles, and of identification, so to speak, with the work at Jerusalem. It was an attestation before the

whole world that God would suffer no such thing as rivalry in His Church — that those who were the heads of the work in the one were quite as indispensable in the other. Thus, then, God shows, as it seems to me in this very fact, that although there is a difference in the manner of giving the blessing, still that very difference is due to God's wisdom and care over our souls as really as in the gift itself. Of course, the gift of the Holy Ghost is the main part of the blessing, but then there is always the goodness and the wisdom of God in the smallest variation which His word puts before us. Thus, although we have here a very marked difference from the day of Pentecost, all contributes to prove how God loves us, how the Lord takes care of the Church, how, even in the manner in which He gives this supreme blessing of the Spirit of God, He proceeds in such a mode as to show, if saints are wise to heed His ways and seek to understand the method of His gifts, how He would arm us against our own nature.

There is another thing that comes before us in the next case. (Acts 10) Here we have a third variety. The apostle Peter is at length summoned of God, who was pleased to vouchsafe a two-fold witness of His purpose. Cornelius, the Gentile centurion, while he fasted and prayed in Caesarea, had an angelic visitor, who directed him to send for Simon Peter. As for the apostle himself, he fell into a trance the day after at Joppa, and saw thrice a vision about this great matter, that every word, as it were, should be established by three distinct witnesses. Peter, yet more encouraged by the Spirit (Acts 10:19-23), yields to the messengers of Cornelius, and goes. When he opens his mouth, he calls their attention to that which was exceedingly prominent in his own

mind; for he had gone unwillingly at first — had even ventured, so to speak, to dispute with the Lord in the vision of the great sheet. He had never, he said, eaten anything that was common or unclean when the Lord commanded him to kill and eat. But he had received repeatedly the reproof, “What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common;” and at last he had profited by the lesson. “Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.”

In the first instance, then, it is plain that the call did not go out to a pagan idolater. Peter only speaks in this case of one that already feared God and wrought righteousness. This was the case with Cornelius. He was not an unconverted soul, but one who really feared God. He abounded in prayer and in almsgiving. Certainly self-righteous prayer or alms could not have commended him to God. Such things, when done as a means of rendering some atonement for the soul before God, are (we know) among the unholy resources of unbelief. But Cornelius was a God-fearing man — this really, and not in mere outward profession. He was regenerate, and God had signified his estate and his acknowledgment of his righteousness in the message of the angel, which it seems to me perfectly impossible to understand as meaning that he was merely an outward professor of the true God — the most hollow thing conceivable even in the sight of men, and always an abomination in God’s eyes. As I read the account afresh, I am bold to say his state was that which the Lord had wrought, and which He distinctly owns as pleasing to Himself. And it was wise of the Lord and most gracious, that, in going out to the Gentiles, He should begin with such an one as not

even a Jew could deny to be godly. It was, beyond a doubt, infinite mercy which was about to save the evidently lost, the chief of sinners. But still the point here was not awakening for the first time a soul from its death in sins, but rather setting one already awakened on a known ground of relationship with God and perfect liberty, so that none who feared God and His word could gainsay his title. In most cases the two things might coalesce; but this was not the case with Cornelius, who in due time, with his household, hears the word from Peter.

Observe, it was a word, too, that was not heard for the first time. “That word ye know,” says Peter, “which was published throughout all Judea.” Plainly, therefore, this centurion had not only feared God, and prayed to Him before, but was aware of that which was preached through out all Judea. How was it that it had not been received in its fulness and applied to his own soul? Just simply because he was one that feared God and trembled at His word. It was not the shape in which faith in God would work now, but it was right in its season. This reverence for God would make him slow to anticipate His ways. “If God had sent out his word for Israel,” he would say, “I know it is sure for them; and blessed are the people that have such a God! But who and what am I?” For this very reason he waited till the word was sent to himself. This is just what the gospel does now. It is the proclamation of the word of God’s grace to every creature; but it was a new thing then. He was acquainted, of course, with the ancient Scriptures, and did not doubt the promises. There was no question about them as an abstract truth, or in their accomplishment by and in Christ for Israel.

But now the word was sent to him, Cornelius a Gentile, by the authority of God through Peter. As we are told here, “While Peter yet spake these words,” (more particularly, I suppose, “to him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth,” etc.) this truth was fastened on his soul. At least, this is direct testimony, and opens the door to any one according to all the prophets: “Whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins. While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.” What! Without baptism? without imposition of hands? without prayer for them? Yes, without any of these things, without more ado, at once, even while the very words are being preached by the apostle Peter, the Holy Ghost is given to them all.

Here, then, is a new phase, altogether different, not merely from what was witnessed in Samaria, but even from what had been experienced in Jerusalem. There the Jew must be baptized, and only then he should receive the Holy Ghost. It was not enough that he should believe the gospel; he must be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, (baptized with water, of course,) “and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.” At Samaria, not only had they been baptized with water, but there must be prayer and the laying on of the apostles’ hands, without which the Holy Ghost came on none there. Here, before baptism, and without apostolic imposition of hands, the Holy Ghost fell on all of them. How came this to pass? The only wise and the only good God owned these Gentiles in deep grace. The moment was come to carry out His mind more fully, and the first display of His grace towards them was in this rich and singular process. It might not be so public an

occasion as when three thousand souls were brought in. Still, what was seen then was the breaking down of Jews that had been hard and high-minded against Jesus of Nazareth. To that name they must bow, nay, they must be baptized in it; not otherwise could they receive the Spirit. The Samaritans, again, had their special lesson, to counteract their peculiar propensity, and to establish the grand principle of the Church or assembly, (not churches merely,) which God was forming on the earth. But here God would encourage and win the Gentiles that Peter himself had despised. For after the Lord had told him that he was to go and make disciples of all the Gentiles, he went not; after even the Church was driven to speak, he lingered. They were slow (may I say?); they were staying behind the work of the Lord; they had little entered into His mighty grace, so far transcending the thoughts of His own children, but now manifested with little heart on man's part, yet led on by God's hand (for it was scarce more than this until Peter was actually brought to the spot). But when he preached at Caesarea, how God rebuked — though it might be in the fulness of mercy — the slowness of His servant! When the words fell from his lips, not even Jerusalem had ever seen such mercy, nor had Samaria witnessed anything like it; for there had been, in God's wisdom, a pause there, and an imposition of apostolic hands before the full blessing was imparted.

But here was nothing of the sort. Here it was all of pure grace. Of course, there was an antecedent work of the Spirit in their souls, giving them repentance toward God and faith in Jesus. This is always necessary. But there was no outward act to be done by others and submitted to by themselves. Baptism followed as a privilege (as it

really is) which could not be refused them. For the Jew, for the Samaritan, humiliating elements were not absent. For the Gentile, on the other hand, there was sweet encouragement. God was winning them, and would stop the mouth of every gainsayer. He was giving, in the manner of the gift, the most magnificent proof that, if He went out to the most distant, He shows for that reason the more grace; — no mercy so rich as that which sought and found the poor Gentiles.

And mark it well, brethren, it is thus that we receive the Holy Ghost. We come under the Gentiles. We are not Jews; we are not Samaritans. Let others boast, if they will, of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven: would that they did boast of what was done on the day of Pentecost, and among the Samaritans afterwards! No apostles were called to lay their hands on the Gentiles. Peter, not a whit behind the chiefest, and one of those who had laid his hands on the Samaritans, was there; but the fact of his presence at Caesarea made the grace of God the more conspicuous. He declared the astonishing news to all; but there was no room for him to do anything more. It was no question of man’s preparatory action, either in laying on of hands, or even in baptizing. Nothing of the kind was done before the Spirit was given, although the apostle Peter was there to baptize and lay on hands if necessary. Circumstances, therefore, did not prevent, had this been God’s order. Man, so to speak, disappears in the overflowing grace of God. And how blessed that there it is we find our blessing and proper place before God! In this God has given us a full adequate answer to all the efforts of men, who insist on the necessity that we should have apostles when there are none. Unbelief despised the apostles

when they were here; unbelief assumes their presence now to be indispensable, as the sole channel for the impartation of the Spirit, when the channel is nowhere to be found. How good of the Lord, that He should leave us in His own written word the proof that these men understand not what they say, nor whereof they affirm! Let others, if they will, put themselves back in what, no doubt, suits them — the place of Samaritans or Jews. Let them say they are Jews when they are not. But the Lord gives those who are content to own themselves mere sinners of the Gentiles His richest mercy. Would that those who are still cleaving to forms and ordinances, to channels of one human sort or another, might be brought down to their true place, that (willing to be, as they really are, nothing) they might be blessed fully according to the heart of God! Thus it was that God then blessed; and thus it is that He ever loves to bless. It becomes us, then, to make much of His grace. As the apostle said he magnified his office, so I think we should magnify the grace that deals thus divinely with mere outcast Gentiles as we naturally are. We may say much of Him who can thus afford to bless such as we are; for if such was His blessing then, the ground is not changed, and such it is still. I say not that there is the same kind of evidence, but that such is the revealed principle of God’s blessing the Gentiles. How is it, if you bow to the testimony of God going forth in the earth — how is it that according to Scripture not Jews, but Gentiles, received the Holy Ghost? It was through the preached word. Is it not now through the same medium — the word of His grace?

There may be, no doubt, a delay in some cases. You may find souls really touched of the Spirit of God — I do not

mean merely their feelings, or any passing emotion, but a real work of grace in the heart and conscience — and yet the person may have no peace, no settled rest and liberty, in the Saviour. This is not uncommon. Are we, therefore, to deny a work of God? Are we to ignore this part because there is not all we might and must desire? Are we to say that, if there be not full deliverance before God, there is nothing at all? This I leave to others; for myself I dare not think or say so. I entreat my brethren that none among them may yield to such unbelief. I hope that no one here will think it necessary to question the reality of God's work in a soul, because it does not yet enter into the full and simple sense of all Christ has done for it. We may be sometimes in haste with souls, and may injure them deeply if we do not accredit God's work.

But there is another point of danger also. Let us not rest satisfied because a person is truly penitent, and looks to Christ, unless he be brought into liberty. This is equally unbelief, and a want of acquaintance with the word and grace of God. It is to stop short of the full presence and operation of God's Spirit in the soul. We must call things by their right names. One may be but miserable through a sense of sin and anxieties which have not found their answer by God's grace in redemption. But still, when the heart yearns after Jesus, although by no means in peace of conscience and still less of heart, this we ought to call conversion, and to treat it as God's own gracious work. But to settle down in such a state would be equally wrong — to suppose it enough because a soul turns from sin to God, because hating himself he also looks to Jesus. For it is more a grasping after Him than any positive peace in Him, and very far from the fulness of the

blessing of the gospel. On the contrary, we ought to press, that there is much more in Jesus than merely what awakens the heart and touches the conscience, however real the sense of sin may be, and desire after what is of God. We all, I believe, fail if we do not insist that such an one is not yet in what Scripture recognizes as the true Christian state before God. If His word supposes His children to be fully at peace, aught we to be satisfied with anything less? A renewed mind, but still under law, we ought never to recognize as the full result of the truth in Jesus, though bound to recognize it as true so far as it goes. But there is much more that God intends for His own — even such a place of blessing where doubts, fears, anxieties, all melt away in the sense of the perfect grace which has brought us nigh to Himself without a sin or a question before Him.

It is evident that, while there is conflict and inward trouble, the state of feeling is that which was found in the Old Testament saints. The only difference is, that they could not get beyond it. The time was not yet come. The Deliverer was not there. The deliverance had yet to be wrought. The blessed ground which makes it a matter of faith to receive peace through the grace of God was not laid before them, and God’s ways cannot be anticipated. We cannot run before Him. We may follow after Him, and should delight to see His goodness as it passes before us; but we cannot anticipate God. But now salvation is come. Christ has been here, and died and rose; yet still quickened souls do not always apprehend the mighty results in a day. It may be, of course; and I do not doubt we have still cases such as the Philippian jailor referred to. The very same hour the man’s conscience was reached, there was a further work of

God, which left himself and his house rejoicing. As miserable as he could be just before, in the same hour he was thoroughly happy by divine grace. So I do not in the least deny that this may now be in the course of an hour, though far from thinking that it is so common a thing as is supposed.

Take the apostle as an instance. Surely he was converted, if ever a man was, on the road to Damascus, and in most extraordinary power too. Yet manifestly God did not bring him into full liberty all at once. He was for days and nights so exercised that he neither ate nor drank, but was blind; and all this was in keeping with his spiritual state. He had really seen Christ in glory, and this for his soul; but had he yet been brought into the peaceful enjoyment of all? I do not doubt that there was another and an immediate work, the fruit of the truth dealing with the inner man; still, until Ananias comes to him, when he was baptized, he was far from full rest and liberty. The Holy Ghost, as we know, filled him, and then, as it is ever, he enters consciously into the full blessing. This does not take away from the fulness of the gospel any more than from its freeness; but it leaves room for meeting the actual facts, and it accounts for a state in which we find souls, which, after all, can never be bent into a theory. There are stubborn facts which meet the eye every day, even without looking for them, if we are in earnest about souls. Take notice of them, no matter where, and you will learn that there is a real action of the Spirit of God with the soul, and that one may even go on in this condition for days, weeks, months, and years. It is not infrequently after this that the soul is brought into perfect liberty before God. Where one

enters into liberty, there is, in my judgment, not life only, but the reception of the Holy Ghost.

Another word I would just say before leaving this part of the subject. Wherever God does begin the work, He always finishes, though not all at once. That there is no person, therefore, who ever dies with the work incomplete, is my firm conviction, according to the word of God, and, of course, confirmed by all I have ever known in experience. That is, whenever God creates anew, He most surely gives them the Holy Ghost. I do not believe it is always at the first, because, in fact, Scripture plainly to my mind proves the contrary; but he whom God undertakes to bless now, will undoubtedly, sooner or later, be brought into the full simple enjoyment of peace with Himself. I am not speaking, you will observe, of intelligence. If this were the case, it would be indeed a most sorrowful reflection how few are to be found. We all know how miserable truly pious souls may be for years and years. But it has never been my lot to see one of those who was not made happy before the Lord took them to Himself; and, indeed, I have seen marvellous instances of the complete rolling away of all anxieties and questions, which had clouded a lifetime, even where there was life; and I do not doubt that others have seen as much, perhaps more. They have seen the grace of God at length remove all clouds from the soul. But do they associate this with its real cause? From what has been before me then, I conclude that, whenever a soul is quickened by the Spirit of God, or converted, which substantially means the same thing (only from another point of looking at the work of the Spirit), it will eventually have the gift of the Holy Ghost;

but it may have to wait because of no present submission to God's righteousness.

We may observe that on the occasion at Caesarea baptism follows. The apostle Peter draws attention to the fact, that not only did the Holy Ghost fall on them as on the Jews at Pentecost, but the people spoke with tongues; there were the same undeniable tokens of that great gift. And this was of great importance, as it stopped the lips of the brethren of the circumcision who accompanied the apostle. When he heard them magnify God, "Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water?" He knew perfectly well how the prejudice of the Jewish brethren would work. It was a new thing too — that Gentiles should be baptized with water. "Can any man forbid water, that these should be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?"

Observe another fact (which, indeed, Scripture abundantly proves elsewhere), that baptism was never meant to be the prerogative of an official in the Church. Peter was there. Had it been a question of superior dignity, surely an apostle could have baptized them. The plain, simple inference of the language is, that the act was not his personally. He took care that they should be baptized; for he commanded them to be baptized; but it is nowhere said that he baptized them himself. So Paul was glad to record about his work at Corinth, thanking God that he had not baptized any, except a very few. Peter, I do not doubt, was here led of God, although for a different reason, to abstain from baptizing. Had it been otherwise, how men would have seized on the circumstance? what endeavours to extract from it something to glorify man where God was working for His own praise? But it was not so. Even the blessed

apostle Paul was baptized by a simple disciple; and surely, if there had been anything involved in the person that baptized, we might expect it peculiarly guarded, when an apostle was the subject. But Ananias, at God's word, goes and says "Brother Saul," and baptizes him at once. There was no waiting for an official personage. Is it not a wonderful proof of men's unbelief, that they should overlook and explain away a fact so patent and overwhelming? Do moderns or ancients flatter themselves that they can improve on Scripture? Do they know, or can they impart the will of the Lord for His servants and the Church better than the inspired writers? There is no warrant from God for making ministers of the gospel the only persons competent to baptize. The greatest care is taken to prove the contrary; and this too when it was no question of necessity. There was no need of seeking one in high office for Cornelius: for an apostle was on the spot. Had due order, according to God, called for any such form as men have urged since, why was it omitted on so grave an occasion, which could not but be a precedent for all time to come to those who are ruled by apostolic example? As Paul, so the Gentile centurion and his household were baptized by those who, now-a-days, would be designated as laymen. Apostles and evangelists sometimes did baptize; but it was in no way regarded as an official rite: other brethren might and did baptize, even when the apostle was present. But this by the way.

There remains but one case more, as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, on which I must say a few words for my present theme. "And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the

upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, he said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied." (Acts 19:1-6.) This is an instance not less remarkable than any we have examined, and quite clear in its import. The apostle no doubt, perceived a certain want of ease in these "disciples," which induced him to enquire whether they had received the Holy Ghost since they believed. Then there is — certainly there was in the apostle's mind — such a thing as receiving the Spirit after believing. He does not question the reality of their faith; he had reason to ask whether they had received the Holy Ghost since. And their answer is equally plain: "We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost." They did not plead ignorance, as is sometimes ignorantly inferred, of the Spirit's existence. The question was about believers receiving the Holy Spirit. This was an ancient promise; and John the Baptist (with whom they had connection more or less close) did not more surely testify of a Messiah quite imminent, yea, in the midst of Israel, than of His baptizing with the Holy Ghost, and not with water only, as he himself did. In fact, every reader of the Old Testament knew, not only of the existence of the Spirit, but of God's gracious promise,

that He should be poured out in the last days; and of all teachers John had most strongly pressed on his disciples that Messiah would be the instrument of this wondrous work and favour among men. But they did not somehow know that the promise was now in course of accomplishment, that believers among Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles had already received the Spirit, through the hearing of faith, and not through works of law.

The apostle proceeds to ask them unto what they had been baptized; which drew forth the reply, that they knew no more than John's baptism. This elicited a weighty explanation: John had not gone farther than the baptism of repentance. He did insist on that self-judgment which the Spirit alone produces in souls that bow to God's word, and which detects their moral ruin in His sight. The power which is founded on redemption, which cannot dwell in him who is a sinful man till the blood is shed and sprinkled as a groundwork, as it were, for His own indwelling power, (which thereon links the ransomed and delivered soul with Him who has won the victory, and leads it victoriously too through an evil world,) was not yet bestowed. John could only tell the people that they should believe on Him who was coming after him — that is, on Christ. Paul preached a Saviour who had already come, and had effected redemption. "When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them, and they spake with tongues, and prophesied."

Here again the external signs were not lacking; but they are confounded with the gift of the Holy Ghost no more here than in any of the other instances. These disciples

were baptized with Christian baptism: the baptism of repentance did not suffice for them. They were baptized unto His name who died and rose again. And thereon they received the Spirit, but even then not without the imposition of Paul's hands. Thus, if God had put honour on Peter and John at Samaria, not less did He uphold the apostolate of Saul of Tarsus. And it is to be observed also, that as the two apostolic delegates had been thus owned, not in Jerusalem, but in its religious rival, Samaria, so Paul laid his hands not on Gentiles converted through his preaching, but on disciples already baptized with John's baptism.

There is nothing therefore in this to produce difficulty, or weaken the tenor of what I have already sought to expound with all simplicity from the word of God. The two instances where apostles, one or more, laid their hands on believers, in order that they might receive the Spirit, were exceptional and ancillary to the chief occasions where we hear of no such act done by the apostles. In one of these, the greater, instances (the dealing with the Jews at Pentecost), Scripture is entirely silent as to imposition of hands in any case; and there assuredly was none to lay hands on those who first received the Holy Ghost that day, whether the apostles or the rest of the hundred and twenty: God reserved this gift that it should come direct from His own hand. In the other kindred case, we know for certain that hands were not laid on the believers before the Spirit was given them; and this is the more momentous to us, inasmuch as it was the case of Cornelius and his household, under which type, of course, we, as Gentiles, properly fall. The conclusion, therefore, is irresistible. Even if apostles did exist, they are not needed to lay hands on us, or any

other Gentiles who believe, in order that we may receive the Holy Ghost. Not thus, according to His word, did God give His Spirit to the uncircumcision. Believing on Christ through their word, we have shared the blessing, even as our prototypes at Caesarea.

The Lord be praised, not only for His Spirit, but for the written word, which makes manifest the folly of pretentious men, reprobate concerning the faith, who seek to alarm the timid and to embolden the superstitious. May we hold fast, according to the faith of God’s elect, the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness, in hope of eternal life, which God that cannot lie promised before the world began.

In the Spirit and the Spirit in you.

Lecture 7 - Rom. 8:1-27

There are two main parts of the subject tonight which it is of great consequence for the children of God to distinguish, in order that either one or other should be rightly understood. One is to be in the Spirit. It is a condition that supposes a total change of being; it means, in contrast with nature or the flesh, a new state which souls enter now on the earth. Besides, there is the actual personal dwelling of the Holy Ghost in the believer. This chapter most clearly insists on both truths; and I shall endeavour a little to explain their difference, as well as the conclusion from them both for the blessing of the Christian to God's own glory (and, of course, therefore by Christ Jesus), to which all tend.

In order, however, rightly to enter into the first of these two truths, we must look a little at the general features of the epistle to the Romans.

And, first of all, I would remark that the true key-note of the epistle is righteousness, chiefly and foremost the righteousness of God (i.e. His habit or quality revealed in the gospel and founded on redemption, in which God can be perfectly consistent with Himself in justifying the guilty who believe in Christ). Such divine righteousness, when we enquire how it is that God can thus justify us, is by Christ Jesus the Lord. It is in virtue of His blood, of His death; but not that only. It is there indeed most believers are apt to stop. We may bless God that any sinners go so far. We may grieve for our brethren's sake that they go not farther; and this not merely for them,

for their own lost enjoyment, more particularly in the matter of liberty, but because every defrauding of the soul of its proper blessing and full liberty before God is just so much detracted from the glory of Christ, and entails proportionate weakness in the service of Christ as well as in worship. We need not envy those who think this a light matter; nor should we in any way sympathize with those who count it the only desirable thing that a soul should just be saved from the wrath to come. It would be true if man's salvation were God's end; but God never proposes less than His own glory; and he who makes salvation the great question proves that he is more careful about himself or his fellows than exercised in what the Holy Spirit reveals about God and His Son. And, in point of fact, there is always a just retribution; for there never was one since the world began that had power of enjoyment in the soul, or had pleasure in glorifying God, or was an overcomer of the world, or was simply and thoroughly a worshipper in the energy of the Holy Ghost, who stopped short where man is apt to stay, and where human theology habitually terminates. For theology consists of so many conclusions, is a system of inferences, and never faith. It draws deductions from certain principles that may be found in the word of God, and many of them true enough, no doubt; but the very thing that makes it to be theology hinders power, forfeits liberty, opposes the glory of God and gives an undue place to man by making him the arranger of doctrine and head of a school. The consequence is, that the children of God are stunted in their growth, and the Holy Ghost is grieved at so much dishonour that is necessarily done to Himself, the only one that is entitled to guide fully and capable of blessing all that belong to Christ, to the glory of God the Father.

Let me call attention first to the obvious facts of the case that meet one in looking at the epistle to the Romans. There is not a word said about the love of God, nor a word more about victory for the believer, until the whole question of righteousness is settled. This might not at first sight seem the readiest way to give the heart ease, and peace, and liberty; but it is God's way notwithstanding. First and foremost we have that word, always so unbending and withering to man, the "righteousness of God." And why so? His righteousness keeps before man divine authority, will not let him forget His solemn title to judge; for there was no question of righteousness until sin came into the world. What was there for Him to judge till man had ruined himself, and creation dependent on him as its head? All previously was very good. Thus judgment was not the natural or normal relationship, so to speak, between God and man when man was innocent, and God was simply a blesser of man in every kind of created goodness. There man enjoyed, and the thanks of a creature altogether without sin rose up to God. But the scene was soon changed and spoiled; and the conscience which man acquired in the knowledge of good and evil, the knowledge of good that was lost, and of evil that was the bitter gain of sin which had overcome him, led man first to hide his own conscious nakedness, and then at the very sound of the presence of God to retreat from Him. The conscience of man, alas! banished him morally before ever the voice of God sentenced him judicially. Man felt he had no longer place in the presence of God. The fatal consequence was manifest from that day, though brought out gradually, as God was pleased, with increase of light. Sin necessitated judgment.

Thus, evidently, if man was to be saved, he must be called, and this, moreover, to glory and virtue, as it is said in 2 Peter 1 This is the character of God's call. It is to what man had not. It was not simply a sustaining and using aright of what he had. He had lost his original tenure; yea, he had lost not only what was put under him in untainted excellence, but the One who was above him — God Himself (his own conscience bearing its sad and true witness). Accordingly God calls in His grace; but He calls him by glory; He calls to things unseen, and outside what was seen, at the same time acting by moral motives as a restraint upon the evil that had now entered and gained dominion over man's heart. This, of course, is all brought out with incomparably more force and fitness in Christianity; but still we find the principle of it true from the moment that man fell. In due time, however, God gave promises, and these, it is needless to say, powerfully acted upon those who had faith. In due time also the law was given by Moses, and by that no small knowledge of sin where the conscience was exercised; for it raised the question of man's state — a thing that the promises did not touch. The promises simply held out a good that God would surely give in His own time. Their characteristic point was, that they did not depend on man's state, but on God's gracious will and word.

Evidently, however, it would not be good for man, being a sinner, not to feel his real state. Accordingly, after the promises, but before their accomplishment, the law came in, acted as a probe, and brought out most plainly that man was altogether evil and guilty, and, finally, that he had neither the will nor the power to amend, however much he knew the evil of his ways.

Last of all came Christ, who submitted to the law, and might have taken up the promises; for, indeed, He was the heir, as well as the faithful witness, the only One who ever made the law lovely as a moral instrument, and responded perfectly to that expression of God's claim on man. He alone vindicated God, who had given the law, in all His ways here below; but had he, therefore, taken up the promises, and in connection with the law, it is very evident that not one could have shared the inheritance along with Himself.

A new thing, therefore, appears in the cross of the Lord Jesus. He who had fulfilled the law, He who was the heir of the promises, takes the curse instead of the crown — takes the judgment of God instead of the kingdom of God. Then was done that most wondrous of all deeds — the outpouring of all that God felt and could express against sin on the person of Him who knew no sin; all that God could do in holy indignation against evil on the One that had done no evil, neither was guile found in His mouth. He who was His own Son, the object of His perfect delight and absolute eternal favour, — He was given up to unsparing judgment, God Himself dealing with Him as He never did with another, and never can with another again. The very glory of the person of the only-begotten Son, which gave Him power of endurance, made God's wrath so much the more intolerable to be borne. The fact that He was God, and in the relation of Son to the Father — that, therefore, He both had the nature of God, and knew the love of the Father as none ever had or knew — added ineffable poignancy to the sufferings of the Saviour in that awful hour. But "it is finished;" and thenceforward God's righteousness begins to be (not promised merely, but) revealed. The

subject may not be wholly traced out in the epistle to the Romans; but, at the least, a very important part is given there, especially that which is in view of man's wants. In 2 Corinthians the Spirit looks at another part of God's righteousness, which we are made in Christ. But the great point here is, that Jesus is glorified above in the glory of God. Not that this is absolutely omitted in Romans; for, as we all know, it is just alluded to very briefly in Rom. 8, inasmuch as the design of the epistle calls for fundamental truth, rather than the heavenly height to which divine righteousness entitles. This would have interfered with the then current of the Spirit, which was to bring out life in Him risen from the dead, rather than to reveal the place of glory to which Christ is gone on high. But, beyond doubt, the most indispensable requisite for the display and foundation of God's righteousness (as Scripture shows it, if looked at as a whole) is, that God should enter the scene of death, where Jesus lay the sacrifice for sin, having become responsible in perfect grace for us. Thereon He raises Christ up from the dead, and, finally, sets Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places.

All this clearly was God's righteousness because of the cross. It was what God owed to Jesus; it was a debt which He could not but pay, both as God and as Father; and this because Jesus was the man who had glorified Him to the uttermost, so as He never had been glorified before, yea, even about that very thing — sin — which was of all things the most hateful to God. He kept back nothing; He endured all things; He held not fast the show of His glory, but put it in abeyance. He committed even His very life into the hands of God. He put Himself thoroughly, so to speak, into the hands of God, enduring

everything that was due to God for sin. The consequence is, that God, both as God and as the Father, raised up Him that was the Son but a man, by His own glory (as we are told in Romans 6). But even this would not have been a sufficient estimate of what Christ had done and suffered in God's eyes the cross deserved incomparably more. Undoubtedly He died there, bearing our sins in His own body. By the grace of God, He tasted death for every man. This annulled Satan's power, blotted out sin, brought infinite glory to God, who was indebted thereby to man, the Son of man. Hence, as it is said in John 13, "if God be glorified in him, God shall glorify him in himself, and will straightway glorify him." Therefore, instead of waiting for the administration of the fulness of times, instead of giving Him the whole earth and all the nations on it, God glorifies Christ in Himself at once and on high. There is no delay nor change as to any single thing of the earth. It was a question of God's righteousness, of His moral and heavenly glory; it was absolutely independent of all else. Neither the race nor the world have any part in procuring it. God takes Christ up, and puts Him on His own throne in the heavens. Who but God ever thought of such a plan? There were, no doubt, inspired words in the Psalms and elsewhere, which, when God had thus done, derived a meaning from it, and showed the divine intention from of old; but still glorifying the Son of man in Himself is a form of expressing the glory that He put upon Jesus, for which you might search in vain the word of God, till He Himself declared it just before He went away.

Nor was this portion, glorious as it is, enough for God. It was personal to Christ, and above all precious. Still, His work bore on others, and the epistle to the Romans

takes up this side of God's righteousness (namely, the effect of His righteousness as regards believers rather than as regards the Son). He suffered on the cross, and He was exalted in heavenly glory; but what about the sinners He died for? Would God leave them in their sins? How would this be treating Jesus? What would be a due estimate of the work the Son of man had done for the lost He came to seek and save? Had He failed or conquered in that mighty enterprise? He suffered and died for them and their sins: what is the result? This is answered in the epistle to the Romans, where we have the working out of this truth for sinful man: "The righteousness of God toward (or unto) all, and upon them all that believe."

From Romans 3, whence these words are taken, we learn that His righteousness meets sins completely. It is the "satisfaction," as the old divines were wont to speak, that was rendered about sin. Not that I quite like the phrase or idea; but what we have there is clearly expiation or propitiation for the sins of men. Romans 3 proves that Christ's death or blood in no sense stops with meeting the measure of man's wants. All now is according to the glory of God. Men "come short of the glory of God;" but if God brought in His salvation, it must be to make man capable of standing in His own presence on high, and not merely where he was before. This would be short of God's aims. Reinstating is not salvation. If salvation be wrought, it must be not merely to put man back into the state wherein he was before the fall, but to make him competent to stand in presence of the glory of God.

Accordingly, this is shown in Romans 4, 5 in a more advanced way; and by what means? The precious blood

of the Lord Jesus Christ is not all; but He was "delivered," as it is said, "for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." Mark the connection: "He was raised again for our justification." Some take it as because we were justified, which appears to my mind far from sound doctrine. The effect of such a version or sense would be to make our justification, like Christ's blood-shedding, a past thing, and independent of faith. It is never so treated in the word of God; and, indeed, the next words, which open Romans 5, refute the thought. "Therefore," says the apostle, "being justified by faith, we have peace with God," etc. There could be no such "therefore," if we had been justified when Christ rose. The work of redemption was, no doubt, wrought when God raised Him; and Christ passed into that glorious condition of resurrection, showing the character of the justification which would be given to him who believes in Him. But the words immediately after prove that justification, in the very place where men would separate it from faith, is indissolubly bound up with it. "Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God."

There it is, be it remarked, that we have, for the first time in the epistle, the revelation of peace with God, and entrance into this grace wherein we stand, and exultation in the hope of God's glory. In Romans we are never (as in Ephesians 2) regarded as even now, in a certain sense, linked with the glory; but we are enabled here below to abound in hope of the glory to which we are looking onward. Also, in the midst of the tribulations which also turn to a matter of boast, we are said to have the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given to us. Thus, again, the first mention

of God’s love is after the righteousness of God had been as fully explained as this epistle called for.

That which I draw from this is, that God would give a deep, solemn sense of sin to those in whom He was working graciously. More than that, He would show them that after all He takes care of His own glory. I do not say that this would be the way to deal with a poor anxious soul; but, in point of fact, the Epistle to the Romans was not written to the anxious and troubled in conscience. Here it is not a question of winning unconverted people to God. In that case, nothing is more important than showing love, just as Jesus first does; and as He wins the attention, He then awakens the conscience before setting it perfectly at liberty, as we know, by the Holy Ghost, now that the work is done. But in dealing with believers, and more particularly where souls have entered into the blessedness of the gospel without any very deep work on the conscience, it is of all importance that the righteous side of God’s salvation should be maintained with all possible clearness, and that it should be distinctly understood that the gospel is “the power of God unto salvation,” because it is God’s righteousness. Such is the argument: of the apostle in opening the discussion in Romans 1.

When we search into this a little farther, we find another question rise before us. In all this development of the first four chapters, and, indeed, as far as the middle of Romans 5, the great point before the mind is, sinners guilty, and God in His own way meeting them as they were — in their sins. But then there is another thing that far more troubles the soul that has been awakened and brought into peace, and that is, not his sins, but his sin, not what he has done and been guilty of, but his estate

before God. For the most lamentable thing that he finds about himself is, that, after conversion and finding peace, he makes discoveries of his wretchedness and the inward evil of his nature which he could not have believed possible in a child of God — which no man ever anticipates until he proves it in his own person. The word of God may speak about it, but he passes it by and does not dwell on it; and, in point of fact, nobody does understand it until it becomes a matter of personal experience when the heart is really brought to God.

There is precisely where the Christianity of the day, and, indeed, of many a past day for a long time, stops short of the revealed truth of God. It leaves persons, I may say, half-saved. It leaves persons with partial thoughts of Christ before their soul, but never with the proper, simple, clear understanding and consciousness that they are in Christ. I do not mean that the expression “in Christ” is not used, but that people, when they read such language as, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus,” for the most part understand nothing more than that Christ died and rose again for them, and that consequently they are cleared in the sight of God. But this is not the full meaning of the text. The difference is that, from the middle of chapter 5 of the epistle to the Romans, a new question is raised by the Holy Spirit of God — man guilty, and the way in which guilt can be met and the soul can have peace about it. All this has been closed; and this is the proper doctrine of the epistle to the Romans. What follows directly after is rather a supplement to all, from chapter 5 down to chapter 8. It is an added instruction of the Holy Ghost of the deepest possible moment for the soul that has already found

Christ. The point that is handled here is, that not merely there is a Saviour, who died for my sins, and rose again for my justification, but my old nature has been judged and condemned in Christ's death. "As by one man sin entered into the world," so it is not a question of what I did. Wherever sins are treated of, we get personal guilt; and it is to this that law applies, and to this that the judgment of God applies for things done in the body.

But grace gives us another thing besides. If all my sins were blotted out and forgiven, I am in a state of things that is a misery to myself and a deep dishonour to God. How has this come to pass? It came in through one man — Adam; and as one man is the head of the evil, blessed be God, there is another man who as certainly has brought righteousness to issue — yea, grace reigning through righteousness unto eternal life — as the first man brought in sin and death. This is deliverance. It is not sinners with the law, but Adam at one extremity and Christ at the other. But how does this affect you or me? No Jew could deny the effects for the race of Adam's position. He might boast about the law, but there was a world ruined before ever the law came in; and the law, instead of repairing the ruin, rather and only fastened additional fetters on man, and gave more complete proof of the extent of the ruin. It could do no more. But now another man came, even Jesus. And how is Jesus spoken of here? As One who passed through death into resurrection-life. The consequence is, that from the middle of Romans 5 the Holy Ghost begins to discuss a new question altogether — not justification by blood, but justification of life.

And herein lies the great deficiency of theologians. There is no understanding, as far as I am aware, of

“justification of life.” Manifestly this is not a question of what the Lord did. It is an estate or condition founded on redemption and displayed in His resurrection. Works, however good, do not meet the exigency. Christ did magnify God, as we have said, in everything; and this was absolutely necessary for God’s glory, as it is a part of our deep blessing, because we have indeed an entire Christ. Still, what Scripture brings out to meet the question of our state of sin as men is not what Jesus was when here below, but what He rose up into. Therefore, just as Adam only became head of a family when a sinner (i.e. when he had accomplished, as one may say, the work of sin), so the Lord Jesus only becomes Head, the recognized and revealed Head, “a quickening Spirit,” when He enters into resurrection. Only when He laid down His life in death, He had finished the work that God gave Him to do. Then it was that the corn of wheat, which fell into the ground and died, now risen, would bring forth much fruit.

This principle is applied in Romans 6 to the sin by which the believer was troubled. The main point of the chapter is not that we are risen, but alive, in Christ risen, to God. The argument of the apostle does not go so far here as to regard the believer as risen with Christ, which is not the doctrine of Romans. In Colossians he is viewed as so risen, in Ephesians he is even seated in heavenly places in Christ; but in Romans the believer is never regarded as risen; he is simply dead to sin and alive unto God. What is here insisted on in regard to holiness of walk is that he should reckon himself “dead unto sin, but alive unto God.” But I cannot reckon myself dead if I am risen. This is evident. It would be a contradiction in terms; so that the necessity of the argument and the

whole force of the epistle excludes this mistake; and a very important point indeed it is and will be found in Scripture. But this does give the believer a very wondrous deliverance practically; and I am entitled to it from the first moment of my Christian career, when I own the Lord Jesus Christ and am baptized unto His name.

What am I baptized unto? Unto His life — unto what He did? Not at all. I am baptized unto His death. I begin at once with the great and infinite act of divine grace in which He met me, and not merely my sins (for there I find His precious blood); but He does not say unto His blood, but unto His death, which is a larger expression and goes more deeply. This meets my condition as a sinner — as a man alive to sin; and I want to find death to it all; I want to find deliverance out of it; and the only possible deliverance out of a state of sin is death. This is exactly what is wanted. It is not only that I am forgiven: this is all very blessed and most necessary as a beginning; but it is not what is called salvation, even if I look at the term as a purely personal matter. There is more than this; for I want the application of His death and His life beyond it, as well as of His precious blood; and this is what I have in Christ.

The glorious fact is, that I am entitled to account Christ's death as meeting my state with every root of evil; so that I have the comfort of knowing not only that by His blood I am forgiven, but that by Him risen I am called and warranted to count myself dead to all indwelling sin, which otherwise would be an intolerable burden. Thus a double blessing is procured in the dead and risen Lord Jesus. There is remission of sins, but also plenary,deliverance. Only he that has died is cleared

from sin. The blood of Christ meets the sins; but I wept the death of Christ in all its value for sin. This alone, therefore, supplies the answer to our wants; for He that was dead in atonement is risen into a new estate altogether, where no question of sin, or of anything requiring to be done or suffered on Clod's part, ever appears again. The entire blessedness of Christ is for the believer, and, mark, from his baptism. Is it a something that a man grows up into which gives a certain kind of value to experience? This would be all sadly liable to turn to self-applause, and, from the subtlety of the natural heart, would be the means of taking away from Christ on the plea of honouring the work of the Spirit of God within. Alas! this is precisely where (in spite of God's care in Scripture, as in the facts of Christianity) so many Christians slip aside; and would you know why? For this simple reason: the world, the law, and the flesh go together. If I am simply a man living in the world, I need a law to keep me in order, a rule to deal with my nature — to reprove me here, and to strike me there.

Accordingly, when God concerned Himself actually with His people Israel, a nation living in the world, He gave them His law, which acted as a curb or restraint, a kind of bit and bridle on their rebellious flesh. It had to be checked on the one hand, it had to be pushed on the other, so to speak. Thus it was that the law dealt with man's flesh; and this is what the law would essay for Christians. But to go back to it now is just the denial of Christianity. I have not the slightest hesitation in pronouncing, that some good men who in grievous error would impose the law as a rule of life for the Christian mean very well by it (for they aim at being pious); but I

am well satisfied that the whole principle is false, and that the law, instead of being a rule of life, is necessarily a rule of death to one who has sin in his nature. Far from being a delivering power, it can only condemn such; far from being a means of holiness, it is, in fact, and according to the apostle, the strength of sin.

What I want first of all is deliverance. How is this deliverance to be found? By death. Our death? Am I to die? This would be destruction, not salvation; and we find it not thus in Scripture. Resting on His death, I can die daily; I can submit to the scorn of the world according to the measure of my faith, and expose myself to that which I know will bring separation and suffering from the world; and it is the glory of a Christian to go forward humbly but boldly withal, and at the same time entirely separate from the world, by a path which is strewed with all bitterness of trial. But what is it I must start with? It would become a matter of boasting, and reflect a certain degree of credit on myself, if I had to die to my evil nature gradually. But it is not so; and hence the importance of the truth set forth in Christian baptism. A man at the beginning of his profession of Christ confesses His death and resurrection. I am not going to discuss now any points that are disputed, but assume it to be an initiatory institution. Differences on the subject there are, no doubt, as all allow; but all should hold its initiatory character, as well as the truth which it sets forth objectively. What does it signify? That the Saviour confessed is not a living One, but dead and risen. “As many as are baptized unto Jesus Christ are baptized unto his death.” This is more than the sprinkling of His blood to me, true and precious as such a privilege undoubtedly is.

Besides blood there is His death, which deals with my nature, and sets me free before God in Christ risen. The more simply I take it the better. There is nothing like simplicity in the things of God; and there is no faith so true as that which takes His word on His own authority though we may as yet understand little. If God tells me, a Christian, that I am dead, am I to believe it or not? If, then, it is certainly true that I am dead, am I not to believe also the inferences which His word draws for me — that my judgment has fallen on Christ, and that He, risen, is the power and sample of my deliverance, and that as, for man and the world, they have no claim on me, who now belong to Another, even to Him who is raised from the dead? What claim can there be longer on a man that is dead? Everybody knows that such an one is to be buried out of men's sight. The law passes completely out of application to the dead. Not that the law ceases to retain its force; but it is for those alive under it. The law is all-important in its proper sphere; but its power and sphere consist in dealing with men alive in the world. Out of this I have emerged by Christ's death and resurrection; so that I am no longer living in the world as to my proper Christian life. To flesh and world I have died; and this is what, in my baptism and profession of the Lord Jesus, I began with. I was living as a natural man, but a dead and risen Christ has closed all this for me. It is not only that I believe in Christ, and know forgiveness by His precious blood; but I am entitled by God's word also to know and say that I am dead in the death of Christ. One is as much a truth as the other. But the feeblest saint, practically mixed up with the world, feels the need of knowing that which stays divine judgment, and hence clasps that comfort to the heart in the hour of trial and sorrow. Why do they

not equally accept the other truth? Because they do not like to face the full grace of God, nor the full responsibility of the Christian.

The blood of the paschal lamb sprinkling the door-posts was known even in the land of bondage; but the Red Sea separated from it manifestly, that the people, now redeemed and outside, might be only for the Lord. Then it becomes imperative that the Christian's walk be in the pure light of the grace of God. "We are not under the law," as Romans 6 insists, "but under grace." And this is a humble as well as holy walk, where flesh counts for nothing; and there is not a word about the law, save indeed expressly exempting the believer completely from its jurisdiction. It is not made for a righteous man, which of course a believer is. It has its force against the unrighteous; its application is to the wicked living in the world. Against the evil of man, as such, the law bears its witness not in vain. They are living in the pride of the world, in the profanity or the self-righteousness of the flesh; and the law deals with such. That is, whether men give loose reins to low flesh, or religious pretensions to high flesh, the law deals with them all. But as for the Christian, he begins with death to his nature — as alive in the world. I press again that this is the precise meaning (not of John's, but) of Christian baptism unto death. The Christian finds his blessing in that which the natural heart finds so dreadful — in death; but it is in the death of Christ he is a dead man before God, as he was dead in sins. Such is the first Adam condition out of which the believer emerges by the faith of Christ, by whose death he too has died to all he previously lived in, and now enjoys as part of God's grace toward him, to

reckon himself “dead to sin, but alive to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Such is one of the privileges, with a grave responsibility attached to it, to which the Holy Ghost applies the death and resurrection of Christ. It is no longer a question, it will be observed, of our sins, or of God’s washing us from them in His grace by the blood of Christ. Sin, as such, the fleshly nature, is met in Christ’s death, who, risen, communicates a new life, a spiritual nature, in the power of His resurrection. That man is my Saviour, and that new nature is exactly what I have got as part of the new creation; for “if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature. Old things have passed away, and behold all things have become new.” The second epistle to the Corinthians may carry the doctrine farther, as remarked before, because it treats of the glory of Christ, and not merely the application of God’s righteousness, as a basis of salvation, which is the point of the epistle to the Romans.

Next we come, in Romans 7, to the question of the law; and though this be not the time to discuss that subject fully, I may just observe that we have here also alike thorough and divine clearance from this difficulty that we had in chapter 6 from sin. “Wherefore,” he says, “my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ.” And how is this? The body of Christ is very expressive; for nobody in his senses would use such a phrase as this to describe Christ’s life here below. Apply it to His death, and all is quite simple and consistent. “Ye are become dead to the law by the body of Christ, that ye should be married to another.” And in what condition? Even to Him who shed His blood for you? Not so; but “even to him who is raised from the

dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God. For when we were in the flesh;" — then we are there no longer. This is the point needed. But it will be found that, when those who insist on the law as the rule of life for the Christian refer to this expression of the apostle, they put quite a mistaken meaning on not being in the flesh, and only mean by it our old unconverted state. But it goes farther. What experience does the Holy Ghost bring before us in the end of this chapter? It is a man wretched, but evidently converted. He has been given to turn to God. He abhors sin, yet he is always falling into it; he loves holiness, but ever comes short of it: in fact, he is every way miserable. He feels rightly as to all this, but no effort to do good or shun evil avails. The evil is present, and the good seems to elude his grasp: such is the experience of his heart. I am not speaking of his outward life, because this is not the question here, but a deeper thing. There may be no fall into open sin, but sin sadly works within.

That which the apostle here transfers to himself in application is the bitterness of a soul who thought he had nothing but blessing, yet after all never realized himself to be so unhappy in his life. In his unregenerate days he might have tasted the unsatisfying pleasures of the world. Now he had turned his back on the world and his face to God, yet never was there (he felt) so disconsolate a being,. The misery increases till he bursts out into "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?" when the darkness yields to a better and calmer light than ever. Thus it is the case of one who had seen Christ as the hope of his soul, who had been born of God, yet, nevertheless, had no sense of deliverance. God lets him feel his own inward evil till he looks quite out of

himself to Christ as his Deliverer, not alone from guilt or wrath, but “from this body of death.” It is not sins, it is sin, which harasses him so much the more because his conscience is awakened. Being alive to what is due without adequately knowing grace or redemption, God or his own heart, he suffers severely till he knows the reality, nature, and extent of liberty in Christ. Accordingly, this is the very question the Holy Ghost sets Himself to answer in the Scripture I have just now read. And what is its purport?

The first answer is, that God has already in His love brought in a full deliverance for my soul; by-and-by He will bring in an equally complete deliverance for my mortal body. Thus a real present deliverance of grace comes first, and this becomes the pledge of all that follows in glory. What is the nature, then, of the soul’s deliverance now? If I use the word “partial” about what God gives now, it is only because there is the body as well as the soul. As far as the soul is concerned, the emancipation is perfect; but it is perfect only for the inner man, if I may so say, not yet for the outer.

Accordingly, the apostle brings this before us in the earlier verses of Rom. 8. “There is therefore now no condemnation,” because he looks to, rests, and is in, Christ alone. This is, in part, the answer to the soul’s confession of misery and cry for a Deliverer. Awakened to feel that it is not merely pardon he wants, but deliverance from self, he finds that deliverance is in Another. He had thought that, having found pardon in Christ, he must deliver himself by the inward working of the Spirit of God; but he learned, when most wanting Him, that the Spirit of God did not help him; he found, somehow or another, that the Spirit of God was making

him miserable with himself. The reason is manifest: because he had put himself under law in the spirit of his mind, and the Holy Spirit (just because He is the Spirit of God come down to glorify Christ) will never give power, but rather make a man prove his weakness, as long as he is trying to put law in the place of Christ. This is in no wise what the Holy Ghost has come down to do. He came to earth from heaven to glorify the Lord, and not the law.

The lack of deliverance was learnt in groans; thence he is driven to turn to the Deliverer; whereon, in spite of the old nature being still as bad as ever, having thanked God, he concludes, “there is therefore now no condemnation” — not for those for whom Christ died, but — “to them that are in Christ Jesus.” We are now by grace set in Another, even Christ risen, in order to give us our status before God. Nothing can be more blessed.

Some may be helped to an understanding of it in part, even from a human illustration. Take the case of a man who is worthy, whose honourable feelings and whose resources (I speak after the manner of men,) are as great as his worthiness, and he makes a choice. Being a wise and worthy man, he selects wisely and worthily, and he is pleased to choose where others had not the heart to choose. He does choose where nobody else could afford to do so; but having chosen, what then? The person he has chosen, and who is married to him, was once wretched and low, but she acquires the status proper to her husband, and all the old antecedents, perplexities, and griefs completely disappear. Among men the wife gets the name of her husband: her own name is gone for ever, and a new one taken. We find it is thus with those who are in Christ Jesus. What is their

place? Where He is. Jesus walking on earth — is this my status? As the heavenly and divine pattern, He may be followed, but He “abideth alone:” if that had been all, I had been left out for ever. But Christ died, yea, rather, is risen again. Then He can give me of His Spirit. This is what Christ does. His death has met the evil doubly. The sins are gone, but the nature is also judged righteously. Therefore God can reveal the new nature He has given, and vouchsafe another position altogether. Christ risen is the sole Head of God’s family. I do not speak of His body but of the family; for the epistle to the Romans, except in the figure used so practically in Romans 12, does not go beyond that. But here I have the family of God, and the condition, place, or standing of that family before Him, resulting from the death and resurrection of Christ. “Behold I and the children that God hath given me.” Grace imparts Christ’s own status to the whole family. And what is the result for them? “No condemnation.” Christ had suffered for the Christian; and, now that He is risen, the Christian is, as it were, part of the righteousness of God, as is indeed yet more strongly said in 2 Cor. 5. How could God demand justly a debt to be paid twice? And now Christ has entered into this place where He could have others identified with His own blessedness before God. This, and nothing less, is its character — “no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.”

And next the reason is given; for, says the apostle, “the law of the Spirit of life,” etc. Mark well that it is not simply because His blood was shed. This alone would not suffice. However efficacious for the consequences of the old estate, it would not give us the new standing before God. Without His precious blood I could not be

brought into this new condition; but I want not only the blood that cleanses from the sins of my past life, but also complete clearance out of the old condition, and a holy, happy, settled place in the new creation. And what can do this? Himself dead and risen. Just as He is the One that perfectly meets the sins, and, more than this, that was judged for the sin; so He is the blessed ensample and power of the new estate in resurrection. He is the head and source of all the blessing. Accordingly, then, the apostle speaks of a “law of the Spirit of life.” Hence it was that, when Christ rose from the dead, having purchased with His blood the best and most intimate blessings, He breathed on the disciples; His own blessed person vouchsafed the sign of it. Judgment had fallen on Christ for us; sin was put away, death vanquished. None of these has anything to do with the new life in Christ. Not but that a believer may slip into sin, as he may also die; but he neither sins nor dies from having the new life, but rather he sins because he has indulged the old nature, and he dies because it pleases God that Jesus should not come yet, and accordingly He calls him to be with Himself above meanwhile. But the life that he gets from Jesus neither sins nor dies. It is a holy life. And therefore, in virtue of its source and character, it may be said, that “he who is born of God doth not commit1 sin.” So the Christian does not die, as far as the new nature is concerned, even having eternal life in Christ.

But observe, all this deliverance is merely for the inner man; there still remains the need of the outer. Although reconciliation is complete as regards the soul, it is but partial as regards the rest of nature, and God will never be content with what is short of His own counsels. He means to deliver wholly, and He will deliver worthily of

Himself, of the Holy Ghost, of Christ, and of His redemption.

Further, the apostle proceeds to give the reason why the law of the Spirit of life in Christ has made the Christian free from the law of sin and death. For he says, “What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh,” God has done. Observe how the law and flesh go naturally together. “What it could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh.” He does not, of course, say, in sinful flesh; for this it was not, yet certainly in the likeness of it. That is, it was not at all in the circumstances of one who refused a place in a sin-stained world, but of one who was made flesh, born of a woman — no doubt, supernaturally born so — who should only be in the likeness of sinful flesh, but most truly born, or He else could not have the nature of man. But He who was the Son of God nevertheless becomes as truly man as He was God from everlasting, and dies in the nature which He had assumed — dies for man, dies vindicating God for man’s sins; and more than that, not merely for his sins, but for his sin.

I call your attention to it; for this is what was needed, and this is what is asserted here. God sent His own Son in the likeness of flesh, of sin, and for sin. It is not merely that there was an accumulation of sins, but it is the nature which is in question here. I have as I need forgiveness for my sins; but do you suppose I want God to forgive my bad nature? Why I do not forgive it myself. No; I want that nature to be condemned, and myself to be delivered. And this is exactly the character of the new estate which Jesus brings us into, and puts us in before God. It is perfect liberty, as far as regards the

soul; not merely deliverance from what I have done, but from what I am. So that I am no longer as a Christian man having to do with the responsibility that attaches to mortal men, but am passed now into a new state, even while I am in the world. Before quitting things here below, I have acquired by grace a new relationship before God. And He that declares and brings out and illustrates this relationship is Jesus in His presence. Such is the believer's place through His redemption, and it belongs to every Christian.

The grave question is, Are we in it in faith consciously? Who can doubt, from Scripture, that God really designs it for His own now? But faith was to enter in, and to make it good, looking at Christ. It is mere self-deception, and serious misunderstanding of the word of God, to suppose that a man can be at the same time in the struggle of good and evil described in the latter part of Rom. 7, and all the while enjoying the liberty of Rom. 8. Together they are quite inconsistent. Can a man be in bonds and free at the same time? They are equally a contradiction in terms: only man sees the absurdity of it in nature easier than in grace. No man can be at the same time wretched and happy. With one breath he cannot say, "Wretched man," and "I thank God;" but he can well say, "I thank God" after he knew what it is to be a "wretched man." But it is the fruit of a false system, itself the fruit of unbelief, to assert that one can be made free from the law of sin and death while one is "carnal, sold under sin." The law of the Spirit does not reign along with the law that, when one would do good, evil is present. One may know heaviness through manifold temptations with joy in the Holy Ghost; one may be at peace with God, yet suffering deep grief on

account of what the world is, and what the people of God are. This gracious sorrow burdened our blessed Lord here below, and drew out His groans; and we may and ought to know the fellowship of His sufferings. All this I quite admit; but those were not the groans of one who lacked the peace of God. Unbroken communion is precisely what the Lord Jesus, in the days of His flesh, always possessed; as He said, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you.” Now we dwell in that peace made by His blood, as it is brought out to us in the power of His resurrection. But then it is when we have left behind the exercises under law of Rom. 7. What I complain of is, that quickened souls, who really look to Christ, take up the law, and erroneously think it a duty to toil like a galley-slave at that oar of bitter bondage, when God calls them into the liberty of Christ. They have not died to law in their own souls. The death of Christ brings completely outside that condition; just as really as a man in prison for debt remains no longer under the power of the law when he dies. No doubt, as long as the man lives, the law applies to him; but death makes it impossible for the law to hold him fast; he is irrevocably gone beyond its reach. It is exactly so in the case of the Christian.

Some speak as if it were all mysticism. No doubt, it is a figure of speech; but it is a most expressive statement of a blessed reality. Those who do not believe so in simplicity pay the penalty of their unbelief in the uncertainty and powerlessness which attend it. Whenever there is an exercised conscience in one who thus puts himself under the law as a rule of life, then he proves of necessity the bondage of the law, which is the strength of sin, not of holiness; and ends in defeat, not

in victory. It is never thus that one finds strength; for this is the fruit of grace, and not of the law. Hence, when a soul is thus under law, the more the Spirit of God deals with his conscience, the more miserable he finds himself; and this is the reason why the most conscientious are often thus. Will any person dare to affirm that this is the ordering of God? Is it of Him that a believer should be godly and conscientious, and yet without peaceful enjoyment and rest in Christ? The reason which accounts for so strange a state is, that such a man has not entered into the place of death to the law in which Christ would set him.

Others, indeed, may venture to tell me that it is a false doctrine that Christ died for sin as well as my sins, and that I am dead to sin as well as forgiven my sins. I have heard such charges among those who ought to have known better. But death to sin in Christ's death seems to me a vital truth of Christianity. He that would shut me up to forgiveness through Christ's blood, who allows no more in the work of Jesus than that He died for my sins, who denies that He has given me besides this death to sin, has not realized the completeness of salvation or the positive side of Christianity. It is a great mercy from God to know the complete blotting out of all my evil works and guilt; but this alone is comparatively negative. Hence so many children of God try to gather a positive ground of righteousness from what Jesus did day by day in His walk on earth. Now, there is the positive side as well as the negative: only it is found in resurrection, not under law on the other side of the cross.

And the Christian will learn that he needs all that God has given him. He will learn that he needs this precious truth too. To be dead to sin is a very substantial part of

the Christian's blessing; and any man who does not know it omits a capital doctrine of the positive side of Christianity, which is revealed from Rom. 5:12 to Rom. 8. Of course, I say nothing of Colossians or Ephesians, which epistles one must never expect to be understood by those who stand on legal ground. I limit myself to that which the Christian wants as the liberty, if not the foundation, of his soul. Be it remarked, that there is not a word about overcoming till we have entered here — not a word of "being more than conquerors" till we come to this. There is neither the groaning nor the joy of the Holy Ghost, the intimate working of God in his soul, till he has got solidly founded on the precious footing where the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ puts him. May God keep His people from abandoning that which He has brought out for their deliverance and for practical victory? Scripture is plain enough: the difficulty, as ever, lies elsewhere. The heart shrinks from that which puts sentence of death on nature in all its forms.

Are the days evil? So much the more do we need to hold fast. Let me, in speaking of this subject, press it on those around me to look at 2 Peter and Jude — two portions of the word of God specially in view of a day of declension? Of increasing wickedness, and even apostacy; and what do you find there? The saints given up to decay as if it must be? Not at all. It is in these epistles above all others that we are exhorted to growth and progress in the truth of God. Such are the resources of grace for a day of deepening darkness.

As to the point in hand, may we treat as of the enemy, no matter what the form or pretension, everything that would blot out so precious and, after all, so simple and

fundamental a truth bound up with our very baptism! What a warning, that men should be so beguiled as to treat this as some strange doctrine!

How, then, may one describe this new condition in which the Lord Jesus puts the Christian? According to the New Testament, there are not two, but three conditions in which a man may be. I press this, because it is connected with the faith as well as with practice. It is not true that a man must be a natural if not a spiritual man. These are not the only alternatives. We find a third and intermediate class between a natural and a spiritual man. The former is clearly one who has unremoved sins, who is simply a child of Adam, without anything whatever above fallen humanity. When God's grace converts such an one, a new nature is imparted, and, on the footing of redemption, he is brought to God. But every man who is thus reconciled to God is not necessarily a spiritual man. There is more than one cause that may hinder a believer from being what Scripture calls spiritual. The spiritual are those who, as the apostle Paul says, are "not in the flesh, but in the Spirit."

Again, the Corinthian saints (however grave their faults) were not by the apostle said to be natural men. He lays down that "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God." He does not say so about the saints. But he does tell them that they are children; that, instead of their being full-grown, instead of his being able to speak to them of God's deep things, he is obliged to feed them with milk suitable to their estate. And what were they then? "Carnal men." Hence men are natural, carnal, or spiritual. This is a very humbling truth. I can understand men not liking it; and why? Because they

fear that they may not be accounted spiritual, if believers may indeed be carnal without being natural men. Such persons prick up their ears on hearing any action of God's Spirit distinct from the new birth. They shrink back from the sound of His distinctively Christian operations, as if the assertion of so bright privileges were to deprive them of something they have not, instead of making them feel the lack of what they should have. It is evident that, whether carnal or spiritual, I ought, on the contrary, if there be anything wrong or lacking, to own my state. Is not this the way to have the wrong rectified, and the deficiency supplied of God?

Now, there are various causes that hinder the believer's spirituality. The first is, where he has never passed in the consciousness of his soul into the thorough sense of nothing but evil in the flesh, and the faith that it has been all fully judged in the death of Christ. Without this in substance, is it possible for one to be truly spiritual? I doubt it gravely, though admitting freely how much a deep sense of Christ's love may effect in one who has not learnt this. But then there is another hindrance which may operate — not the law, but fleshly wisdom. There may be such a value given to man's thoughts, such a lowering influence consequently exercised over the spirit by heed to the philosophy of the world in one shape or another, that one can only in such a state be carnal. The spiritual manifest what God has made them to be in the Second Man, and desire not to cultivate but to mortify what belongs to the first. Instead of pampering flesh up, or admiring it, such an one treats it, on the contrary, as a dead thing. The consequence is, that this does not fail to give him power over every such snare.

One danger — that to which Satan continually incites the children of God — is to take all the comfort they can in Christ, while at the same time holding fast all they wish of the world's ease. It is evident that the heart and conscience of a healthy believer must repel such ways and thoughts, as the very world does too; for if a Christian is observed in any place where he ought not to be, others will express (what one ought to have felt without such a hint) their surprise that a confessor of Christ should be there. Is it not most humbling for a Christian to startle the world after this fashion; allowing himself such a licence as men generally feel to be unbecoming the Master's name? The world is sensitive as to consistency. They may tempt the Christian to share their pursuits and pleasures; they may insist on the great importance that the Christian should help to set the world right and show a good example, entering into its assemblies, and taking part in its senates, sitting, on the judicial bench, and exercising authority in every conceivable sphere. And, no doubt, it is uncommonly pleasant to the flesh to be in dignity and power; but is not this precisely what Christ formally, as well as in spirit and His own example, interdicted? These things the Gentiles do and value; but Christ died and rose to take us out of this present evil age. His grace makes us happy in our little lot, and content with whatever estate God may have apportioned us. It is a most bright and blessed thing in such a world as this to see a soul that so values Christ, and so rejoices in the place that God has given him in Him, as to yearn after nothing but His will and glory.

On the other hand, as long as a man is labouring under the law, he is always weak by reason of the flesh. He

may make resolves, but he does not keep them; he may ever so much strive, but there is no power to attain. He is incessantly wrestling, but he is obliged to confess at the end of each day that the things he would he does not, and the things he would not he does. Thus he is always repenting and sinning, sinning and repenting. Such is the invariable condition of a man under law. But can intelligent men affirm that this is the condition of a Christian? I do not mean to deny that the state of many a Christian resembles this; but it is wholly irregular, and contrary to what Scripture supposes in every Christian. When I urge that it is not a Christian condition, I do not insinuate that it is a state in which no Christian may be found, but only that it is at issue with that which our God gives to us and looks for in us. A child of God may be in a state which does not answer to the grace shown him. If I take the epistles with simplicity, it is impossible to avoid seeing that God intends me, by the working of the Holy Ghost through the word, so to lay hold of the place which He has given me as to enter into stable peace and real joy of heart. This is of the highest possible moment for practical testimony; and God would have me, as being a vessel of the Holy Ghost, to testify continually of Christ in this wretched world. This is the main reason why His grace has so blessed us, and would have us to know and enjoy it all.

That of which I have spoken is what is meant by being “in the Spirit;” and this depends on, and is proved by, the fact that the Spirit of God dwells in us. It is not the Spirit acting on the soul to produce faith, but dwelling in the believer. “Ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now, if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.” This

is the characteristic of the Christian. Without His Spirit, one is not stamped with His essential character. The Holy Ghost, not mere flesh, distinguished Christ from His conception, as He was sealed by Him in due time, and acted always and only in the Spirit. So the Christian, as he lives in the Spirit, is now called to walk in the Spirit. It is no question of not being lost — this is not the force of the expression — but of being distinctively Christ's here below. "And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness." When a man is converted, but troubled under law, he has no sense of such a place, and no power to count the body dead. The Spirit is a convincer of sin, not strength to glorify God in peace while he is thus. But when he gives all up to God's sentence on the flesh, finding his all in Christ, the Spirit does strengthen him inwardly. Thus he is not only freed, but can use his liberty in practical power also.

There is yet more. "But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you." This is full deliverance even for the body, and the complete answer to the question raised in the distress of Rom. 7:24. Thus the Holy Ghost, who witnesses of redemption, does not only give me now my status in Christ dead and risen before God, but is the divine pledge, as I look at Christ that this mortal body shall be instinct with that life which I now enjoy in my soul; for I look not on Christ simply as God's Son, but see Him raised in righteousness, and by the Father's glory. I say that in grace He came down and died; in righteousness He is raised up and seated at the right hand of God; and the

righteous award for the infinite work He wrought in grace overflows, so that God frees us who were once slaves of sin and Satan, but now believers in Him, according to the liberty of Christ — first, for the soul now; next, for the body when Christ comes to wake us up; and the Spirit is the seal of the one, and the earnest of the other.

Is Christ my portion? It is Christ who determines the display of justification. It is really as perfect as Christ before God. What a measure is Christ Himself before God! Therefore it is that we are said to be made the "righteousness of God" in Him. Grounded on this, the Holy Ghost comes down to dwell in me now, (not merely to act in me,) anticipating the bright day of glory, and meanwhile just so far empowering me as I treat the old nature as dead, and make Christ my all.

This, then, is the full answer to the cry for a deliverer. The soul is emancipated first; the body shall be quickened later. Meanwhile, the Holy Ghost takes His blessed place not only as to the soul, but also as to the body. When the believer is raised up by-and-by, it will not be without the Holy Ghost; the Son quickens, but by the Spirit, who takes His part in every atom of blessing that body or soul receives. How sweet, how glorious, a thing it is to have the Spirit of God, who thus identifies Himself with every part of the blessing! How should we, therefore, feel at grieving "the Holy Spirit of God, whereby we are sealed unto the day of redemption?" But this is not all. No doubt the Spirit of God has not yet raised up our mortal bodies; notwithstanding He works in us now, and sustains in our hearts the cry "Abba, Father." This is the first and suited action of the Holy Ghost when deliverance is entered into by the believer.

It is necessarily Godward, and as the Spirit of sonship or adoption. Thereby the soul rejoices not in the blessing merely, but in the source whence it came, and accordingly “Abba, Father,” is the word.

Nor is it thus only that the same indwelling Spirit works in us; and how? He gives the certainty that we shall be delivered shortly; nay, more than that, He groans within us “with groanings which cannot be uttered.” There is perfect sympathy with all the state in which we are now. The groans of the Spirit of God are not in any wise because I am not delivered, but just because I am. It is true that I am only delivered in part, not completely. Thus, if I groan in the Spirit, I groan because, being set free in my soul, I feel the contrariety of my outward man, as well as of all things around me, and my heart is looking onward to the day when creation itself shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the sons of God. I have got the liberty of God’s grace now, and I shall have the liberty, even for the mortal body, of God’s glory by-and-by. And thus, then, we have this blessed place of the Spirit of God, as will be observed, as a personal Spirit distinct from the new nature; but at the same time the Holy Ghost gives His name, so to speak, to the condition in which I am now put, as a delivered soul, as a Christian, by virtue of the death and resurrection of Christ; and so I am in the Spirit, and the Spirit dwells in me.

It will not, in this sketch, be expected that I should enter into all the applications and practical uses of so great a truth. But I have desired particularly to discuss the point that is commonly least understood — that is, the Spirit as a condition in which we are now. I presume most here are more familiar with the truth of the Spirit of God

dwelling in us; but the other truth is also of the highest interest and importance for the Christian.

1 It means really practise sin; which the Christian does not.

"Baptized by one Spirit into one body"

Lecture 8 - 1 Cor. 12

I propose to treat now of some of the mighty effects of the presence of the Holy Ghost. One of these is here designated as His baptism, by which He forms a new and united body, the body of Christ upon earth. Not only is this an exclusively New Testament truth, but, even within the New Testament, the revelation of it to us was confided to one apostle. No man can find it, save in the writings of the apostle Paul. I do not mean, of course, that there was no such thing as the Church of God, the body of Christ, before that apostle was raised up of God to make known this great truth. I do say, that while the mystery of Christ and the Church was revealed to God's holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit, it was revealed not by them all, but by one. This is a plain matter of fact. None of the New Testament writers but Paul speak of the Church as Christ's body.

Now there was a remarkable fitness in the history of Paul, as brought before us in the sacred writings, for the work which God confided to him, as far as its revelation to us was concerned. He had been an enemy so long as the testimony even of Christ Himself glorified on high was confined to the Jewish people. He was the witness of the martyrdom of Stephen; he was the active emissary of the Jews in persecuting all — men and women — not merely in Jerusalem, but pursuing them from city to city in their sad and, at the same time, blessed flight (for God honoured it to win fresh souls to Christ). He, in the fulness of the hatred he bore to the name of Jesus, had received, as we all know, letters from

the highest religious authorities of that day, in order to prosecute their destruction the more energetically and, withal, piously. In the midst of this, when God was changing the form that His ways took upon earth, so that the tide of blessing was no longer flowing towards Jerusalem, but from it, when all that then constituted true glory (for indeed all was of grace in Jerusalem) was trampled down or dispersed, the Spirit of God points, as it were, outside, seeks and blesses the old enemies of Jerusalem, not only works among the Samaritans, (and we know what their jealousy was of Jerusalem,) but even a stranger from a distant land is sought by the Lord, who is met in nothing but grace, in spite of the grossest ignorance of that which God had just accomplished in Jesus, and sent on his way rejoicing, — not up to Jerusalem, but returning to his distant home from it.

It was at this juncture that it pleased God to deal with Saul of Tarsus on his road to Damascus; for he too was going from Jerusalem, full of persecuting fury against the confessors of Jesus, dark as night to the true grace of God; he, on the mission of sorrow, shame, and death, such as the world could give; he, with his commission such as Satan alone, borrowing God’s name, could instil energy to carry out; he, nevertheless, with a good conscience as a man in the midst of all this blindness to the truth, — he is struck down suddenly with a light brighter than the sun at noon, but withal, even in that which blinds him naturally, was enabled to see supernaturally the Lord of glory, to hear the voice of his Lord, to know himself called, not as a saint only, but as an apostle too, not merely to taste the grace of which he was to be so remarkable a witness, but to minister with the Lord’s authority, not for that day only, but for all

times, not for one land, but for every country under heaven. That blessed man was given, in the very words that converted his soul, the gem of that great truth on which I hope to speak a little now. He learnt, to his amazement, from One that he could not doubt to be the Lord, both that He was Jesus — wondrous knowledge to burst upon his soul! — but that this glorified Lord, who was Jesus of Nazareth that had been crucified, identified Himself with the objects of his unrelenting persecution: "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." The work was done — not all at once, as far as regards the enjoyment of the soul, but surely, as communicated in substance to one thus strangely converted. The first and last that had ever been arrested by a revelation of Jesus, which revealed also in principle the Church of God, was precisely the suited one to develop this and enforce it practically, as well as in his writings, to lay the foundations of the Church of God, to insist upon its heavenly character as Christ's body, and to do battle for God's glory in it. This became his life; to this God henceforth called him by Jesus Christ our Lord.

It was Paul who at once, after he was converted, began to preach the Lord Jesus, not only as the Christ, but as the Son of God (Acts 9) — another great point of his writings. I do not say that this is so characteristically, or at any rate so exclusively, his as the body of Christ; but I remark it to show the largeness in the ways of God displayed by the blessed apostle. Although the Church of God rather attaches to Christ viewed as the exalted man, yet still He who is the man exalted in heaven is the Son; and, (if I may be allowed such an expression reverently) God does use the utmost care to enforce the relationship of Christ to Himself, as well as that in which

He stands to us in His place as man at His own right hand. He accordingly was not led by the Spirit of God merely to insist on what others had done before. He did not merely draw attention to His being made Lord and Christ, as Peter did; he did not speak of Him as God's servant (παῖδα), for such is the true meaning of the term that is improperly translated "Son" in Acts 3 and 4. There was no preaching as yet of Christ as the Son. As to Acts 8:37, in which the Ethiopian eunuch is supposed to confess that Jesus is the Son, every person moderately acquainted with these matters knows it to be spurious. But Paul, instead of limiting his teaching to Christ as the man exalted above, preaches at once in the synagogue that Jesus was the Son (υἱὸς) of God. This I conceive to be well worthy of note, as admirably exemplifying the largeness of heart wherever Christ, and Christ seen above, is the object of the soul. One is free, then, to think of all His glory; one delights in it; there is no hesitation in accepting the truth of God, and the importance of the truth is realized by the soul.

If I look upon Him merely on earth, progress is incomparably slower. We find this in the case of the other apostles even. How easily they mistook, how slowly they received, how they had to be led on step by step! In the apostle Paul, no doubt, the truth was allowed to settle down through conscience; for even he must have it thus. No man otherwise can have it, or make it really his own in his soul; and this because we are not merely men — we are sinners. The apostle Paul himself, a man walking with as good a conscience as any man ever had since the world began, — even he must learn the worthlessness of flesh, and must learn it for and in himself. He must learn it by Christ, but he learnt

it in his own heart: still, thus learnt, the result is always bright. That which we are not told had been said to him the Holy Ghost enables him to seize. I say not how it was; for certainly the Lord Jesus had said nothing about it in what passed, as far as we know; but he was given of God to know it. God does not direct our attention particularly to Sonship in what passed between Christ and Saul. Still, the fact is, that the two grand truths of Christ's glory, as Son and as the heavenly Head, became henceforth his testimony. It is not merely that He is Messiah on earth: this was now no longer to be insisted on; the Lord Himself had put an end to the preaching of it even before He left the world. (Matt. 16:20; and especially Luke 9:20-22.) Then came a new thing.

After Jesus went up to heaven, He was made Lord and Christ. His being Lord is the very simplest acknowledgment, the lowest form of the recognition of Christ, that he who confesses Him can make, because it is simply the assertion of His authority; and it is clear that authority, although most true, is after all the lowest side of the truth in Christ. It does not bring out His grace; it does not display His infinite glory. It is what He was made, not what He was and is in Himself. It is not, therefore, what is proper and intrinsic, what is personal and eternal, but a place that was given Him, which He assumed, which He was exalted into. The apostle Peter and the others, as we saw, preach this. Then Stephen sees Him after another sort. Thus, though it were by the full power of the Spirit of God working on earth, still even so there was gradual advance, and the discovery in his own person how totally rejected is the truth of God as to the exalted Lord and Christ. He bears his witness that He was the Son of man standing at the right hand

of God. That is, just as upon earth the testimony to the Christ-head, so to speak, of Jesus gave place to His being the rejected Son of man, so the exalted Lordship of Christ, being Lord and Christ, gives place to His being the Son of man in glory. Finally, Paul not only at once enters on the truth that had been known before, but in the germ of it, at least, learns the great mystery, that Christ and the saints he was persecuting were one; yet, instead of being shut up in the narrowness to which we know our little hearts are so liable, he, on the contrary, immediately preaches Him to be the Son of God.

Now, I do think that this is a most blessed fact to bear in mind, more particularly in its moral bearing upon our own souls, as showing how, when things are viewed aright, when Christ Himself is viewed in heavenly light by the teaching of God's own Spirit, the fulness of the glory of His person is seen in what is beyond. For His being the Son of God, if it less connect itself with us in particular; is after all in itself a higher truth than any glory He could have even as exalted in any way whatsoever at the right hand of God. Not that one would too curiously compare or set one thing against the other: there is no reason for; this; but we would assert and maintain the whole truth of Christ's glory. And I am persuaded we shall find that all power to apprehend, enjoy, apply, and walk in all the rest of the truth, depends on the measure in which the truth of His personal glory is felt and owned by our souls. Just as Christ Himself becomes exalted before us, so all else, even things most distant, as it were, the very skirts of His glory, will be found to be enlarged and brightened according to that which we see here. So, on the other hand, all attenuating, enfeebling, corrupting, and

destroying of the truth of God will be found to be traceable to men's low and still lowering views of Christ Himself. It is well that all this should be seen and appreciated. We shall find the bearing of this in what is coming before us presently.

For what is the Church? Is it not the body of Christ? It is the answer produced on earth by the Holy Ghost to the glory of that exalted man and head at the right hand of God. Hence it is that you cannot separate these two. Now, the greater part of the children of God have been entirely unexercised as to this place of glory into which Christ has entered. The consequence is that the Church is unknown. They have ignored His place before God. It is denied; the value of it is unknown; the singular glory and blessedness of a man, exalted as He is in heaven, is just as feebly felt as the misery of man now, were he the greatest of philosophers, poets, statesmen or conquerors, sentenced, doomed, outcast from God on the earth. Even the children of God look on present things as comparatively a scene to enjoy, as that of which we must make the best. Consequently, the very truth of God, and the mercy of God, are used to contribute as much as possible to what may be called earthly ease and joy. What is only a vain search after pleasure is modified, no doubt, in the Christian's case: spiritual thoughts are there. But, still, how few saints comparatively look always on this world as a judged and condemned scene! It had been before God in manifold operations, and in testimonies continually, until all was proved. Then came the Son, the man Christ Jesus. It was, alas! the great struggle, so to speak, between God the Father, who had thus given His Son, and the world, led on by the power of Satan. But God was not ashamed,

and would not shrink from what (we may say) was to Himself the infinite trial of giving Him up, of allowing every indignity and wrong to be done to the One He loved above all; and the Son of God Himself spared Himself no sorrow, no shame, no evil that man could put upon Him. But indeed it was for this He came, and for this it was needful in the ways of God that the world should prove its evil as it had never done before; and so it did. Thus all the evil came out that God might deal with it at one blow; that He might deal with it in a blow of judgment — not on the world, but on His Son; that He might deal with it, therefore, in absolute grace as far as this sinful world was concerned. Thereon all was changed, and instead of its being man turned out of a goodly garden of delight, adrift in what became a desert and godless world, man now, in the person of Jesus, enters heaven itself, and sits down on the throne of God and glory.

But the moment God accomplished this, for which He was waiting, then, and not before, there could be the formation of a body on the earth; for there must first be an adequate head; and there was but one person that was adequate to be the head, and that blessed One could not be head till He was man as well as God, and, more than that, till sin had been judged, and grace in consequence could have its full way. And, therefore, we see how blessedly all truth centres in Christ, and in His cross, and in that place into which He has gone at the right hand of God. Besides, there was another thing necessary; there was a suitable competent power needed on the earth. And what power could this be? The same that had always wrought in order to effectuate anything from God. It was the Holy Ghost; but acting

now in a new way, conformably to that in which God had displayed Himself. He had shown Himself in the Son of God, and He would not retire from it.

There was but one person even in the Godhead that could, as an object and image, display God: it was the Son. It was always so. He who had revealed God, even passingly, was the Son. He might as an angel, so to speak, appear, as in the case of Abraham; still, it was always the Son. But if ever there was a power that wrought, whether in a good man or a bad man, He that wrought divine things by and in man on the earth was invariably the Spirit of God. Hence the Spirit of God takes His place in this new work of God. The Son had entered as man into the glory which He had before as God. He had gone up into the very presence of God, and carried manhood, as it were, in His own person to His throne; so that there was the wondrous sight of all in heaven subjected to a man. Then it was evident what God had in His heart from what God was manifesting above.

But who, I must ask once more, could worthily tell this here below? Who could be a due witness of this heavenly glory? He that knew it perfectly; He that alone was able and willing to glorify Christ, and was wont to give man to do, learn, or enjoy whatever God had before Him for man. It was the Holy Ghost; and He accordingly comes down. And this is the fruit of His coming — He forms one body on earth, not so many bodies. There is no such thought in Scripture. Is there such a notion in the mind of any child of God here? Does He recognize Christian bodies on the earth? What can be more false? I do not mean intellectually so alone. As Christians, we would not waste time or breath on the mere wanderings of the

human mind. But I do say that a wrong to Jesus, a wrong to this most blessed manner in which God is glorifying His Son by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, is surely one which ought to act on the conscience, and shock the heart of one to whom God has made known the glory of Christ by the Holy Ghost. Am I, then, in the current of the working of God's Spirit? or am I, on the contrary, traversing God's prime object in sending down the Holy Ghost, and exalting Christ at the right hand of God?

Thus it becomes a question entirely above all ecclesiastical controversy. God forbid that the children of God should occupy themselves with such trifles or worse! But I do say, that if we know Him, if we delight in Him, if we walk no more after the flesh, if, indeed, God has revealed His Son in and to us as He is now risen and glorified, it becomes us to inquire whether we are obedient to the heavenly vision, as the apostle was in his great measure — we in our little one- — whether we are imitators of him as he was of Christ. Does not God call all His children to be instruments of divine grace for His purpose of glorifying the Lord Jesus? This must always begin with oneself: just as with the apostle Paul, the truth sunk deeply into his own soul before the mighty work opened out all around him. But whether it be in ourselves (which, of course, is the first true effect of the revelation of Christ to us), or also in the desire to be helpers of the joy of others, as servants of God's will in magnifying the grace of Christ, it does become us to search and see whether we can answer with a pure conscience.

Now, what Paul was given to see, and what he has brought out fully in the chapter from which I have read

a verse, is, that the Holy Ghost is now come down to work on earth in the Church — not merely in the saints individually (though surely this also). But there is here below that which God calls His Church, the body of Christ, and here identified with Christ. So true is this, that the Spirit does not disdain to call the whole (that is, Christ and the Church) Christ Himself: thus thoroughly do the saints form a part of His glory. And this comes out in a very interesting manner, — humiliating indeed to us, but a wondrous proof of the God with whom we have to do. It was the folly, and vanity, and workings of other evil among the Corinthian saints, which formed the occasion for the Spirit to instruct us thus largely about the Church, the body of Christ. Their painful disorder called forth the application of God's mind and will, — their vain-glory too, that loved to display whatever of power they had. And there was power; for it was no question of weakness. Many suppose that the great reason why there is or may be disorder in the Church of God is because of weakness; but weakness never ought thus to work. Disorder has nothing to do with weakness. In fact, some of those who have caused the greatest disorder in the Church have betrayed not so much weakness as strong flesh. There is always insubjection to Christ, and very often the same vanity that was displayed in the Corinthian saints. No one can fairly impute it to lack of power there. It was the abuse of power, the ostentatious desire of showing what they possessed — in few words, the severance of the power of the Spirit from the glorifying of Christ. Disorder is the natural result. It matters not whether it be little or more power, nor what the qualities possessed may be; if severed from Christ, it is fatal, — fatal to His glory, fatal to the blessing of saints and other souls, — most of all, fatal to him who is

so misled of Satan. This was precisely what was at work in Corinth at that time. How ought we not to bless God for the use to which He has turned it in His mercy!

I can say but few words, compared with the demands of my subject to-night. Let me just call attention to some of the leading points of the chapter as they occur. “I would not have you to be ignorant concerning these spiritual things” — these manifestations. “Ye know that when ye were Gentiles ye were1 carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led. Wherefore I give you to understand that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed.” So such man calls Jesus “Anathema;” no one puts Him under the curse (but on the cross). God, we know, did it, when He died for our sins; but no man calls Jesus Himself accursed by the Spirit of God. Nor can one say that Jesus is Lord, but through the Holy Ghost.

Thus, there are two powers at issue in view of God and man. There is the spirit that works in the children of disobedience; there is the Holy Ghost that works in the children of God. In the one case there is the expression of the rising up of man against Jesus; in the other there is the subjection of believers to the Lord (for this is the great point pressed here — Jesus as Lord). The reason was because these Corinthians were practically making the Lord’s Supper their own supper, and the assembly their own theatre of display, as if the word went out from them, instead of coming to them, with all other Christians, claiming their obedience to God. In fact, the lordship of Jesus needs only to be urged when souls are in a proud or negligent condition. The saint that enjoys Christ needs no such pressure, would have none other lord, and delights in His grace. Of course, it is always

due by every soul; but evidently the assertion of it is most needful where insubordination prevails, and flesh endeavours to exalt itself against His will, as indeed was the case at Corinth. Therefore the apostle starts with this grave fact, that the Church of God is where the Holy Ghost maintains Jesus as Lord. This is the prefatory principle, meeting the Corinthians exactly in their need, as the Spirit of God must do, if one may so say. God deals, if at all, morally; nothing else would be worthy of Him or good for us. God deals morally, though He would carry our hearts into the enjoyment of Himself, where all thought of our ways may be dropped: yet is there nothing, after all, which acts so powerfully on our ways to form them according to His nature.

The next thing noticed is that “There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit;” and again, “There are differences of administration, but the same Lord; and there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.” It is clear that these three verses are of deep importance for our practical understanding of that which the Lord lays down. The simplest elements are here; yet the Church has practically forgotten them. They are the smallest requirements that He could accept of, the only recognizable character of God’s assembly, viewed in its working day by day.

First of these, then, “diversities of gifts” are spoken of. Wherever anything assumes to answer to His Church on earth, there must be free room, not only for gifts, but for diversities of gifts, in the same congregation. Where the gifts are practically shut out, and the congregation really look to one or more individuals only, no matter how gifted, the ground is proved by the first touch of

God’s word to be not of Himself. There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit (not minister). I do not mean by this that there should be an effort to give the semblance of many gifts at work. The Church of God is a real body; and now we must add that its state is distressingly anomalous; but seeking appearances, which would always have been unseemly, is now especially to be deprecated. It is His assembly: we must take care what we do or seek there. He formed it here for the Lord’s glory through the Holy Spirit, who is sovereign and will surely maintain the rights of Christ. Be the manifestation great or small, it is the fruit of His own working; but assuredly there are diversities of gifts. In fact, especially as the assembly now is, there might be few — perhaps none in a particular place, or only one or two might manifest gifts to edification; elsewhere there might be many. The great point is that the door be open for all He gives.

I repeat that “there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.” Whatever denies this practically, or in principle, is not God’s Church, and has no claim therefore on my allegiance or yours. Yea, I am bound to disown its pretensions. Ought I to sanction or to abjure a departure from the Lord’s will in these grave matters of the Holy Ghost? Ought I not to treat a congregation of real Christians as a human association, if they fling overboard, e.g. such a word as this? It is no question merely about the constituents, but of that which regulates their action. If human rules, different from Scripture, and even opposed, govern, is it not man’s Church? What has a Christian to do with any but God’s Church? Who licensed man to meddle? Who called him to regulate it? To make the Church was a great work

even for God Himself. It needed the Son to go to heaven after redemption was wrought, and the Holy Ghost to come down to the earth for the purpose. The world He made by His word for the first Adam, though in ultimate purpose, no doubt, for Christ, when He shall be displayed as King in His glory. But even God Himself did not (and I think we may say with reverence, could not) make the Church until He had the Second Man its glorified Head above, and the Holy Ghost sent down to form the body below. Death and resurrection alone could be an adequate basis; the risen ascended Lord Jesus alone the suited head. Thus God's Church on earth is not a governmental provision of religion for a nation, nor a society framed to hold and carry out the plans and peculiar views of the best of men. It is the body which the Holy Ghost has formed here below for Christ, whom in its very first principle it confesses as Lord. But the manner of the practical working is in diversities of gifts, though the same Spirit.

Next, as we are told, "there are differences of administration, but the same Lord." That is, the Lord employs one for one thing, and another for another; but it is He who acts in this. The Spirit of God does not take here the place of Lord, and I doubt very much indeed that this is a true way of looking at the Spirit of God. Is it correct to speak of the rule of the Spirit? I admit most entirely the power, and working, and sovereignty of the Spirit; and I suppose that this last is what is meant by sound men when they speak of His rule. Still there is a danger of slipping out of that form of sound words which the Scriptures supply — not the letter, but the truth and principle of God's word. I am not contending about shadows, but about realities; and I am sure we shall find

the words of Scripture most aptly express the truths of Scripture. Hence, when we slip away from words, we are in danger of weakening the truth itself. Again, there has been a tendency more than once in the Church of God to set up the Holy Ghost, as it were, in the place of the Lord The effect of this is, that it takes us out of the place of subjection to the Lord as He is above. Now, inasmuch as the Holy Ghost works in and by man, this, more or less, tends to put man in the place of Christ Himself: Whereas, if we hold to that which Scripture says and teaches, it is plain that the Holy Ghost Himself, in the working of the Church, takes not so much the place of Head and Lord as of Servant, caring for all and glorifying Christ, though He be divine. As the Son here below took the place of Servant of the Father for the divine purposes, so the Holy Ghost, although He be in His own person God, and therefore supreme, nevertheless deigns, for the carrying out of God's counsels, meanwhile to subject Himself to the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus it is that He stamps the servant character as it were, on the saint who is really animated by Him and led by Him to the glory of Christ. That is, the Spirit constitutes him, in relation to the Lord Jesus, a servant, even though his function may be ruling the Church of God. To do so is not pride, but just the true place of a servant who is called to rule; he cannot faithfully give up that will of his Master, nor need there be a particle of self in thus ruling. Where self or man is the disposer, what value, authority, or power can there be? But if a man be called to rule in any way, let the sphere be little or great, he is as much a servant, nay, he is only a real servant, if he carry out that which the Lord has given him to do. There is no assertion of self here, but of Christ Himself, in thus serving Him, whatever his

place or gift. There are differences of administration, but the same Lord, even as there is the same Spirit and diversities of gifts.

Again, “there are diversities of operations,” he adds; “but it is the same God which worketh all in all.” The Church is not a place where man has the smallest title, or where there is any room for his will. If God is working there, it is man’s place to retire, that God may really work according to His own will. What a character this gives the Church of God! And I just pause for a moment to press this upon those present, not on those to whom it may be altogether an untried thing in experience, or even comparatively new. I would ask the brethren and sisters here before me, Are these the truths that really fill our hearts? When we enter, say, on each Lord’s day, when we come together on any occasion for edification or worship, do we meet as God’s assembly, looking to the Spirit, the Lord God Himself? Thus I press that it is either God’s assembly or nothing I am aware there are those who think it presumptuous to call themselves God’s assembly. Pray, what would you have them to be called? Would you like it to be “man’s assembly,” or no assembly at all? Would you like to break up all responsibility of the saints of God on the earth? Could you bear calmly that Jesus should have no glory by you, however poorly reflected it may be? — that He should have no return of our hearts to His grace; that the Holy Ghost should be thwarted, hindered, supplanted, now that He is pleased to have come down to glorify Christ in the saints? Yea, after He has once more aroused the children of God, and they have come out from their places of hiding and slumbering, refusing to be diverted any longer from going forth to meet the Bridegroom?

And if they go forth, must they not give themselves up to do His will? and how do it better than in that which is dear to Him? There is an object incomparably dearer to Him than all that engrosses men around. What can all worlds be to Him, compared with the love which He bears to His bride, the Church, which is His body here below? Will this lower His glory in our eyes? will this enfeeble our desire to obey, because we realize in ourselves that our place is to do His will, subject to that which lies upon us for glorifying Christ? Far from us be such a thought.

Let me just put it thus. Take, for instance, a wife. Supposing she has a wife's feelings, loving and right thoughts of her husband, and he is one that is not only a husband in name, but worthy of all her love. I need not say how any such comparison fails, when we think of Christ and the Church. But, still, they resemble enough to raise the question, whether nearness of relationship weakens love for an altogether worthy object? To ask such a question is to have it answered at once. How grievous that such delusions should be tolerated for a moment by children of God!

It is a lie of Satan, that to know God as our Father in Christ is to weaken our obedience; so is it to deny the title of Christ's members, wherever they may be. Is it not plain, that to recognize them as His draws out mutual love, and gives perseverance and confidence in seeking to serve them? Deny their place of relationship, and with what different feelings you must deal with them! On what ground would you ask them to abandon the ways and the systems of man? Why, save on this basis, would you urge the blessedness of meeting on]y in Christ's name on earth, before we go to heaven, as part

of that which God has called His Church? How utterly repulsive to the Christian, that the world which is stained with the blood- guiltiness of Christ's cross should presume to meddle with the body and bride of Christ! How nauseous to sink into a voluntary society, a sect framed and governed according to rules of man's device! If this be so, it is the plain responsibility of every child of God to cleave only to what God has done and revealed, not doubting the power and willingness of the Spirit to make him faithful.

But there is another truth, too, connected with this. I have already shown, on a former occasion, the real and abiding presence of God's Spirit on earth. Consequently it is no question of forming a new Church, still less a make-shift. It is our place to recognize what the Spirit has formed and never abandons. It is our calling to act in faith on God's word about it, clearing ourselves from what it condemns, and seeking to be true to what God Himself has given. Only two or three in a place might have faith so to feel and act (for the ruin is very great); but were it only two or three even in a great city like this, met together in the name of the Lord Jesus, even they should allow nothing inconsistent with "diversities of gifts," "diversities of administration," and "diversities of operations," instead of setting up all, so to speak, on the same ground of human equality or the distinctions of self-devised order. God's truth and will can never lose their authority over His people by change of circumstances. Clericalism and religious radicalism are equally and altogether opposed to Scripture and the action of the Holy Ghost. They are different and opposite forms of man's will. The Church is a divine institution, where God's disposal must be supreme; and this the

Holy Ghost alone can make good according to the written word. All else is only man; and it matters little whether it be man the leveller or man the exalter of his fellows, — either is only man. Who but God has any real claim to deal with His Church? If it be only “our church” or “your church,” we or you, I grant, may lawfully alter or amend, narrow or widen it, as we think proper.

But were there only two or three saints who, because of the word and Spirit of God, because of the injured rights of the Lord Jesus, came out from that which has so long departed from the Scriptures about God’s assembly, and set at nought the Holy Ghost, I am bound to own them as on the true ground of God’s Church. Lowliness becomes them as well as deep thankfulness; shame that they too should have joined in the general slight put on God’s word and Spirit, desire for the blessing of all saints according to God’s will, and a holy fear lest their own weakness or negligence should bring dispute on their testimony. I do not mean, nor do I say, that such are the Church of God; but I do call them, thus walking together, His Church. Were they the only two or three saints in the whole world that were so met according to the word, they would be the only thing of that nature here below. Thus it is not the simple fact of being members of Christ’s body that constitutes the Church. No doubt this is the personal title, and all Christians are members of Him, and this constitutes their responsibility to abandon everything that falsifies their relationship in conduct, position, and objects; but what constitutes God’s Church here below is not that the individuals composing it are members of Christ — though that, of course, is essential — but that they assemble and walk together according to the word of God, the Holy Ghost

being allowed His own place of sovereign action for the glory of the Lord Jesus. It is only a circumstance whether they be two or three, or as many hundreds, thousands, or millions. The number of those who gather is a wholly subordinate point.

Again, though real members of Christ are contemplated, this alone does not at all suffice. Thus there might be ever so many saints associated; but if they arranged themselves or their meetings as they saw fit, apart from Scripture, received such or such according to their wisdom, carried out their discipline, owned this doctrine and not that, what would this be? A more or less excellent, prudent, energetic society of Christians. Yet not merely all these things, but any of them, being opposed to the word of God and the place of the Holy Ghost acting in the Church — still more, all of them united — would destroy the pretension to be God's Church. They would have no real claim on God's children outside of them. Not the smallest recognition is due corporately, though they would still be individually objects of love as Christians. None ought to deny their proper place and relationship, which is indeed the true ground of appeal to their consciences. The Church viewed as on earth is the assembly of saints, where God acts by the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven; it is His assembly, and not merely an assembly of saints. Of course, an assembly of saints is so far well; but if only this, it can never aspire with truth to the place of God's Church. It is not theirs but His presence by the Holy Ghost which constitutes them His Church. How precious that there should be on earth saints built together for God's habitation in the Spirit!

But as with Christ the Son in the days of His flesh, so now the Holy Ghost is not allowed His place. What a thought to utter! and yet, is it not true and certain that the state of Christendom now warrants the use of such words as “not allowed His place”? Can you say that God has the full freedom of acting according to His own word? The responsibility of this has been left to man; and how has he discharged it? It is truly wonderful that just as God allowed man to do what he pleased with Christ, so He allows man to show despite to the Spirit of grace, for the present thwarting and defeating His glory in the Church. Both the one and the other were committed to the responsibility of man. We know the day is coming when the Church shall disappear from the world to join its Head, and enter into its destined seat of glory along with Christ. Before the world, too, we shall shine in due season.

But what I press as the point of solemn consequence for God’s people to feel now is this, how far they have received into their soul, and how far they are really carrying out the truth of God as regards His Church. If you say you have no particular care about it, and it is enough for you to think of your soul’s salvation, I must ask you, Where is your heart for Christ and those who are Christ’s, and for His glory in them? What a grovelling and selfish place for a Christian to put himself in! It is, I admit, a natural result of the teaching that prevails, which ignores the one body and one Spirit for our own salvation and that of others. And it bears with itself its, retributive sting; for those who accept such a scheme never seem to attain even that selfish end; they are doomed to continual uncertainty as to their personal acceptance with God, and find a relief in worldliness

from their lack of settled peace. What a contrast with God's way, who saves with a perfect salvation, that we may be free for all His objects, for His glory in Christ and the Church above all! Believer, has God saved you to leave you apart from His own purposes, and without a care for the glory of Christ? If God has shown you such infinite mercy, does not His word, does not your heart under the Spirit's leading, point to your owning and serving Christ, learning and doing the will of God about that which is so dear to Christ as the Church? I beseech you to consider the matter.

But in this chapter (1 Cor. 12) there is far more than I have noticed. The apostle speaks of the manifestation of the Spirit in various forms. It is given to every man, not for himself, but to profit withal. "To one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues." Thus the chapter embraces those gifts that went out as a sign to the world. They were in the Church, in the various members of the body of Christ; but still, it was not the profit of the Church only: there was an outward mark to men also. Take, for instance, the tongues What a witness of the considerate grace of God! What a witness of the love that no longer confined itself to the chosen nation, but would meet men now in grace where they had been placed already by His judgment after the flood! The wonderful works of God in redemption are proclaimed by the Spirit to every nation under heaven in their familiar tongues. But we have

more than this. “All these,” it is added, “worketh that one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.” Thus carefully is maintained the sovereign action of the Holy Ghost. Whatever may be the place of servant which He is pleased now to assume, still He is sovereign, acting as He will; He is divine, He is God. “For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: also so is Christ.” Have you been brought to God? Have you believed in your heart, and confessed with your mouth, that God has raised Jesus from the dead? Then you are His to magnify Him who is your Saviour and Lord. Own Him only as the Lord; own the Holy Ghost as the one that is actively working in the saints, in God’s assembly here below. This I admit, that the Spirit of God, freely acting in grace, does not confine Himself to the assembly as such; He may act in, and does act by, members of Christ (and even others betimes), though they themselves may not be faithful, nor in the place where God would have them be. Hence I do not deny for a moment that the Holy Ghost works in both nationalism and dissent, and not in Protestantism only, but in Popery and the Eastern systems of Christendom. But he who values and understands Scripture must see that all this conflict of Christian societies proves total departure from God’s word as to His Church.

Thus national Protestantism is not only an invention of man, but comparatively modern. Nothing of the sort existed for at least fifteen centuries after the Church was formed. But go on. Let us look not merely at national bodies, but where it is attempted to gather saints, on the basis of (let us suppose) a large measure

of truth: Is this God's Church? Does the Church select particular doctrines? Does it choose its own ministers in the word? When the Church takes such a place, it quits subjection to the Lord in principle. It is the wife attempting to play the husband, instead of obeying him. Nothing can be simpler, if we hold fast what God Himself has laid down. The Church does not confer mission, does not teach; but I admit entirely that it is bound to judge, and not only in matters of moral evil, but also in doctrine, intolerant of all which overthrows the holiness or the truth of God, and especially careful of Christ's glory. But this is very different from commissioning a clergy, or defining articles of faith. Looking at the Church in Scripture, I see it charged with the obligation of maintaining the truth, the pillar and ground of it here below. I do not look abroad into the world to find the truth; I know that the truth is found nowhere except in the Church I am speaking of the Church ordered under apostolic care as it was. Its responsibility is not lost by its disorder.

Now indeed there is a state of things that painfully contrasts with what is presented in the word of God. We see a number of bodies which call themselves this kind of church and that. What is a child of God to do who desires to be humble yet faithful to God? Judge where you are by the word of God, judge by it what you are doing and what you are sanctioning by your assent or even presence. Have you given up the fellowship of saints on earth? Do you hide behind the plea that you have nothing to do with others — that all your duty is to walk well yourself? Then you abandon the ground of God's Church wholly. Be honest. Search and see, whether you find yourself outside the bearing of the

Scriptures that treat of God's assembly in its practical working, or whether they tally with what you are doing. Is not the Holy Ghost so fettered by arrangements of men that the diversities of gifts, were they ever so many and real, have no room to display themselves? Is not the Spirit grieved by the counteraction? Is not the Lord practically displaced by the Church (no matter of what sort) presuming to appoint overseers, and even ministers of the word, instead of His servants going forth on His own warrant, and trading with His goods? Somehow or other you have got outside that which answers to the written word; you are off the ground of God's Church on earth.

On the other hand, if faith emboldens you to be with only two or three, where there is the joy of knowing that the word really applies and directs, instead of pronouncing condemnation, how blessed it is and proves! For them that honour God, He will honour in due time. Meanwhile divine light shines on the path every time you meet together. It may show how feeble you are, and how you fall short; still it is the right place and aim; it is where God wills you to be, and graciously cares for you, supplies need, sends helps by the way, gives now this servant, now that; for "all things are yours," and your soul profits by the truth, and advances in the ways of God. If there be evil here or there, it is detected and judged (the Holy Ghost working through the word to that end). Then how sweet to know that we are doing in deed and in truth the will of God! He that does it shall abide for ever. How happy the heart and conscience that thus has the certainty of subjection to the Lord Jesus through the dreary way!

Now, this was what the apostle desired for the Corinthians. They had practically got the whole machinery into disorder, but he does not deny that it was God's assembly. There may be brought in any imaginable evil under the sun. Am I to turn my back upon the assembly of God because of things unworthy, which I might hear of in one or another? Surely this is not the path of the Lord, who tells us how evils are to be judged and corrected, What we have to do, then, is to apply the word intelligently, and deal with each source of scandal as it may arise. Of course, indifference as to the will of the Lord is evil, no less than the evils I feel in others; but it is as unscriptural to go out at once because of another's sin, as to wink at it or help it on. God's assembly is and must be intolerant of evil, because He is confessed to be there; but I must seek to arouse conscience, and to act in obedience even as to this. In the Church (not rushing out of it hastily) I can count upon God working in and by His saints; and therefore, no matter what evil Satan may foist in, false doctrine or immorality of the most flagrant kind, we are neither to be overmuch surprised nor to refuse our aid to the Church, whose business is to do the Lord's will about all. I am to look to Him, and call upon Him, and count upon Him, and with my brethren too, that all our consciences may be in activity — men, women, and children — and we may have grace to cast out that which is offensive to God's glory, if nothing less can remedy the mischief.

Thus, it is not the fact of weakness, nor even the entrance of positive sin, no matter of what sort it may be, which should lead us to separate, however great the shame and sorrow to the heart. It is the refusal to deal

with the unclean thing; it is the practical rejection of the Spirit of God, rising up by the word and rebuking the evil, which is so fatal. It is where the plain self-will of man prevails and is sanctioned, preferring ease, quiet, and the appearance of unity, though all that makes unity precious be gone; for what have we to do with unity, if it be not formed and sustained according to the will of God? If it be not that which the Holy Ghost puts His seal upon, if it be not for the maintenance of the glory of the Lord Jesus, it is a horror and a sin, and has no claim on my allegiance. And therefore nothing can be simpler, after all, than the application of these principles, though unbelief loudly cries that there is no hope, and that we are delivered to do these abominations. There are difficulties found in the path of Christ; but faith overcomes. We know that the Church is composed of men who, though in the Spirit, have nevertheless the flesh in them. Consequently there are seeds of evil which Satan will endeavour to cause to germinate, and shed their effects around, as banefully and antagonistically for the glory of God as he can. With the Lord in our midst, we are not to be alarmed at anything: still less are we to flee from that which is a post of honour and blessing, as truly as of difficulty and danger. Let us gird up our loins, and look to Him whose the Church is, and whose is all power and might. He will manifest His gracious power on our behalf, and deal with what is hateful to Himself.

But what if subtle evil, especially against Christ (for this is Satan’s aim), gain the upper hand in the assembly — what if remedy or judgment be refused — what if, for any reason of its own, the Church reject as uncalled for, unlawful and presumptuous, the attempt to call

attention to the sentence which God's word pronounces on what is certainly opposed to His glory, and destructive of truth and holiness? Evidently there we find ourselves, if it be so, on slippery ground. But if the evil, flagrant as well as certain, be hid and kept up, not judged, and that which took the place of God's assembly shuts itself up in deliberate self-will and rejection of the calls of the Holy Ghost to judge what is contrary to Christ, then we must go out in the Lord's name, sorrowfully, it may well be, and with deep shame, and with feelings that ought indeed to leave us a heart wounded and bleeding and broken before such grievous evil, but at the same time with no hesitation of spirit, if we see without doubt the signs and tokens of the very same evils which broke better hearts than ours before us. I cannot but repeat that solemnly, in the strength of the Lord, we are to turn our backs upon that which is so much the viler a pretender, because, having had the light of God anew, it deliberately refused to act on it; because, having had the grace of God afresh brought out, it is become obstinately deaf to His word, and turns His mercy into licentiousness against Him. May the Lord deliver us from such ways, and make us always sensitive to His glory and revealed will; but, at the same time, first of all, ready to think ourselves mistaken, and unwilling to believe that His assembly could basely betray His honour thus, never acting in an individual case, still less with an assembly, until we are forced to know the sad and humbling certainty that the saint or the assembly is utterly faithless to Christ. Haste either to put away individuals, or to judge that which has been owned as an assembly of God, is the last thing that ought to characterize the child of God. Slow and painful should be such a discovery to us, which we cannot

refuse, because God, as it were, lays it on our consciences, and then we may not close our eyes or decline to act firmly. This, I trust, may help some to notice the working of God's Spirit, not only as revealed in the word, but as He would have it truthfully applied to deal practically with present duties and difficulties.

And now a few words just to call attention to the great truth contained in verse 13, which was read, that "we, being many, are one body." The Scriptures go further, and say, "By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free." Who can doubt that every child of God now, every one that is called by God's grace since the cross, is brought into the membership of this body? Not one Christian is left out. I do not say that all saints enter at once; but that there is not a single Christian who is not, sooner or later, baptized by the Holy Ghost; and if baptized by the Holy Ghost, unto what end? Not to be split into individualities. This was the state of saints in Israel of old, but is the very thing the Holy Ghost is sent to take one out of. I do not, of course, lose my blessing as an individual under Christianity — the very reverse; but, besides, there is a ground which God has given us corporately here below. I belong to the one body, the Church. I am baptized into that one body by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. This is as much a matter of faith as that I am a child of God. But if I am a member of the one body, am I acting as such? Do I believe that it holds good now? Does it not depend on the unfailing presence of the Holy Ghost? If it be real now, is it not incumbent on me to walk accordingly? And how? Search and see by the word of God; try your ways; and I have no doubt what will be the result to him who does so

honestly — I do not mean in human frankness, but in godly sincerity, and with that single eye which seeks not its own things, but the things of Jesus Christ. Is it possible that there should be any but one result for all the children of God who are guided by His word and Spirit? There is no defect in Scripture, no failure in the Holy Ghost.

I am aware that many will suppose that this is a bold insinuation, but I dare say nothing less or otherwise. I should feel in doing so that I was slighting the word of God, or practically denying the power of the Holy Ghost. It would be the unbelieving admission that God's revelation and present guidance are insufficient. This seems to me truly a bold insinuation, which for my part I utterly refuse. Is not God's Spirit in us greater than he that is in the world? I dare not allow that Scripture is the nose of wax which some papists and all infidels pretend. And I affirm that the Christian, though having the flesh in him, is not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, inasmuch as the Spirit of God dwells in him. Were we simple and subject to Scripture, the Holy Ghost could and would produce but one conviction. The only reason why Christians differ so widely is because unjudged flesh prevails against the Spirit. I mean nothing against other men; I say this against myself as surely, and, I trust, with as deep a meaning, as against anyone who allows the flesh to have its way. I feel that one cannot, ought not to, give up either the assurance of the Spirit's presence, or the sufficiency of God's word, when wielded by the Holy Ghost. Is not the Holy Ghost here, to use mightily that word for the glory of Christ in the Christian and the Church, in proportion to faith? Therefore, what becomes the child of God is to put aside

all the rubbish of tradition, and the dead weight of unbelief he knows, to quit that which he does or allows, or is in any way connected with, that contradicts Scripture, and makes it impossible for him thoroughly, and in all things, to carry out the word of God in the Spirit.

The rest of the chapter, on which I need not enlarge, teaches, first of all, that the body is not one member. The variety of the members indicates how necessary all are — a most important principle — the foot just as much as the hand. Not, of course, that all are necessary for the same end, nor that all have the same place or function; nevertheless they are all needful, great and small. In the present weakness and distraction of the Church of God, the hand may be there and the foot may be here — scattered instead of being gathered. Things are in a dislocated condition, as far as regards the outward manifestation of the body of Christ on the earth. Confusion and perplexity reign as the effects of this; but God is always faithful, and still works by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, who is sufficient for all circumstances. The Church may be weak, and ministry may be no stronger; but is the Spirit of God weak? Thus it comes to be simply a question of our faith in the reality of the presence and the operation of the Holy Ghost. And He empowers and employs individuals as He wills for the glory of Christ, but normally as members of His body; and it is of great importance that there should be firmness in holding fast this truth, without forcing others beyond their faith. But what can be more lovely on earth than this hearty falling in with the various workings of the Spirit of God! He distributes a gift to one which characteristically differs from

another's. There are not, and never were two gifts exactly alike in the Church of God. Not more truly does each man differ from his neighbour; and, as we all know, there is something that is special to every man. The likeness may be strong, but there is that which stamps one man which nobody else has or ever had. It is exactly so in the Church; God needs this or that for the work He has given us to do. Flesh envies and is jealous; but how sweet where the Spirit of God gives us faith to recognize these varieties in the work of the Lord! On the other hand nature, wherever it is allowed, invariably obliterates these divine traits; assimilates as much as possible by some grinding process, so to speak, and thus injures the fine lineaments and diverse workings of God's Spirit. However, the details of the chapter must be passed over. I have only desired to present, as far as I could in brief, its leading thoughts.

There is another Scripture to which I must advert before closing — Ephesians 4. There again the body of Christ is prominent, but in a strikingly different way; because the apostle looks at His body, the Church, not as the scene of the Holy Ghost's operation on earth (1 Cor. 12), but as linked up with its Head in heaven. So far is Christ from being described there as the Head, though, of course, it was true, that the body on earth is itself called "Christ." (Verse 12.) Instead of uniting in that way Christ and the Church, looking at all as a field where the Holy Ghost carries out the will of God, here it is another aspect. Christ Himself is ascended up on high, and the body of Christ, though of course as to fact here below, yet as to relationship is viewed as one with Christ above. If I look at Christ, therefore, I am at once connected with heaven; if I look at the Holy Ghost, I am connected

with earth as the place where He Himself is at work for God's glory in the Church. Hence this difference runs through these epistles. Both views are true and important. The one is not to be abandoned or neglected more than the other. I do not say that they act equally on the affections; surely this is not so; but they are both needful, both divine, and both revealed for our profit and blessing. Thus what we find as the prominent topic in Ephesians 4 is Christ the infallible source of supply to His body. He gave gifts to it — apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers; but not a word about tongues, or healings — the signs, of which we have so copious an account in 1 Corinthians 12, 14. In Ephesians all was directly the means of nourishment to the body, and viewed as flowing from the care of Christ for His own, rather than a testimony in God's Church of power to the world There the Spirit works mightily in what is called Christ; here Christ, as Head, personally loves and cares for His body. Hence, too, Christ is as prominent in the one case, as the Holy Ghost is the great energy in the other, working as He will in these various manifestations that are given to each in the Church. Hence, accordingly, in Ephesians, the great object is "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."

The right and due manner, in which God intended these gifts should be displayed, is as members of Christ's body. So in 1 Cor. 12, it is not independently of the Church of God, but as a member of the one body. It is true even of evangelizing, were it the apostle Paul himself, however miraculously the Lord had wrought in his call, as the Spirit did afterwards. When Saul and Barnabas went forth, it was as recommended by the

Church to the grace of God. So they come back and tell the Church what God had wrought. It was in no way as having derived their commission from the church which is not competent to choose or send forth the Lord's servant. This is of importance. We have only to compare it with the source, call, and character of ministry as seen in the present day, and the difference is as glaring as complete between ministry according to God, and when corrupted by man. I do not deny that there are servants of the Lord amongst ordinary official ministers; but, at the same time, there is that which always and systematically dishonours the Lord as the sole source of mission, as well as hinders the work; so that, far from being in regular order, you could hardly find anything more anomalous here below. There are, I believe, true and sincere servants of Christ among them; but then, in order to enjoy an official place at the present time in Christendom, you must submit to have your call from some church (so-called); that is, you must in effect be a party to the Lord's disparagement, and honour the church in its place of usurpation, in order to get a ministerial commission. It is not a question of any one body: all agree in this guilty substitution of the church for the Lord. It matters not if it be the smallest branch of religionists: they are as stringent in their form of the error as the Pope of Rome is in his. It is all the same principle, from the Roman Catholic body down to the extravagant sect of Irvingites. There is not a single exception, so far as I know, not even the Society of Friends. Although in a certain way there is a recognition of the Holy Spirit, yet, as was noticed on a former occasion, there is no body more a stranger to revealed truth on this subject than that society.

I wish to hurt nobody's feelings, but to speak the truth. Nor am I aware of any "Friend" now present: if there be one, I hope he will bear with me in what I must speak out as my testimony to the truth. Now I believe that the doctrine that every man in the world as such has the Spirit of God is as utterly destructive of the great truth that the Holy Ghost dwells in the Christian and in the house of God as anything can be. I know nothing worse — no, not even in Popery, because Popery does after a fashion bring in the name of Christ. It may be only with a few drops of water; but still there is even in their fanatical and intensely superstitious abuse of ceremonies, some sort of sense that man in nature outside the Church is lost, and that under the name of Christ alone can men be saved. So far there is that which redeems Popery itself from the slight put on objective truth found among the otherwise respectable persons alluded to. I have nothing to say against them individually, but I have everything to insist against their opposition to the true grace of God in redemption, and the gift of the Holy Ghost. Who can justly deny that this is a solemn charge if true?

God forbid that anyone here should use for self-complacency the fact of returning to this great truth. On the contrary, it is our deep responsibility Further, it is that which ought to make us truly ashamed, to think that we do not present it with such power to the hearts and consciences of others as to overwhelm them with anxiety, lest they should be outside God's own way. I admit that our want of spirituality and devotedness, our worldliness, and all other sorrowful elements, which, either individually or publicly, have been amongst us, are the greatest possible hindrances; for all the power of

Satan along with man could not overthrow us for a moment, if there were not want of faith or faithfulness unjudged in ourselves. This is the real danger we have to fear, and be ashamed of before our God. Let us only hold fast the blessed truth which God has given us to witness to, as well as to believe. Slanders from without are powerless, save with those who love what is evil. Let men say what they will, but let us not tremble for a moment so long as our eye is single, and our heart true to Christ Himself, and the Holy Ghost is confided in according to the word.

But, as in Ephesians 4, another fact may be noticed before I have done. These gifts are till we al1 come to the measure of the stature of Christ's fulness. It is precisely here that much of the difference is seen between Ephesians 4 and 1 Corinthians 12. There is no such assurance in speaking about the signs. Thus I learn what ought, to an instructed eye, to account for the fact that signs no longer appear. The Lord never pledged Himself to continue healings, or tongues, or any such externals as were given to the early Church; but the moment you come to what is necessary to edification, to needful ministerial gifts of His grace for the calling in of fresh souls, or the guarding and watching over those that are called, I have divine authority for knowing that these are given "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." All that is for real good in present circumstances abides for the Church of God even to the end.

And now I close this part of the subject, feeling how scantily I have dipped into it; but that I have, at least,

directed attention by God’s grace to that which will not fail those who have faith in Himself. May we cherish faith in His word, looking to please the Lord.

1 Such is the meaning of the true text,

"An habitation of God through the Spirit."

Lecture 9 - Eph. 2

Though I have read this chapter of the epistle as a whole, my intention is to take up almost exclusively the last few words: the reason why will appear presently. The Holy Spirit views the Church, not merely as the body of Christ, but as the habitation of God. The body of Christ specially brings before us our communion with Himself as a head in heaven; the habitation of God connects itself just as simply and clearly with the actual place of the Church now on the earth. This is not the only difference; but it is considerable, and important too. Nevertheless both agree in this, that there can be neither the body of Christ any more than the habitation of God, save through the, Holy Ghost, and founded upon redemption. This is of great consequence doctrinally, but it is not less so practically. Collaterally also it decides, to any man who is really subject to God's word, the limits of the Church — the time when its formation began. Thus the Church is consequent on redemption.

There was no such thing as either the body of Christ or God's habitation through the Spirit, till sin was judged in the cross, when the Holy Ghost was sent down from heaven to the earth to form it. To know this is an immense step for many a heart. There is not one in this room that has known this truth long; there are comparatively few of the children of God who admit it to be a truth at all; and so much the worse for them. It is not that the participation of the blessing is lost thereby;

for not the relationship, but our enjoyment depends on our knowledge of it. And this is a very great mercy on God's part. So far, it is with this as with other privileges that His grace confers. Many a soul really looks to Christ alone, and consequently has eternal life; but if you asked, "Have you life everlasting?" there might be no little hesitation there; and even those who are not conscious of this difficulty, have no adequate conception of the nature of eternal life. They would not question the words that Scripture makes use of; but what the character, nature, and consequences (now and by-and-by) of eternal life are they are exceedingly ill-acquainted with. So it fares with the truth of the Church of God in either aspect — its union with Christ above, or its affording God's dwelling-place by the Spirit below. Last night we looked a little at the former of these truths; tonight we shall search the Scriptures an the latter, though one cannot do more than direct the enquirer to those parts of God's word which develop with divine certainty either great truth. I shall touch by the way on some of the practical consequences; for, certainly, we never do taste the blessing of any truth, any more than we honour God by it, until we are sufficiently awakened by the Holy Ghost to gather for our souls, and also to cultivate in our experience, ways, and worship, the fruits of that which God has made known to us.

In reading the verses that have just been before us, it is obvious that the point to which the Holy Ghost has arrived in this epistle is the setting aside of the Jewish system, and the bringing in of that which was entirely new on the earth. Being altogether unprecedented, God dealt in a wholly new way. He brought in Gentiles, who before this were, as He says, the uncircumcision in the

flesh. Not only so; but having brought in those Gentiles, who, before they received the gospel, had been aliens and strangers, without hope and without God in the world, He put both them and those who now believe from Israel together in one new position before Himself. Why all this? Because redemption is now accomplished. Now, is it not strange that Christians should have any question as to this? Is it not an extraordinary fact (for it is a fact), that theory should be allowed to upset that which is the most evident and unquestionable teaching of God's own word?

Our whole epistle, from beginning to end, contemplates Christians and Christians only. If I take some isolated word, I may, no doubt, apply it to Old Testament saints (for instance, the very word "saints"); but then I never find even such an expression alone. If we read of saints, all is set in a new connection. Thus it is said in the very beginning, "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus." There was nothing of the kind in the Old Testament: we could not possibly hear of any faithful in Christ there. The language would have been wholly unintelligible, and could not in anywise be conceived to be spoken in those times. Not that some were not faithful; not that there were not saints; but they could not be thus spoken of. They were waiting, according to promise and prophecy, for the Messiah. God's Spirit had not failed to work in them, of course. Precious fruits too there were in their season; but not a single phrase, as far as I am aware, of this epistle could have been uttered at any moment of any one soul in the whole course of Old Testament times. What, then, must one think of men who apply every word of it to all times?

Why simply that they do not at all understand its bearing. I do not in the least deny that they have reaped good from the Saviour, because they do see Himself; they have tasted grace in Him; they do see some sweet mercies that are shown the Christian, But assuredly the depth of present privileges and their peculiarity, as well as their force and heavenly character, are obscured, attenuated, and blunted to their souls by the vague haze which is thrown over the whole, by unduly extending to all saints what God has revealed distinctly and solely of the souls that are now brought into the knowledge of His grace since He manifested Himself in Christ, and the work of redemption was wrought. Hence I maintain that, as a whole, every thought, every sentence, contemplates exclusively the saints that have been called since Christ appeared in the world to die in atonement, and before He comes again to receive them to Himself.

All this needs no argument, I suppose, to most here. It is a simple question of believing the word that opens the New Testament mystery, and of comparing the language with any part of the Old Testament, which, of course, is the part of Scripture alone capable of letting us know with unerring certainty the state, condition, and experiences of the Old Testament saints. My motive for alluding to this which, after all, ought to be here, at least, a trite and familiar truth, is to remark, that all attempts to fritter away the differences of the word and the ways of God have an enfeebling effect on our appreciation of that to which God is now calling His children. And there is no one mistake which has wrought greater mischief, as to the very truth which is now before us, than allowing these generalities to swamp the precision of God’s revelation. Men think that it has been

always the Church, for instance, that God has been dealing with in this world; that it now has a little more light, and a little more blessing (for differences cannot be denied); but that, nevertheless, substantially it is the same system from beginning to end. This I wholly deny; but I entreat those who have not as yet duly considered the matter, not to receive what I have said, but to examine it by the word of God; I entreat them to examine what they have hitherto held by the word of God; I entreat them to bring all their own thoughts, and the suggestions of others, on this great matter to the sole test that God acknowledges, the only means of light and truth possible for any one.

If we are willing thus to subject our thoughts touching the Church, as God's habitation by the Spirit here below, we learn, first of all, that the work of redemption is applied to souls after a wholly indiscriminate sort. That is, there is no question now whether a man be a Jew or a Gentile: if there had been this difference in the ground on which the Church is formed (whether in the aspect of the body of Christ on the one hand, or of God's dwelling-place on the other), in either case there is supposed for this new work the total subversion of that which God had sanctioned and set up in former days. Hence we find the language proceeds: "But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in his flesh the enmity." Thus vanishes the partition which subsisted in Old Testament times by God's appointment, "even the law of commandments contained in ordinances, for to make in himself of twain one new man." That is, it is not merely

blotting out our sins, nor simply ensuring heaven by-and-by; but forming here below a creation entirely unknown before. It is the communication of privileges unheard of and impossible, while God still dealt with His ancient people, and acted among them and governed them by a law as in Israel. “That he might [consequently we are told] reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: and came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.”

Here we come to the point which is more particularly before us to-night. “Now therefore,” it is said, “ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.” Take notice that it is not a question of the Old Testament prophets here. The order in which the Holy Spirit wrote excludes this sense; for if the Ephesian saints were “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets,” what could be less natural than an allusion to the Old Testament prophets in such a case or fashion as this? “The apostles” are put before “the prophets.” More than this, the construction of the phrase means a common class of persons who form a foundation for this building, that God was about to construct. And when was this foundation laid? Not just after man had sinned, not in the time of the elders, did God begin to execute this great work in the earth. Here we find that late in the day, after four thousand years had passed, and Christ had come and died, then was the foundation laid (not the work, long in course, brought to a completion) by

the apostles and prophets. The common class, signified by one Greek article, forbids our thinking of the Old Testament prophets that were past. The prophets were then present, and associated with the apostles in this work.1 Both apostles and prophets, namely, of the New Testament, were those that laid this new foundation, “in whom all the building,” says he, “fitly framed together, groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord.” Such is the ultimate result. This holy temple will be seen by-and-by: but note the last clause; “In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.” What I draw from it is, I conceive, a simple and sure inference — that there is now, before the holy temple is grown to its full proportions, this work on earth displacing the system of Israel, a new building altogether, which really is God’s habitation in virtue of the Spirit’s presence.

Thus, believers now, were they Gentiles in nature before they had received the gospel, are brought, with Jews who may now believe, into this dwelling-place of God, “in whom ye also” — addressing the Ephesians — “are builded together for an habitation of God.” The manner of it is declared to be “through” or “in the Spirit.” That is, the Spirit is just as necessary for the habitation of God, as for the body of Christ, into which we were last enquiring. Nevertheless, the habitation of God is, in some respects, not so exclusively a new thought as the body of Christ. We find, at least, more distinct types of the great truth of God’s dwelling among men on earth in the Old Testament Scriptures. But nothing whatever was revealed of the joining of Jew and Gentile in one body; still less that they together should compose the body of Christ. Of course we have the type of Adam’s marriage,

or union, with Eve; but this discloses nothing of its components, tells us nothing of Jew and Gentile — a distinction not then hinted at — joining in one. The fact can only be used, and we know it was used by the Spirit of God, when the Church came to light, but nothing more.

As to the habitation of God, we have, as is well known, no trace whatever of it in Genesis. There is not even a promise as yet. And this is the more striking, because if there is a book in the Old Testament that is more than any other fertile in germs of divine truth, it is the book of Genesis. All the other books put together, it is not too much perhaps to say, do not present so many views of that which God was about to work in due time; yet there is this remarkable exception: God's habitation, God's design to have a dwelling-place on earth, is never once alluded to. The reason is manifest. Though we see the beginning of sacrifices in Genesis, though burnt offerings are spoken of, though covenant dealings are often brought before us, there is yet no redemption. Redemption is also as remarkable an exception as God's dwelling-place throughout this wonderful book.

Then comes the second book of the law, not so remarkable for presenting in this manifold way the unfoldings, so to speak, of the ways of God and the counsels that were afterwards to have effect given to them in Christ. But certainly the book of Exodus claims our special attention now; inasmuch as it presents us, in type, the very truth we are in quest of — first, indeed, redemption, and then God's dwelling with men. We may add by the way, that although of course the law comes in too, within that law we find the renewed assurance of this very truth. Thus the great truths which stand out in

the book of Exodus are among the things revealed in Ephesians 2, and in similar order.

The first part of Exodus is occupied in showing us the forlorn, miserable, debased condition of the people of God. Thanks be to God, it was not merely that they cried out of the depth of their ruin, but the Lord hearkened, and occupies Himself for their deliverance. Not content with sending messages of mercy, in due time He works, not first in judgment, though He did judge, but claiming His people for Himself. He sends Moses and Aaron, and, as signs following their mission, plagues, in which He chastises the pride of the world that kept His people in bondage. Finally comes before us the most remarkable type of redemption that the Old Testament affords, and this in both its parts — the blood of the Lamb with death and resurrection, the Passover and the Red Sea. Either one or other alone was inadequate to set forth redemption, which can only be rightly known when they are both received together. For if we look at the Passover, we find, after all, God still judging; and it must be so. God is armed with power, God is dealing in vengeance on that which was evil, but at the same time in His own admirable wisdom providing a righteous means of shelter for His people.

Thus the most prominent truth that appears in the Passover is God in judgment, though with provision to spare His own. Substantially the same thing appears in one aspect of the gospel. One of the central thoughts in the gospel is, that God is righteous therein. (Rom. 1:17) It is not mere mercy. However precious this may be, it is quite a different thought from the righteousness of God, though there never could have been the founding or display of the righteousness of God without His mercy;

but His righteousness in justifying is the boast of the gospel. While the sinner is accounted righteous, it is not merely that God pardons and shows mercy, but is just in justifying. So it is with the Passover. God that night came down in judgment of man as well as of the gods of Egypt. He was marking His hatred of sin as He had never done before; and this, too, in quite as evident a manner in His dealings with Israel as with the Egyptians. No doubt there was death. That night, in every Egyptian house, the first-born lay dead, and the wail of sorrow declared all over the land what it was to despise the admonitions of the Lord; but in every dwelling of the Israelites the bloodstained doorposts as truly and still more blessedly declared that God is just, and at the same time the Justifier — spoke of a substitute indeed — of another's blood; spoke, at least in God's ears of His death, who should become man, though most truly God; spoke of the Lamb of God, and the shedding of His blood.

Nevertheless this was not all the blessing, even typically. The Paschal Lamb simply kept God outside, only stayed His judgment from falling on the persons of the Israelites themselves. Is this the full character of redemption — to shut God out from His own? It is the notion that too many have of redemption; but how far short it falls of redemption according to God! Most important as it unquestionably is, it is not the whole truth of the matter, but very far from it. And therefore it is we find that along with this God appends another type as its complement — namely, the Red Sea, where the flower of Egypt found a grave, and God gave the Israelites to pass through what seemed to be sure death to them, what in truth became in type life everlasting,

and their best security. So it is precisely that the believer finds the death and resurrection of Christ. Then for the first time God deigns to speak of salvation in relation to His people. (Ex. 14:13, 30, Ex. 15:2.) He never speaks of anything, however glorious, wrought previously as “salvation.”

It may be remarked by the way, that it is a great injury to souls to speak of an immature and partial knowledge of God as salvation — knowledge, I mean, even of the love of Christ. Thus one often hears such talk as, “It is true, the man is not happy yet; he has no liberty of soul; but, at any rate, he is saved.” Scripture never sanctions such language. What it designates as salvation is not that a soul is converted or quickened merely — is not that a soul has received of Christ that which makes it judge itself, and cry out to God, yet with a certain measure of hope. Scripture reserves “salvation” precisely though not exclusively, for the being brought into conscious liberty, for the realization of the present deliverance through the gospel from every enemy by the power of God in Christ. And hence it is that we only hear of salvation when Israel comes to the Red Sea, and when there is, therefore, the full and final quittance of the land of Egypt, and the total destruction of their proud foes. “Today,” says Moses, “ye shall see the salvation of the Lord.” It was not the night of the Paschal feast; it was the day when they could look back on the Red Sea crossed for ever. For this reason, it is of the greatest importance that we should speak according to Scripture as to this, not owning as salvation anything short of it. Otherwise we do not help God’s children, as we might, to a settled assurance of the mighty victory of Christ, the lack of which never fails to leave them in a sort of

dead-and-alive state — an anxious and struggling condition instead of peace. It is very blessed, indeed, for a soul to be wrought in profoundly by the Spirit, and to find out what it is before God; but till it is broken down to rest with simplicity and confidence on the finished work of Christ, there is nothing that God calls "salvation" in the complete sense.

After this mighty work — as far as the type is concerned, wrought then — we find Israel for the first time singing. The song of Moses is heard on the other side of the Red Sea. Remark particularly the language of this song as bearing on our subject to-night: "I will sing unto Jehovah; for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. Jehovah is my strength and my song, and is become my salvation: he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation." How strikingly the truth comes out! The full type of resurrection, as well as death, is brought before us then; and then, first, we hear of salvation; and immediately ensuing on this (as far, of course, as the shadow of these things is concerned), the heart desires that God should have a habitation. (Compare also Ex. 29:45, 46.) How comes this? Are we to suppose for an instant that there was any quality or conduct in those who thus sung in the wilderness, which was more agreeable to God than what He had found in their fathers or other elders of the book of Genesis? The very reverse is true. Among these were some that God had put the most signal honour on — that had been chosen of God to be the depositaries of His secrets, not only exempted from a world-wide judgment, but in one instance at least taken up to heaven without death, as in another God come down to sup with His friend on the earth. Need I remind any how this last was

made the object of promises, confirmed to his son, and repeated to his son's son — promises that will not cease to roll their course of blessing, till all the ages have closed in the eternal rest of God, when good and evil shall have each their lot for ever, according to the judgment of God as well as His grace?

Is it not, then, impossible to suppose it a question of persons? But for this very reason the wonders of redemption are brought into relief. Christ's death, whether in type or in antitype, alone accounts for it; and I do not think it too much to say that redemption ought to account for it. I affirm that it is suitable, and not surprising after all, when we know what redemption deserves, and who has wrought this redemption, and how it was wrought; when we know that it needed the Son of God, and that He should come into this world as a man, not only to give up the enjoyment of all His own proper glory for a season, but that He should enter in grace the circumstances of all man's shame, and sorrow, and suffering; and yet, after all this, instead of emerging into a place of blessedness and glory, on the contrary, should go into a deeper depth, after man had done his very worst, after Satan could do no more. For then, after all the rest, was resolved a question that had to be settled between God and that Blessed One. And that question must have been of all others the hardest for God, and in itself the most trying of all things for the Son of God. For what can compare with that wondrous hour when sin had to be judged of God, and be dealt with in the strangest place in which it was possible for man to conceive it — imputed to the person of the Holy One of God, even the Son of God, by God Himself?

When one reflects on these things, who can wonder that God should see in redemption such infinite worth, and such a resting-place for Him, that the heaven of heavens should cease, so to speak, to contain Him; as though God Himself should say, “I must come down now. My Spirit must dwell where that precious blood is; He can no longer remain above!” It may have been the vilest spot in all creation; it may be that which too often lifted up its puny head in the fiercest, and, at the same time, most shameless rebellion. But no matter what the earth may be, and no matter what the people on the earth may have been proved against God, and against His Anointed, God could not consistently with His estimate of what Christ has suffered, abide in heaven any longer, but must come and find His dwelling-place in this very earth, and among the members of that very race which had treated Him with such habitual contumely. To my mind this, and this alone, accounts for the blessed truth of God’s having His dwelling among us on the earth, or even for the possibility of His having an habitation on earth. Redemption accounts for the fact, and the Holy Ghost at once makes it good when redemption is effected. And so, therefore, we see in this very chapter when the type of redemption was fulfilled, that the typical habitation of God immediately becomes desired on the earth; when the true redemption, eternal redemption, was a fact, God comes down really to dwell, abiding for ever by His Spirit in the redeemed. Thus nothing can be conceived more harmonious than either the typical facts, on the one hand, or the real accomplishment of them, on the other, in the eternal redemption Christ has acquired for the Christian.

But there is another thing, too, that should be noticed here. Not only have we now the people, through Moses, expressing their common desire for preparing God a habitation, but farther on we here find (and it is a remarkable fact too) that this is the first chapter in the Bible where God's holiness is presented. No one would suspect this; no one, I am convinced, could believe it until he had ascertained the fact for himself, that God should have waited all this time before giving a revelation of Himself in His holy character, in His dealings with men here below. There was, no doubt, an allusion to the thought of holiness, when He separated the sabbath day; and I mention this because it is the only passage which might appear exceptional. Thus, before there was any question of sin, God saw fit to enunciate in the sabbath day a pledge of that rest which "remaineth for the people of God." So it comes in due season. But when dealing with man, and man was actually before Him on the earth, not one word about holiness is uttered until Exodus 15.

A little lower down we read (in the 11th verse), "Who is like unto thee, O Jehovah, among all the gods, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises?" This, we shall see, connects itself with God's habitation in the New Testament. I merely point you to the striking circumstance, that the two things are for the first time presented together, consequent on the accomplishment of the typical redemption. In point of fact, it is only when redemption has been accomplished, that man can bear the full revelation of the holiness of God. There may be a call to this or that before, but manifestly it was after all only of a fleshly order; it was but ceremonial dealing with the first Adam in one way or another. But the

moment there is the type of redemption, in Jehovah accomplishing deliverance, then even the Israelites can speak without anxiety, and in their measure rejoice and praise His name. Of course, it is no more than an earthly deliverance as yet; but they sing of the holiness of God.

Now, if we turn to the New Testament, we see, in the chapter from which I have already read, what answers to all this. Here we have redemption wrought. The Son of man gave His life a ransom for many; the effect of it is the bringing souls, even the most distant, nigh to God, and that in perfect peace — Christ Himself being the expression of it. “He is our peace,” with which there can be nothing comparable, nothing — I will not say superior, but — so much as approaching it. But it is exactly on this that we begin to hear of the habitation of God.

Nor is this truth confined to any one epistle. Take 1 Corinthians 3 as an illustration. “We are labourers,” says the apostle, “together with God: ye are God’s husbandry, ye are God’s building.” The apostle speaks of his own relation to it. He says: “According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master-builder, I have laid the foundation.” It is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. So here Paul takes this place, and accordingly, lower down in the chapter, appeals to them. “Know ye not,” he says, “that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?” At once this is the ground of a strenuous call to holiness: “If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.” That is, it is not merely a revelation of what the Church is to be by-and-by, but he is speaking of present facts. It seems to me that we should pay more attention to this than is

usually done; for it is of the greatest consequence that believers should have a just apprehension that Christianity consists not merely of doctrines, but of facts; and that facts are the foundation of doctrine. There is a person, a real living man born, manifested in this world, who lived here, died here, and rose here, although He is now gone to heaven; and that person is not merely the means of making truth known, but is Himself the substance of the truth that He makes known. Abstract Christ from Christianity, and what remains? And now that He is gone, too, God makes Christianity good by another person, even the Holy Ghost that-is come down, who, instead of supplanting Him that is gone on high, is now the power of our knowing Him. I can only know really and according to God Him who is gone by Him who is come. It is His presence that makes the temple of God. The Holy Ghost dwells in the saints on earth; as it is said, “Ye are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.”

Now, I would ask my brethren before me this night, Have you sought to estimate the immense magnitude of such a fact as this? Is it this which fills your heart to overflowing, when you come together, say on the Lord’s day, or at any other time when the assembly of God is gathered, either for worshipping Him, or for edifying one another? Does the presence of the Holy Spirit comfort you as a matter of faith? Do you count on the Lord as really in the midst? or are you thinking only of those who compose that assembly, or such as open their lips in worship and edification of the saints? What would be thought of a visitor coming into some grand building, who merely occupied himself with the small accidents

here or there? It is evident that the object of all would be lost upon him. But still more when we bear in mind that there is a living, divine person whom I am entitled to count on, and to know present in the assembly here below' who makes them to be God's assembly, as nothing else does. It is not their faith simply; for this did not make the Old Testament saints to be God's assembly. It is not life again; for certainly all saints from the first were born again, and yet, as we know, till Pentecost God's assembly was not. The only thing that could thus give the assembly of those who have faith, and therefore life, the title of being God's assembly, is the presence of God Himself there; and He is there by the Holy Ghost.

Again, so paramount is this, that the fact of persons slipping in there who are not born of God does not destroy His assembly. It is sorrowful and humiliating; but I am not to be alarmed, nor overmuch cast down by it. It ought to be a pain that we had so little discernment, and that persons were allowed to come into the assembly of God who never were born of God. But there is nothing that Satan would not dare, in order to defile and destroy the assembly of God. It is the nearest thing to God upon earth; it is that in which His Son's glory is most of all concerned now; it is that body to which God commits His truth. From it God demands an answer to His moral glory and character here below; and if He has not given unfailing power of miracles, He has sent down His Spirit to dwell with us and be in us for ever — His own habitation in the Spirit. It is not, then, because of this or that quality He so blessed us, but through His present Spirit.

Supposing there should be the sorrowful fact of those brought in who, having no life in their soul, in time

depart from the Church. These are apt to turn out the greatest adversaries not only of it, but also of Christ Himself, the haters of His name, and deniers of His glory (such as, for instance, we find in Heb. 6). They had shared astonishing powers, as we are told, yea, “were made partakers of the Holy Ghost.” This is a great difficulty to some; whereas, in point of fact, it is no mean help toward understanding the very truth that we are considering tonight. So far from its being an enigma, it seems to me to be that which falls in with the truth generally, and which gives us the key to facts that may occur at any time, as they have happened from the beginning. Thus we find unquestionably that there are men who creep in unawares among the saints, and these men, when alienated, are so much the worse — twice dead, as the apostle Jude calls it — just because, having taken the place of confessors of the Lord Jesus, they have gone from Him, abandoned the truth with disdain, treated it with the utmost contempt, become, therefore, infinitely fiercer zealots against the truth of God than they even were in its favour when they commenced. These men might have had any amount of outward privileges; for there are external mercies of no mean value entirely short of eternal life. It is not said that any of these professors of Christ had ever been quickened of God. Eternal life is in no sense an external privilege Nor is there such a thing in the Bible as a man, who had once partaken of eternal life, losing that life. Those quickened of God do not afterwards fall back into death in that sense. It is very possible for a man, touched in feelings and persuaded in his judgment, to renounce the Christ he professed, and to walk no more with Him; as we read of certain disciples stumbled by the Saviour’s teaching, so unsparing to the flesh and the world. Thus

we only can understand these passages consistently with others. The professor, naturally dead, was now twice dead, as Jude says, having given up what he seemed to have, and gone back to earthly ordinances or to open sin, as the case might be, with even greater relish than before, and intenser hatred than he ever had for that which he thus openly abandoned. These are the persons described in Hebrews 6 and 10, and such departures every now and then present themselves before the eyes of sorrowing Christians, as Scripture explains.

Thus the flesh may go to the farthest extent in professing the truth, and may possess every conceivable external privilege and power it is possible to enjoy, and this even now more in Christian than in older times. Thus we know that in the Old Testament Saul had got among the prophets, and others were gifted with mighty powers by the Holy Ghost, who then, as ever, was the sole agent of divine energy, and might act by whom He would, and in what He would, for God's glory. Now the grace of God opens the door, if possible, for readier abuse, if men dare to take advantage. It is quite possible also for the unconverted to deceive themselves as well as the Church of God and to rush in, assuming the profession of the name of Jesus, so much the more because with less conscience The Holy Ghost now gives His persona1 seal, which is peculiar to him who has true faith and life everlasting in Christ. But while the Spirit is given as a seal, it would be an error to forget the outward powers He confers. In Hebrews 6 the apostle does not speak of His sealing, any more than of quickening souls, nor of "the earnest" the believer has in Him of the coming inheritance of glory. There is the

greatest guardedness of language in speaking of anything that ought to produce a real difficulty. Still, there is participation in the power of the Holy Ghost. This many unregenerate men may have had in the early days of Christianity. Can one wonder that such persons abandon the name of Jesus, because of which alone these powers were conferred on them?

This again explains the present state of Christendom — the extension of the habitation of God to the unbelieving and profane, who nevertheless bear outwardly the name of the Lord Jesus, and venture where God's presence is made good by the Holy Ghost. No doubt, where there was carelessness, outward privileges might be lightly used, as, for instance, baptizing unto the name of the Lord Jesus. All such like things could easily be carried out irregularly by men, so as to bring in multitudes of unconverted professors, as we know was soon the fact. Accordingly it was by some such broad-churchism, in manifold forms, which need not be entered on at present, that the house of God, although the Spirit dwelt there, was gradually corrupted in every direction, as an unhallowed ambition sought increase of sway, outside the intentions of God, and man, as ever, lost sight of his solemn responsibility, and turned the grace of God into licentiousness.

Another thing I would just observe too, which is, I think, of importance for judging rightly on this subject. We have in Scripture, not only the house of God, according to the divine idea described in the close of Ephesians 2, but also its responsible connection with man's labour in chapter 3 of the first epistle to the Corinthians, to which I have alluded. There is, indeed, more than this; for we have a half-moral half- prophetic sketch of that which

was working, in a measure, when the apostle wrote his last epistle (2 Tim. 2), to which I must briefly refer, because it bears so powerfully on present duty. The apostle calls on Timothy to study to show himself approved unto God, and tells him of the profane and vain babblings which he was to shun, but which, nevertheless, should increase to more ungodliness. He speaks of persons who, concerning the truth, had erred, but comforts his too sensitive fellow-servant, who was clearly under pressure from the dangers and difficulties of the time, by this consolation: “Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth firm, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.” But this is followed by a very animated figure of what was then in existence, and afterwards to be verified yet more literally. “But 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.” Here we have evidently a most graphic description of what was then in rapid progress, though going on every day yet more and more. This great-house condition has arrived at the present time; it was but the anticipation of full-blown Christendom. That is, we have a vast building in these lands, where vessels of honour, as well as of dishonour, are found.

What, then, is a Christian to do? Is he to abandon the great house? Certainly not. A man cannot go outside the great house without ceasing to be a Christian; for that is precisely the condition into which the profession of

Christ's name has got. Therefore it can never be a question in any way of giving up the profession of the Lord's name: what we have to do is to separate from all that is contrary to His will, never to relinquish the profession of His name. The profession of Christ is in itself the only stand revealed that is good and complete below. Up to it no profession can attain. It is, assuredly, also due to Him, as it is the blessing of the saint to render it, no less than His salvation. For who shall be saved but he that calls on the name of the Lord? And so all through, from the first acquaintance with Him, calling on the name of the Lord, professing His name, is clearly just as much a joy as a duty. In no case, therefore, can it be right to abandon the house which is characterized by the profession of the Lord's name. But in that great house there are vessels of honour, as well as of dishonour. What am I to do? I am commanded to purge myself from the vessels of dishonour. Such is the meaning of the text, such the clear intention of the Holy Ghost when it is said, "If a man therefore purge himself from these" (i.e. from the vessels of dishonour). This a man does when he ceases from any evil fellowship that he knows to be judged by the word of God, from all companionship with that which, by God's standing written testimony, is proved to be opposed to His will.

If a man therefore finds himself involved in subjection to an unscripturally formed ministry, for instance, or, again, in any prostitution of an institution of the Lord (say the Lord's Supper), let him have done with it at once. The Lord does not warrant His servant's sanction of what is contrary to truth and holiness. Why should I, as a Christian, endorse any ministry which is not of God? Why should I be a party by my presence to a desecration

of the Lord's Supper into a sacrament made a means of grace for the world, for anybody, for every one? He that possesses but little knowledge of God's word about either, knows perfectly well that they cannot be defended by Scripture, and that they frustrate the Lord's will in these grave matters. Am I then to abandon the Lord's Supper? Am I henceforth to do without the ministry of the word? Certainly neither the one nor the other, if wise and obedient. What one has to abandon is the abuse of these things. I am to have done with that which, as being without Scripture, is clearly to the dishonour of God. I do not give up Christian ministry, therefore, I do not give up the Lord's Supper; but I judge according to the word of God, as far as enabled by His grace, what is His will in these respects. The same principle applies to every other. Do you think of worship, for instance? I must search the Scriptures to judge what is Christian worship according to God's word for us now, as a Jew used to do from the Old Testament. Am I not bound so to do? Am I not to follow His will?

As to the question before us — What is it that God would have His saints feel as to their position on earth? That they are nothing less than His assembly. Here, therefore, we have at once an invaluable test for discovering whether that to which we hold day by day as His Church in this world, in the midst of so many conflicting claims, really for our consciences meets His will. It is not enough for me, nor should it satisfy any, the feeblest, of the children of God, that those composing it should be Christians; still less is it a question of arranging Christians in various classes of doctrine as offering the best guarantee for peace. What presumption! Who called me to arrange the saints of God? Who warranted

you to order the house of God? Who gave any man title to put those here and these there? The character and testimony of the Church of God is destroyed by any such arrangement. Supposing one could have every soul in communion holding precisely my views or yours on every topic, I should regard it as a very great calamity for the Church of God. What measure could be thought of surer to blot out the truth that we are God's assembly? What more calculated to produce a false estimate of the state of the saints than all thus banded together with identical views, all crammed with just the same thoughts, satisfied with one another, and contemptuous to those outside who did not hold similar sentiments? I am supposing now every notion correct, and the things done to be according to the mind of God. To my mind such a picture in no way answers either to Scripture, or to the love of Christ.

Brethren, let me be plain-spoken. The Church of God is not a citadel for the strong only, nor a niche for the wise and intelligent alone; it is not a front bench for those who have arrived at a certain maturity of holiness any more than of knowledge. He would have me always contemplate all saints (save those in sin or evil doctrine). So far from thinking the eclectic school according to the Lord's mind, to my view it utterly dislocates and spoils the truth God has disinterred about His Church. What I find there is the body of Christ, and doubtless the various members in their place. There are feet as well as hands. The feeble have their use as well as the strong, and all as God is pleased to give and order. As the large-hearted apostle teaches, the uncomely parts, instead of being left outside, are treated, being in danger of scorn, with more abundant

honour. Such is the way of our God, such His express word. Have we learnt to bow? Those that are strong are expected to bear the infirmities of the weak, instead of pleasing themselves. Religious rationalism might think it best to have only the strong, only those of the same mind, only such as had attained a certain given point of truth; but is it Christ? The Church of God should be before our hearts, as it is according to His word. The moment we seek to model or even to desire in our heart anything different from what is given us by Him, there is fatal insubjection stamped on the thought, and confusion must be the result wherever that theory is yielded to and carried out. And therefore, brethren, I am persuaded it is the will of God concerning us, especially in the present broken state of the Church, that he who is most strengthened in divine wisdom seek most especially to cherish the ignorant and the feeble who have attained ever so little — that we seek to walk towards all saints according to Christ's love to the Church. Assuredly Christ cherishes, not merely the more worthy and honourable members of His body, but the Church as a whole, cherishes most of all, if there be any difference, those that need His love most. Are we in this to have communion with Him or not?

Just in the same way, as to His habitation in the Spirit, God contemplates in this His whole Church — contemplates every one that names the name of the Lord. Here of course, in Ephesians 2, those that bear His name truly have part in it; but do any one of those that name a false Christ? Not in the least degree, save for judgment. In the present state of Christendom there are vessels of dishonour. Am I to bind myself up with them? I am forbidden by the Holy Ghost. "If a man purge himself

from these.” Communion with any vessels to dishonour is wrong. I am called to separate myself from all such, if I cannot get them separated from that which bears the name of the Lord. Otherwise I am a party to the mystery of lawlessness; for the continuance of a Christian in fellowship with known evil is as good as saying that Christ holds communion with Belial. Sometimes it is allowance of doctrinal or practical evil; sometimes it is an indifference which ignores the presence of the Holy Ghost, or hinders His operations in that which bears the name of the Lord here below. But no matter what may be the particular forms of allowed evil, which there is no means of judging, a man is to purge himself from these. There stands the plain and positive duty. You are not presumptuous; you are assuming no improper authority; you are only obedient thus. It is not a question of setting up to be somebody, but of obeying God. It is incumbent on every man that names the name of the Lord to depart from iniquity. And instead of leaving the occasion undetermined, instead of throwing a Christian on his own mind or heart to judge what he must separate from, here is the explicit demand of the Lord that he must purge himself from vessels of dishonour, whatever and wherever they may be. If people bearing the Lord’s name (and so His name in their persons) committed themselves to sin, they were vessels to dishonour, and the Christian is bound to stand clear and undefiled. It is the prescribed course in a corrupt state of Christendom, as surely as other Scriptures deal with individuals as objects of discipline for the assembly. Value for peace or unity was not to override the character of Christ, which must not be compromised on any account. The saint cannot abdicate his responsibility. The first of duties is

what we owe to Christ's name. We can never sanction or wink at evil.

Nor is it, let me say, a question only of flagrant wrongs. The Church, being God's habitation, is intolerant of all that is unfit for His presence, though we have need of patience too; and who is so patient as God? But He will be sanctified in all that come near Him, among whom He dwells: everything contrary to His word must be judged. Supposing there be only, as men say, a little evil, am I to bind up His name and presence, not to speak of myself, with even a small evil? Be it far from us. Not that it is called for, of course, to separate for every fault; but we are never to partake in what is contrary to God, but always by God's grace to keep ourselves pure. At the same time, the manner in which this is done must be determined by the word of God. For instance, not every censurable brother, but those guilty of wickedness (1 Cor. 5), are to be put away from the Church; but in no case is a Christian bound to go along with that which he knows to be offensive to God. Again, we have to judge ourselves, lest we should be hasty in imputing evil. Slowness to suspect, to act, and speak in such circumstances God looks for from His children. Alas! how ready we are, because of the evil of which one is conscious within, to think of it in others.

On the other hand, our comfort as well as spring of responsibility is, that God dwells in us as His habitation by the Spirit. We can and ought to count upon it, assured that He will aid us, hear us, appear for us; and therefore, whatever be the difficulty, whatever the sorrow, whatever the shame, let this be our confidence — God dwells in the assembly, His temple. It might be in a very low state; it might be only (as things are really)

represented in a given place, by two or three individuals. Nay, a soul might be obliged to stand alone; or there might be no sense of the truth sufficient even to produce this result. But I adhere as to a fixed and fundamental Christian axiom, that there is no possible circumstance in which a member of Christ is obliged to have fellowship with that which is opposed to God's will. Patient remonstrance and adequate waiting may be called for; but never allowance of evil. It is not the amount of evil (as remarked already) which destroys the quality of God's temple, but the deliberate sanction of known evil, though it may take no stronger outward form than mere indifference. This does destroy its character: else it would suppose God Himself indifferent, who dwells there. When that which bears the name of His house commits itself to binding up His name with the evil it allows, all is over with it. Then it becomes a simple though sorrowful question (not without urgent appeals to the conscience of those who stay) of leaving that which has ceased to be in any sense a true representation of God. What claim can it longer have on the faith of His child to abide there?

This is evidently of the last importance. It makes the Church question to be one of judging according to God's word by His presence. Profession and prejudice, tradition or human will, are equally out of place. It becomes a manifestly serious step to own or to disown an assembly as His. He who does so lightly or falsely trifles with or abuses the name of God. How different this from an ecclesiastical strife! Instead of a man's judging according to what he thinks ought to be in the Church, instead of his own feelings or mind about it, God is the criterion. How right and holy this is! Of

course His word is the standard, and His Spirit is the power. Thus nothing can be simpler, but at the same time nothing more certain, than that, where there is simple faith, God will appear, hear the cry, and come to the rescue. He will make the path manifest.

Another thing may be observed. The Church undoubtedly may make mistakes. Measures taken in discipline may be hasty, slow, or erroneous. In fact it is with the habitation of God in the Spirit collectively, as with the Christian individually. If the saints are, so the saint is, the temple of God Now nobody in his wits could maintain that a Christian is exempted from evil or mistake, because the Holy Ghost dwells in him. It is exactly the same principle with the assembly; as to it the same kind of liability exists. It may be so far in practice guarded against, humanly speaking, in proportion to the men of God who are there. This or that man might easily err; but it would be difficult to think that in the midst of an assembly not one so looked to the Lord as to gather His mind. Yet it is possible; and particularly where the commanding influence of one or more weakens the dependence of the assembly on God. It is evident that a wrong principle, a false position, or even mere precipitancy, might expose an assembly of God to act amiss. Therefore there is nothing so important, no matter what servant or servants of God may help, as to bear in mind that the one safeguard is, that God is there. He may be pleased to correct the wisest of His servants on the earth by a very feeble child.

Hence we must hold to it resolutely and watchfully, that the Church is not the assembly even of a Paul, still less of you or of me; it is God’s assembly. Consequently, in a case of discipline, for instance, it would be destructive of

that assembly, if the measures taken were to be settled for it definitely by any of His servants. Every person who knows either God's word about the Church, or its wants and difficulties practically, must acknowledge the immense value of the help of those He has given to guide and rule. There is as truly rule as there is teaching; and the Church would forsake its own mercies if it despised the help of either. Doubtless some have large spiritual capacity, and great experience in souls; and these are able, as a general rule, to judge rightly about such things much more than those less gifted and versed. Nevertheless, God is jealous, and room must be left for His own free action in His own assembly till the last moment. Where there is no room to revise whatever individuals may judge, where there is no power left to the Spirit to set aside, by the feeblest member of Christ there, the judgment of the best of guides, I no more dare call that assembly God's than any other society of believers under the sun.

Therefore it is not a question simply of sound doctrine, or precious saints, or great gifts. What I am insisting on is yet greyer. I admit all these in their place; but the fundamental truth to apprehend and hold fast always, and under all circumstances, is, that the Church is God's own even now; and God, because He is there, will maintain His sovereign action. He can shed fresh light. He may correct the most experienced, where unduly leaned on, by whom He pleases. There must always be this kept open; for God will not permit that we should glory in the flesh; nay, more, He will not permit that we should glory in the gifts He Himself gives us. He will convince us, however thankful we may be for all the fruits of His goodness, however we may bless Him for all

He has given us, that the Church is God's, that He loves to be owned, and that will make His presence felt in the assembly that has faith in Him.

Faith loves to see and know Jesus in the midst; and this in the darkest day, if there were but two or three gathered unto His name. And with Him thus looked to, will the Spirit fail to guide? I do not believe it; yet I allow freely that either confidence in a leader or jealousy of a leader, or any other fleshly working, or the haste of unbelief whether lax or self-righteous, may practically sever the assembly from the mind of Christ in any given case. Hence the assembly, as the individual must be ever open to the Spirit's correction through the written word: if it should err in fact, humiliation also is due before the injured Lord.

Time forbids my touching more Scriptures now; indeed, I feel strongly how imperfectly the subject has been treated. Still, I have desired to point out some practical results, as well as the truth that we are God's habitation through the Spirit. If the Lord be pleased to use these hints to stir up His own to examine His word about it for themselves, they will see with surprise how largely His testimony hangs on this truth.

1 Compare Eph. 3:6. "It is now revealed" to both.

The Spirit in the Apocalypse as compared with the Epistles.

Lecture 10 - Rev. 1:4, 5, Rev. 19:10.

These two portions of the Revelation have been read that we may be enabled to contrast the aspect of truth given us by the Holy Ghost in the last book of the New Testament with the testimony of the epistles. Our course now, therefore, must be somewhat discursive. For instead of confining myself to a particular Scripture, I shall endeavour to put together in a somewhat comprehensive view a number of passages scattered over the epistles, chiefly St. Paul's, which we have looked at either not at all or for other purposes. Having taken a rapid survey of these scattered lights I shall endeavour to put into juxtaposition with them that which is furnished in the Revelation on the subject.

The Holy Ghost is always presented, whatever Scripture may treat of Him, according to His own object in each book where the reference occurs. This remark applies to one topic no more than another that may be in hand; but as it is true of other doctrines, so of the Holy Ghost. Thus we have seen, in the epistle to the Romans, that righteousness is the subject, and especially the righteousness of God. Hence, till this has been thoroughly cleared, there is not one word about the Holy Ghost at all. It is only in Rom. 5 where the first allusion is found, as indeed also the first statement of God's love along with it, as already noticed. "The love of God," says the apostle, "is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." Thus the whole question

of our sins, and God's judgment of them, of sin and deliverance from it, has been fully met before the Spirit of God is Himself introduced. It was not well to open the work which goes on in the heart until God had been thus shown amply vindicated in the redemption and resurrection of Christ. But it is in Rom. 8 (that is, when we have had not merely our sins, but sin, fully discussed) that the apostle launches into an ample doctrinal exposition — the doctrine of the Spirit, viewed both as a condition and also as an indwelling person.

But I do no more than allude to this now, as it has been already before us. Let me recall the fact, that all is viewed on the side of righteousness, and this practically, after all is clear about the righteousness of God. "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: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." This is the only possible way now, or indeed at any time, in which the righteousness of the law could be fulfilled in the saint. It is in walking after the Spirit. The believer is first set free as in Christ before God. There must be liberty as well as life; and founded on this righteousness, the moral scope and purpose of the law is fulfilled in the believer. It is not exactly by the believer; still less is it fulfilled for the believer, which is as baseless as it deserves a harsher name. It is fulfilled in us, and is thus a more intrinsic thing than if simply by us. Love, as we are told elsewhere, is the fulfilling of the law; and this the Holy Ghost works in us as possessed of a new

nature, and now able to treat the old man as judged in the cross. The new nature is then drawn out in loving God and man; and thus the righteousness of the law (in vain sought under law) is fulfilled in us who walk after the Spirit. It is the display of what is according to God's moral nature, which is thus accomplished in the exercise of the new man by the power of the Holy Ghost.

This illustrates how thoroughly the Holy Spirit, and the character of His operation in the believer, is determined by the scope of the epistle. Having laid down, first, man's ruin as needing the gospel, and God's righteousness as revealed in it, the apostle now turns to the answer of practical righteousness in the children of God; and the Holy Ghost takes His place in reference to both. When righteousness is cleared, the love of God can be freely spoken of as shed abroad in our hearts; and, further, the Spirit is shown to be a power that displaces not only sin, but law as an external test, which can in no way enable such as we are to work inward and practical righteousness.

In the first epistle to the Corinthians we have the Holy Ghost after another sort altogether, and with remarkable fulness. What gave rise to this was carnality at work in almost every possible form except legalism. They were too loose to like the law; but their carnality was beyond all power of the law to remedy: law can only condemn the carnal. Christ alone can meet such evil, or any other; but Christ also made good by the power of the Spirit. Hence we find in this epistle the wisdom of man, first, judged by the cross (1 Cor. 1); and, next, supplanted by the communications of God's Spirit. These communications which he takes up in 1 Cor. 2 are shown to be revealed by the Spirit, and set forth in words

which the Holy Ghost gave, as He alone is for man the power of receiving them. Thus the Holy Ghost gave the truth, and the words, and the capacity to bow and understand. The Holy Ghost, in point of fact, has to do with everything as to the truth of God, which is only rightly seen in Christ Himself. Clearly, then, the Corinthians, who were wishing to bring in some wisdom from the world in the hope of making the gospel more palatable, were thus completely at fault, and, in fact, in opposition to the mind of God.

Then, again, the next chapter (1 Cor. 3) shows, though I need not dwell on much of it, how the Holy Ghost is viewed as having constituted believers God's temple. This is urged as a standing fact, as well as the consequent seriousness of meddling with God's sanctuary, and bringing in either mere trash, or positive defilement and destructive evil. "If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy." But even supposing a man did not defile the temple of God in the strongest sense, if he brought in what was worthless, all his labour should come to nothing, and be burned. He himself might be saved, but it would be as one who passed through the fire. This is, of course, figurative, but a most instructive figure, intimating the application of God's judgment to the work, though the man himself might escape.

The next, and very solemn use that is made of this gift of the Spirit, is as regards the believer's body. It is not now that together Christians constitute the temple of God, but that each one's body is His temple. This is a capital truth of Christianity; for the Corinthians fell into that error which has been perpetuated in our own day, that, if we be only right in heart, it matters not about the

body — that we must not be too particular as to outward things, among which comes, of course, the body as the outward instrument of the man. To such it seemed an unspiritual thought to be occupied with the body: why not insist on the inner man? Let the soul be right, and the rest may be safely left. Not at all, says the apostle Paul; the Holy Ghost is pleased to dwell in the man, and makes, not the soul, but the body, His temple. If the body is consecrated to the Lord, if it is separated by the power of the Holy Ghost, the soul must surely be all right. But there might be excuses made, so as to leave the body free for self-indulgence and downright wickedness, while highflown sentiments filled the spirit of a man. This, it is evident, is hateful to God. “Ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.” (1 Cor. 6)

After this (1 Cor. 12), not to notice every passage, the Holy Ghost is described in the Church, first, operating in the way of gifts, His manifestation given to each, on which enough, perhaps, has been said to excuse my not delaying now. Again, 1 Cor. 14 regulates the exercise of these gifts in the assembly of the saints, in God’s assembly. Thus is established the important principle, that the possession of power of the Holy Ghost exempts none from the Lord’s authority by His word. Yea, it is the Holy Ghost who applies that word to deal with Christian conscience in the use that is made of His power. In vain does a man plead that he has a word from God, and that it must be spoken. Not so, save in due season, and in the proper place. A word may be ever so truly from the Lord, but He holds to His own order in His own house. Nor does the Spirit of God set aside in the smallest degree personal responsibility in the exercise of gifts.

The word, and the word alone — not the Spirit — is the standard. (Compare 2 Tim. 3) And this, I need not say, is an invaluable truth; for the tendency of men who really believe in the action of the Spirit of God is more or less to subject the word to the Spirit, instead of owning what is made so plain in Scripture, that the Holy Ghost subjects His own manifestations to the authority of the word of the Lord — the word that He has Himself inspired.

Next, in the second of Corinthians, when God had wrought powerfully to awaken and recover the souls of the saints, we have a passage of great weight connected with our theme. The apostle expressly consoles the saints who had been cast down. He himself had experienced a fearful persecution, but had been brought out of it. Next, he tells them, that “all the promises of God in him [Christ] are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.” They had been, some of them, reproaching him for not having kept his purpose. Did this, at best vacillation, seem like an apostle? If any man’s word ought to be trusted, surely an apostle’s ought; but Paul had not come as he had promised. The change of purpose as to his visiting them was thus turned artfully against his authority. At any rate, he answers, if I have not kept my purpose, God keeps His in the gospel. “All the promises of God in him [Christ] are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us. Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.” This is precisely what takes place in the dealings of God with the soul; and all is here presented in a remarkably full and orderly manner. The believer is established by God in

Christ, which, of course, supposes that he is quickened with the life of Christ. I do not mean that this establishment in Christ is only quickening, but that, when a soul is thus established, he must needs have been quickened. This is the strongest way of putting the blessing; for Christ gives force and fulness to that which is inherited of previously existing privilege. Then, again, he is said to be “anointed;” for the Holy Ghost is the power of his knowing all things according to God. “Ye have an unction from the Holy One,” as we read even of the babes in 1 John 2. So, immediately after his establishment in Christ, anointing is mentioned — the Spirit’s opening of the believer’s eyes, and giving him power to see and take in things with a new and divine capacity. Moreover, the Spirit seals the believer on the ground of accomplished redemption, and becomes to him the earnest of the future inheritance. “Who hath sealed us, and given us the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.”

Let us now turn to another Scripture, where the same double thought occurs — the epistle to the Ephesians; for the brief remarks I shall make on this subject may suffice for both. In Ephesians 1:12-14 it is written, “that we should be to the praise of his glory who first trusted in Christ.” “We”1 means from among the Jews, who anticipate the nation in being brought to rest our hopes on Christ the Lord. “In whom ye [the Ephesians] also, after ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance,” etc. You will observe that the apostle treats of the Holy Spirit in two special points of view, and in relation to the two main subjects he had

been and is setting forth in the chapter. One is the call of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; the other is the inheritance. The Holy Ghost deals with us in relation to both. Relatively to the call of God He seals the believer; and relatively to His inheritance He is the earnest in our hearts. In the one case He is the power of conscious separation unto God on the ground of that which is now complete. And therefore, you will observe, that in this very verse it is said, “After ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation.” It is only consequent on this that the Holy Ghost deigns to take such place in the believer. He seals the person of him who rests on redemption; and He becomes the earnest of the inheritance of glory, which we shall share along with Christ.

On this subject there are often difficulties in the minds of true children of God. My only object and desire, in saying a few words now on it, is to contribute one’s mite of help, with a view to removing, I trust, some of the difficulty, and, I must add, somewhat of prejudice, that darkens the subject. That there should be some difficulty in comprehending such a theme as this ought not to surprise any who know how the world has encroached on the domain of the saints. I was thankful, the other day, in glancing over an old Puritan writer, to note, that even he admitted its distinctness from faith (and certainly Puritanism is not the quarter to which I should look for intelligence in the doctrine of the Holy Ghost). But still, just because it was little expected, it may have been the more pleasant to find a theologian lifted up above the too common legal traditions of his party. It was the homage that a godly mind paid to the plain and precious truth of God. Be it remembered too, that this

good and able man, a couple of hundred years ago, wrote at a critical period, when the moral side of the law was asserted with more keenness than perhaps at any other time. Legalism ordinarily is the great hindrance in the way of understanding the Holy Ghost. It is legalism in some shape or another which causes difficulties. The Holy Ghost is the power of holiness to the believer, as law was the strength of sin to men under it. The law dealt with flesh. The Holy Ghost now dwells where the new nature is.

In quickening, the Spirit of God finds a soul that has no life whatever towards God. There is nothing but fallen nature before He imparts the new creature by faith of Christ. The soul is connected by faith of the word with Christ; there is a spiritual nature communicated which it never had before. “That which is born of the Spirit is spirit,” as flesh comes from flesh. But the sealing of the Spirit supposes a holy thing already there, whether one looks at Christ, or the saints as in Christ. Of course, there is no sealing of the old nature. The Holy Ghost seals that new nature, or rather the quickened person. But is there not more? I believe that in our case there is another thought. It is not only that there must be something good and holy to seal, and that it would be monstrous and absurd to suppose the Holy Ghost sealing the old nature or the flesh; quickening supposes an absence of life, but sealing further implies that there is something to seal which is according to God. For even a new nature is not enough; because the saints had a new nature all through the Old Testament times (though not revealed then), yet we never hear of their being sealed of the Spirit. But now more is implied. The sealing of the Spirit does not come simply on quickening, though it

always supposes it, but follows the reception of “the gospel of our salvation.” “In whom after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed,” etc. I do not lay any particular stress on the word “after” here, but am willing to take it, as some contend, for “having believed.” Still it comes precisely to the same effect in the end. Most decidedly, in my opinion, it assumes that the saints had already believed, and that the sealing was a subsequent action of the Holy Ghost on their souls. In short men are not sealed as unbelievers, which would be the most miserable thing if possible. They are sealed as believers, as they were quickened when dead in sins.

The question of the time elapsing between believing and sealing is of slight consequence, but the distinctness of the two things is of great moment. Let there be but a minute; still they are distinct, and the sealing follows faith. The unbeliever needs to be quickened, the believer to be sealed. Far from allowing it to be a doubtful point or an open question, to my mind Scripture is positive and uniform, that the sealing of the Spirit invariably follows faith, and is in no case the same thing, or even in the same moment, as faith. I hold that whoever does not see it confounds the action of the Spirit of God in quickening or giving to believe with that which is altogether of another nature. The danger too is, that people are thus exposed constantly to confound the condition of saints in the Old Testament times with Christianity. Undoubtedly the Holy Ghost dealt with souls of old; undoubtedly they were quickened, and believed. Were they sealed? Had they the earnest of the Spirit in their hearts? Neither.

This brings us now to the reason of the difference. It was not because they were unbelievers, or without quickening; for their faith is certain, and to be born anew is indispensable for God's kingdom. But the gospel of salvation was not yet a known published ground of blessing for the soul in its relation to God. That is, the condition of old was always one simply of expectancy; there was as yet no enjoyed communion with God in peace and deliverance. Christianity has brought in all this and more. Christ is come, and has accomplished redemption; and the Holy Ghost, now sent down from heaven, brings us not merely the promise — for this of itself is never Christianity — but the promises verified in the highest degree in Christ Himself: Wherever it is simply promise presented to an unconverted soul, the gospel of salvation is not yet understood. I admit, of course, that there are promises where the soul has found Christ. Some things are future, and, of course, in that sense they are not fulfilled (for instance, the resurrection of the body and the display of glory). But I maintain that Scripture attributes the greatest possible importance to the fact of (not bare promise now, but) accomplishment in Christ; and that this is precisely, therefore, what is now preached (not promised) in the gospel. It is not a mere hope of Christ, which is exactly where those under law always find themselves. They are constantly yearning to be saved, for an interest in Christ, and so on. This was all right in the Old Testament, and no person was entitled to go beyond it. The Messiah was not come, nor the work done: hence it would have been sentiment to have believed more, and not the truth of God; not reality, but imagination. It is not according to God's present testimony to set forth promise only; indeed there is no such thing as a

“promise of forgiveness” now. Forgiveness is an actual fact; while eternal life is a present possession, but future also. Salvation, in a most true sense, is the believer’s portion (Eph. 2), and so complete that the believer is said to be risen with Christ, and seated in heavenly places with Him. Viewed as far as Christ, it is as perfect as it ever can be, although our bodies must be changed into the likeness of His body by-and-by. In this sense salvation is only at hand, not yet come.

Accordingly the Spirit of God takes a new relation or mode of action in reference to this development of the ways of God, and the impartation of the full blessing. As far as the soul is concerned, salvation is already perfect, and the Holy Ghost (in dealing with the soul now) bears the message of this, and seals the person of him who believes the gospel. The sealing supposes not only a new birth, which was true of old, but, beside this, it is based on redemption complete, and supposes the work of Christ known. Even we do not seal a thing until it is done. Nobody would think of sealing a letter till it was written. Thus it always supposes that the ground, on which an object that is sealed already stands, is finished and firm. Hence the act of sealing, which is applied by the Holy Ghost, clearly indicates the completeness of what is in question.

As the Holy Ghost seals to the believer the salvation which the gospel announces (which is, in fact, the way in which the call of God now displays itself in Christ), the other side has its place. There is that which has not yet come; and the Holy Ghost even there is not a promiser, but an earnest. He is an earnest, not of Christ’s salvation, any more than of God’s love, but of the inheritance. The Christian has God’s love as complete

towards him as he ever can have it. I have such a salvation for my soul that even God Himself could not make it more perfect; but I have not yet the inheritance; and the Holy Ghost, instead of merely holding out a promise now, gives me to taste it — gives me to enter into the anticipation, joy, and blessing of it even while I am in this world. Therefore, He seems to me to be called the earnest of it.

This may suffice for the text in the Ephesians; but I must go back for a moment to the Galatians, though it may seem to savour of disorder. “Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?” They knew well, though beguiled by Judaisers, that law works never led to ministering the Holy Spirit to them, any more than to working miracles among them. (Gal. 3) This, however, does not for all minds decide that they are distinct. I shall refer to another and later expression in Galatians 4, which is very explicit. When His people were under law, “God sent forth his Son…. to redeem them that were under law, that we might receive sonship. And because ye [Galatians, who were not under law] are sons, God [when redemption was accomplished] hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.” Thus it is the Holy Ghost giving us the consciousness of the relationship already ours by faith in Christ. (Gal. 3:26.) They were sons already — “Because ye are sons.” But then they might not have the known enjoyment of this relation; for this “God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.” The meaning and force is thus as plain as possible. Under the law the believer, although a child, never had the consciousness of a child. He was ostensibly and in his experience in the condition of a

servant, though lord of all, as the apostle elaborately explains. The reason of this was because, for the first time, he was under law. He was like a minor, under guardians and stewards till the period fixed by the father. He was held in bondage under the principles of the world, and the law scourged him, and made him feel how naughty he was, and what rebelliousness there is in human nature. All this was going on during the legal system. But now is come a wholly different state of things, as the apostle shows here.

So the epistle to the Romans taught us that grand truth of Christianity as to the flesh, that I am entitled, nay bound, to regard it as dead. I am never called to die to it. This is natural, pietistic, mystic, but not at all the truth revealed in Christ. I am never called to die to the flesh. Dying, of course, to nature and the world is practically spoken of — dying daily. But it is another thought altogether, and is a question of exposure to trial and death for Christ continually. But as to the flesh, I am entitled by grace to say that I have died already; and I am called on to reckon myself henceforth and always dead. Mysticism is an effort to become dead in oneself, and sounds well; but grace gives me the title of Christ to believe in the power of His death for me, and of my death in Him; so that I may, without presumption, reckon myself dead unto sin, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus.

The epistle to the Romans gave us this teaching in connection with righteousness; but here, what is taught is in contrast with the legal system of restraints which served to deal with those under age. Redemption has brought us by faith of Christ into the place of sons, and we have the Spirit of God’s Son given to us as the power

whereby we cry, Abba, Father. Such is the connection of the Holy Ghost with the doctrine of this epistle. The object of the enemy there was to draw away believers from the liberty with which they had been made free in Christ, and from that blessed relationship of sons before their God and Father, back again under ordinances of the law, in one shape or another. The Holy Ghost is the great delivering power given to us, founded upon redemption by and in Christ. But a few words more on the presentation of the Holy Ghost in the Ephesians before we pass on. We need not enlarge on all the allusions to the Holy Ghost; for there is not a chapter that does not furnish one or more. In the testimony of Ephesians 1 and Ephesians 2 the Holy Ghost is viewed as the power of access to the Father for both Jew and Gentile that believe now: at the close we are told of Him also as the constitutive power of the habitation of God. It is not the habitation of God in an external manner like Israel. No visible cloud of glory marks His presence in the Church; but there is the utmost reality in the fact that the Holy Ghost dwells there. In Ephesians 3 the Holy Ghost is not only a revealing power, as in Ephesians 1, for our intelligence, but also an inward energy for deepening the spiritual communion of the Christian, and strengthening his inner man according to those riches that are in Christ. In Ephesians 4 the doctrine of the Spirit of God is largely developed in relation to the body, as well as to individual gifts. Above all, in the latter part of the chapter we have Him alluded to as the active power and personal measure of holiness in walk. It is not merely doing this or that which can suit the new man, but not grieving this divine person, by whom we were sealed unto the day of redemption. It is not enough that we have the truth of the old man

judged, and the new man given; but there is the Holy Spirit of God, whom we are on no account to grieve. Ephesians 5 furnishes another and a very interesting allusion to the Holy Spirit. We are called upon there not to yield to carnal excitement, but to be filled with the Spirit, and, in connection with this, “speaking to each other in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord.”

And here I will allow myself to make some remarks which, I think, may be helpful to souls often charged with the inconsistency of using hymn-books, whilst they object to forms of prayer. There is no such thing in the New Testament as a body of praise metrically prepared for Christian use. There is no provision of psalms, or hymns, or spiritual songs, written by inspiration for the Christian; there is very abundantly for the Jew. Do you wonder at this? It seems to me simple, suitable, and full of interest. The Jew needed such praises made for him; the Church does not; for the Christian and the Church, having the Holy Ghost, as the Jew had not, has within a full spring for making melody in his heart. This seems to me the reason why there is no external supply provided for Christians. To the Church, having the ever-present and indwelling Holy Ghost, belongs the well of living water; nay, each individual Christian has it, and so far, naturally and normally, breaks out into psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs. Thus, what to some is an evidence of the need of human forms, or to others a ground for falling back on the psalms of David, is really the most striking proof, in the simplest possible way, of the actual blessedness of the Church of God and of the Christian, if they had only faith to use their goodly heritage. Those who are under all the dolorous

experience of the law, and cannot therefore enter into proper Christian worship, may, no doubt, require to be provided and stimulated with the Jewish store of the psalms, which, if they only understood, suppose a wholly different experience as well as relationship. There is no spring of joy in themselves; they want a provision for them outside. But just because we have Christ, and, besides, the Holy Ghost as a divine power for enjoying our Saviour, with our God and Father, it would be to lower the Church's place to make for our singing a provision of psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs in the word of God. Holy Scripture deals with the Christian as grown up to man's estate, and supposes the Church, unless beguiled by deceivers, to be standing in full liberty before God, in intelligence of His mind, and confidence of His love, entering into the riches of His grace and of His glory in Christ; and this because the Holy Ghost is in the Christian and in the Church. The consequence is, that such conscious blessedness naturally — not to say necessarily — finds its expression, as is said here, not merely in praise, but "speaking to each other in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord."

Again, I do not the least doubt that these psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs here spoken of were Christian compositions — not indeed extemporaneous, any more than Davidical, but their own suited expressions of various praise. They were the fruit of the Spirit of God working in the early believers, causing them to express their own proper joy to God, instead of casting them on an inspired provision, which does not enter into their distinctive privileges and joy, but in all directly belongs to others who are as yet to come. Does

not this, then, fully meet those persons who urge captious difficulties, and say, “After all, you have a hymn-book, and we must have forms”? It seems to me so. The expressions here really intimate that there were known metrical compositions of these kinds; that there was a due and characteristic expression of praise and thanksgiving, as well as of the different spiritual experiences of the Christian. These varieties seem meant by “psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs.” They have each their own proper character, and no one can take up a Christian book of praise to God without finding one and the other and all of these things. But, I repeat, these compositions are left room for among Christians, instead of being provided ready by God’s inspiration outside themselves; indeed, this is one of the peculiarities of the Holy Ghost’s action in the New Testament. He has come down to be in us. He is not merely One who writes for us and teaches us: there is this kind of testimony. You will find, particularly in the Apocalypse, and occasionally elsewhere, even the prophetic character of revelation still, as “The Spirit speaketh in the latter times,” etc. Thus we do not lose in the New Testament the predictive element which abounds in the older Scriptures, any more than the narrative. There is in the epistles special instruction on Christian standing and conduct, ministry, etc. Besides, the Holy Ghost leads the believer in joy and praise. He does not give up His function in furnishing authoritative injunctions or visions of the future; but neither is in any way the characteristic dealing of the Holy Ghost with the Christian or the Church. The praise of children, the expression of common as well as of individual joy in the Lord, cannot but go forth from the heart now, as well as

from the lips, to the praise of God, and this, too, in a rhythmical form.

The only other allusion to the Spirit of God which remains to be noticed now in the Ephesians occurs in the last chapter, where prayer is called for in the Spirit: “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit.” Never does the New Testament speak of prayer “to,” but “in” the Holy Ghost. It is not that the Spirit is not worthy of worship and prayer; it is not that He is not God, equally with the Father and with the Son; but He has been pleased, since redemption, to take a place in us which precludes His being made the definite object of prayer while thus dwelling with us. Prayer to God includes the Spirit with the Father and the Son. Therefore, where Christian subjects are revealed, it is invariably praying “in the Spirit,” and not to Him. Praying to the Spirit would be unconsciously not to believe in the Holy Ghost as dwelling in the Church and in the believer; as it is the expression of want of faith in one of the great distinctive Christian privileges, always known among those who confound the Church’s estate with the Jewish position.

Without touching on the minute passages in the Philippians, which speak of the Spirit in point of character rather than as an indwelling person (that is, as the source of fellowship, and the character of worship as contrasted with what was special), let us observe the remarkable omission of the Spirit of God in the doctrine of the Colossians. It has been often noticed; but I refer to it in passing. This epistle as strikingly brings out the new life or nature, as the kindred one to the Ephesians makes much of the Holy Ghost. Of course both features

are connected with the peculiar strain of their respective epistles.

In 1 Thessalonians the Holy Ghost is introduced with remarkable strength and simplicity, and this from their conversion throughout their whole career. (1 Thess. 1:5, 1 Thess. 4:8, 1 Thess. 5:19.) The texts need no extended remarks, save perhaps the last, which is sometimes misunderstood: “Quench not the Spirit.” It is totally different from grieving of the Spirit, against which we are warned in Eph. 5. Grieving Him is clearly a personal question; whereas quenching Him is just as emphatically with regard to others, and mainly, I suppose, in public action, or, at least, in the use of their gifts. I am not to hinder another, nor to raise difficulties as to the manifestation of the Holy Ghost in any brother. It may be a great work, or a very little one. This is not at all the question; but — Is it of the Spirit? Respect for the presence and operation of the Holy Ghost in all the variety of His action in the Church would keep the greatest from quenching the Spirit in the least. God certainly does not despise the day of small things.

In both epistles to Timothy we hear of the Holy Ghost repeatedly. I have referred to the prophetic episode in the first epistle; but the introduction of the matter in 2 Tim. 1:7 is deeply interesting also. “God,” says the apostle, “hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” (See also ver. 14.) It is not hard to see why the Holy Ghost is so spoken of in this place. Timothy shrank from the difficulties of Christian warfare — from that sorrow and trial into which the service of Christ, more particularly among the assemblies, necessarily brings him who seeks to be faithful. Hence the apostle reminds him of the gift which

had been given him through the imposition of his own hands, and adds that the Spirit, who is given to us Christians, is not the Spirit of cowardice, but of power, love, and discreetness (σωφρονισμοῦ). There are thus two things — the gift given him by the imposition of the apostle's hands, and, besides, the general character of the Spirit given to the saints. Clearly this was for the purpose of stirring up the trembling man of God. Why should he be surcharged with grief at difficulties, dangers, disappointments, or even the defection of those who had once laboured with the apostle himself, but were now turned against him?

In Titus we have a rich passage — not about a gift to a beloved servant, but the common place of blessing into which Christianity brings a soul (Titus 3:4): "After that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; 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." Here we have not the being born anew or of God, which is common, in my judgment, to all saints at all times, but that form and fulness which now pertains to the Christian. It is "the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour." This appears to be distinctly the full power of the blessing which characterizes the Christian. The new birth simply is universal; but the new place and the gift of the Holy Ghost thus richly awaited the accomplishment of redemption. Therefore this is said to be "shed on us

abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour.” Thus the passage very strikingly shows both what always is and must be true, and what only became possible according to God’s wise ways when the hindrance was removed, flesh was judged, and the Holy Ghost could be shed thus abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour There are various references in the epistle to the Hebrews; but I need only notice two expressions for a moment — “the Spirit of grace,” and “the eternal Spirit.” They are both to be applied to the Holy Ghost, and stand in evident contrast with Jewish things: the “Spirit of grace” in contrast with law, and the “eternal Spirit” with temporary dealings as of old.

Next, we come to a passage in 1 Peter 1, of much interest to the believer: “Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace which should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with (ἐν) the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven.” Now, this passage demands and will repay the most careful consideration. First there is the clear statement of the working of the Spirit of Christ in the prophets of old; but what He was in them was a spirit of prophecy; that is, He gave them to bear witness to what was coming. He gave their souls to bear witness to the sufferings that belonged to Christ, and the glories after these. How much they understood, and how far they could enjoy, are other questions; but He set both

before them. We find all this in the Psalms and prophets generally, and in Isaiah, Micah, Daniel, and Zechariah, with especial clearness. But, again, we find much more: “Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven.” Thus, now that the gospel is sent out, because Christ has come and the great work of redemption is accomplished, the Holy Ghost takes quite a new place — “sent down from heaven,” you will mark, which is not said about the working of the Spirit of Christ before. Evidently the mission of the Holy Ghost sent from heaven is contra-distinguished from the Old Testament operations, however blessed, of the Spirit of Christ. It is the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven who is the power of the believer’s entering into that which is now reported in the gospel. Besides, there remains the accomplishment of the prophecy at another epoch, when the kingdom shall be (not preached, but) set up in power and glory here below.

Accordingly there are three things in all: first, the Holy Ghost predicting; next, the present enjoyment of soul-salvation proclaimed by the gospel in the power of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; and, thirdly, the revelation of grace at the appearing of Christ, which will be the fulfilment of the prophecies. That is, there is a mighty work accomplished, and, no doubt, prophecy touches on that work, though it goes far beyond what prophecy has revealed. Finally, the full accomplishment of prophecy awaits the appearing of the Lord in glory. Between the two — after Christ came to suffer, but before He appears in glory — the Holy Ghost is sent

down from heaven; and we enjoy in faith by His power what the gospel announces in Christ. We shall find the importance of this by-and-by, when we look at the Revelation; but these preliminary remarks may serve to bring out the contrast with what we shall find there.

On 2 Peter I need not dwell, as the chief allusion is simply to the Old Testament prophets, who spoke under the influence of the Holy Ghost.

1 John might claim a particular hearing, as we have there very full instruction as to the gift of the Holy Ghost to us, whereby we have God dwelling in us, and ourselves dwelling in God. But as this again would detain us from that which is proposed for this evening, I only refer to it by the way.

At length we come to the Revelation, where the first words in which the Spirit of God is announced place the subject on entirely novel ground — novel at least in the New Testament. Here it is outside not only usual phraseology but spirit to speak of “the seven Spirits;” so much so that some ancients as well as moderns have denied the reference to the Holy Ghost, and applied the phrase to the seven presence-angels. (Rev. 8:2.) I do not myself doubt that the allusion is to the sevenfold spiritual power of which we hear in Isaiah 11. But the style is unprecedented in the New Testament. The connection differs here, of course, as applying to a transitional time of judgment on men, while the Jewish prophet was showing how the fulness of the Holy Ghost was to rest on the Messiah.

Thus the Apocalypse is not at all occupied in its prophetic visions with the ordinary objects of the New Testament. This is evidently the key to the change of the

style. Hence the Revelation — about to treat not of the display of grace, but of God's government — is pregnant with allusions to the Old Testament. No person is capable of understanding the book who has not the ways of God of old before his mind's eye. But bearing in mind its constant allusion to the law and the prophets, while at the same time it connects New Testament elements with this leading up into the eternal state after a sort far beyond the Old Testament, one may follow its communications somewhat more intelligently.

Hence, though saying "grace be unto you, and peace," God Himself is spoken of after another manner than we have found before. It is "from him which is, and which was, and which is to come." He speaks as Jehovah. It is a translation, if one may so say, of the Hebrew "Jehovah " into the New Testament language. As God is thus brought before us, so is His Spirit — "the seven Spirits which are before his throne." Any one familiar with the New Testament must be so much the more struck by such an expression. Do we not always hear of the Spirit — yea, "one Spirit"? Is not this the emphatic teaching of the apostle Paul? Is not this the ground and formative power of the one body of Christ, that one Spirit dwells in every disciple of Christ, knitting together and incorporating into one all the various members? Surely so. Here; in the very terms of the salutation, we hear of the "seven Spirits;" and more than this, "the seven Spirits which are before his throne." It is another order of ideas, wholly different from what we find in the epistles. He is "the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven" elsewhere; He dwells in the believer; He distributes and operates in the Church. Here it is the seven Spirits that are before God's throne. How comes this? We are

entering on a scene of government and judicial dealings. We are closing the heavenly parenthesis of grace where God made the wondrous display of the mystery, hid from ages and generations in the glory of Christ on high, and of the Christian and Church united to Him there. Even in the preface of the seven churches and of Christ in relation to them, judgment is the point, and the Holy Ghost is viewed according to the governmental character that the book as a whole unfolds to us. God Himself is thus presented judging, and about to govern directly, instead of providentially. It is the book consequently where every system, and man as such, must be judged. The churches are judged in the first place; the world is next judged; then the quick (at Christ's appearing, and before His earthly reign closes), and in the last place the dead are judged. Throughout it is judgment.

Consistently with this the Holy Ghost is viewed according to an earthly and judicial character, resuming an Old Testament aspect, but with a depth characteristic of the final and complete revelation of God. The prophet speaks of "the seven Spirits;" it is the full but varied perfection of the Holy Ghost acting according to the developed ways of God Himself in government, and therefore designated as being before His throne.

In the addresses to the churches, there is a remarkably coincident manner of speaking even to them: "What the Spirit saith to the churches." It is not the working of the Spirit of God in the saint or the Church. It is not the habitation of God in the Spirit. But even He, in addressing them here, takes rather the place of warning and of expostulation as One outside. Christ Himself does the same. He is not here as the head of the Church

communicating nourishment and cherishing His body. He is seen walking in priestly robe — more than a priest, but as a priest too; not indeed interceding or bearing up the believer, but, on the contrary, searching with His eyes as a flame of fire, and dealing with that which was contrary to the mind of God. This is clearly the revelation that we have even of our Lord Himself in the things seen. Consequently He Himself is described as the Son of man — an extraordinary designation relatively to the Church; and why so? Why is He seen as Son of man here? He is going to take the kingdom. Meanwhile judgment is given to Him because He is the Son of man. (John 5) Thus the Lord has taken the place of a judge, even though the subject be the churches themselves. Every kind of judgment is in His hands. "Alas! who shall live when God doeth this?" Hence we find that the best of these churches — the first of them at least — is threatened with the removal of its candlestick if it repented not; (and did it repent?) while the last of them, although called to repent, is threatened positively with being spued out of our Lord's mouth. Thus, as for the churches, there was utter and hopeless rejection.

Then ensues a vast change; and (whatever may be judged) redeemed ones — no longer on the earth — are glorified in heaven; and the Lord is seen above as a Lamb that had been slain (a rejected Christ) in the presence of God and on His throne. There, again, is seen once more the Spirit, but still as seven Spirits, symbolized by seven lamps or torches of fire (still judicial); as also in the next chapter there is power and activity in the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth — not any longer a question of preaching the

gospel with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. The Church is not in view any more than the gospel, but a mission into all the earth, where He is a Spirit, not of grace, but of government, dealing actively with the earth universally. The churches, too, are no longer heard of; they are here not even objects of testimony for the Spirit of God. Hence forth God is occupied with other and earthly plans, the heavenly joint- heirs being seen on high with Christ. The Spirit of God, then, acts in view of all the earth.

This of itself sufficiently indicates the great peculiarity of the Holy Spirit's action at this Apocalyptic period. The largest portion of the book treats of the transitional interval after the churches have disappeared from the scene, and before the Lord Jesus comes from heaven with His glorified saints in judgment of the earth. I believe that this is in brief a true account, as far as it goes, of the main subject-matter of the Apocalypse. The churches are gone, and are no more heard of after chapter 3 (save in the exhortations at the end). Then we hear, as remarked, of the seven horns and eyes representing the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth. The term of long patience ceases, and divine judgments run their course. It is not that there are not saints called and witnessing; nor, of course, could there be saints without the quickening power of God's Spirit acting by the word as of old. But what is the character of the action of the Holy Spirit in and by these saints who follow the Church on earth? What is the nature of His communications to their souls? What is the experience that He forms within, or the walk that He leads to without? The answer in the words of the Apocalypse itself is, that the Spirit of prophecy is the testimony of

Jesus (for such is what I suppose the order really ought to be, though, being reciprocal, the grammar admits equally of either). It is a question here entirely of contextual propriety, whether you take first the one member or the other.

Now, this at once lets us into the total difference in the relation of the Spirit of God towards these saints, as compared with His aspect toward the Church and the Christian. The Holy Ghost, as a present and characteristic fact, dwells in the believer as a spirit of communion. What I learn in Christ, I enjoy as mine. It is all my portion and delight. There is not a single revelation that God makes of His Son that I am not entitled to take as the comfort of my heart. The Christian has a direct interest in all His glory. He may see that which only presents Him as an object of worship for the soul, as the Son of the Father; but, still, nothing more delights him, because, as born of God, and having the Holy Ghost setting the heart free, it is the joy of the believer to have One above himself, whatever His love — One before whom he can fall down and worship. We know, alas! how John proved his own weakness here (the abuse of what in itself would be perfectly right to a divine object); but the glory of the angel for a little while dimmed the homage of his heart, and divided it: so bright was this revealing personage, that the prophet was going to worship him. But the believer (whose heart knows the Son of God, knows His grace, delights itself in His glory as the Holy Ghost brings before him Jesus) is a willing worshipper, as of the Father, so of the Son.

In all other things where Christ is not simply thus as the Son, the eternal One, and divine Person, the object of worship, we have One who is both above us, and in deep

and ungrudging love is pleased to share His relationship with us. In fact, all that He had given Him, He gives to us; all that He has wrought, He has caused to contribute to our infinite blessing. In all this, you observe, it is the Holy Spirit of God who takes of the things of Christ, and shows them unto us. He is glorifying Christ, but it is by showing His things to us. He makes our hearts run over with the joy of Christ that we possess.

This is not the case in the Apocalypse. Look at the saints in Rev. 6, which is the first place where any on earth are brought before us in the prophetic part as a matter of fact. They desire the Lord's judgment of their adversaries. They are wistfully longing after some good they have not got. This is the case even in Solomon's Song, not what pertains to the Church or the Christian's relationship, as I shall show presently in speaking of the book of the Revelation. But the position of saints on earth, after the Church has disappeared, is such that the Holy Ghost is only the Spirit of prophecy. The sole testimony that He renders to Jesus is as a prophetical spirit which casts them on the future — on what they are to receive by Jesus when He appears. It is not so with the Christian; and this is a fact which may suggest much as to differing principles in the display of God and the blessing of the saint. Two things are wanted to set one in real blessedness as a present thing. I want a satisfying object for my affections, and I must possess that object; I want a stimulus for my expectations, being still in the body, and surrounded by objects that Satan uses as means to draw one away from God. Now, it is essential for me, that as I have Christ for my heart, so I should yet have Him to wait for in the other sense of my hope. We want these two things, that seem to be

contradictory but in reality are the essential constituents of full blessing for the saint and for the Church. If there be not a satisfying object before my heart, what exercise or rest can there be for its affections? But the Christian has Christ. And therefore it is that the Holy Ghost does seal him, gives him this unction, gives him to know what he has, and is his power of enjoying Christ and what Christ has given him. But then the same Holy Ghost leads me to look for Christ. This we shall find in the Revelation too — for us, not for those who are to succeed the Church. It is only with the Bride that the Spirit says, “Come.” It is only in dealing with her that He prompts her cry, and joins in saying, “Come.” And He says “Come,” because He who loves us best, and is truly loved by our hearts, has told us that He is coming. Then the Spirit, who honours His word, instils this desire, and makes us long for Him. But then He is One who loves as none other could love — who has spent Himself in His love, that I am waiting for. Therefore I have, while I have not; I have all the blessedness, consequently, of possession by faith, and yet have all the stimulus of hope, that makes me look out of the present scene, only to be perfectly satisfied when He has me and I have Him in the heavenly glory where He is gone.

This is precisely what meets the heart in Christianity. Christ has come down to the world, and loves me where I am. He loved me in the midst of my folly, and in spite of my sins. At the same time He is my hope; and I shall be like Him and be with Him where He is. And this is what is found in Christianity, and nowhere else. It could not be before Christ came, because the object was not come nor fully revealed. It cannot be after Christ has come

again. At His coming there will be full and everlasting blessing, and all sorrow and difficulty shall vanish away. Then the path for saints on the earth will be an easy one. But now there is the opposition of the Spirit of God to Satan's power. Therefore there is every possible element to hinder and try the child of God. But there is the blessedness of faith and hope. The Holy Ghost is the spring of all power. He, since redemption, takes His place in the believer and in the Church. How blessed is the portion of the Church of God!

But manifestly, when the Church goes on high, there will be no longer any kindred state. The Spirit of God will quicken souls, as He did before He was sent down from heaven and formed the Church. That is, there will be the same elementary and eternal work of the Holy Spirit as long as there are souls here below, and a God to know vitally. Besides, the Holy Spirit, working appropriately, will throw them upon the future. This is not wonderful; because it is simply the order then before God. Thus the contrast is plain. The heavenly saints just before will have been taken out of the world: here are these souls which are being prepared for the millennial earth It is a strictly transitional period; but the form of the Spirit's action and testimony is to direct hearts to the future that is about to be revealed. The spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus. Thus it is not the opening out of the fulness of redemption. It is not the power which gives the soul the consciousness of drawing "within the veil," where there is "an anchor of the soul both sure and steadfast." Nothing of our peace and joy appears: saints have this now in Jesus. But the emphatic form intimates that the Holy Ghost will direct them to look to Him for the future. They will have to wait. Other souls must also

suffer like them. (Rev. 6:11) Accordingly we find some such words as these, “How long, O Lord?” They look for One who is to come; and nothing but the mighty power of God can give them to believe this: such will then be the deceit of unrighteousness.

It is not for man to dispute with God; and it is not for a believer to question the word of God. All our wisdom is in exercising at once simple faith in the Scriptures, which has a sedative effect on the soul in presence of all questions, difficulties, and doubts of mind about these matters. If God has revealed the future, He has revealed it for us to know. So far is it from being true that the Christian has enough to do in occupying himself exclusively with his own blessings, on the contrary, you rob the Christian of part of his peculiar inheritance if you induce him to quit this vantage-ground. Not only has he faith’s possession now, and hope’s anticipation, but he stands here put on an eminence whence he can survey the future, looking right into eternity itself. What can be larger, what more blessed, than the place of a Christian? Oh, how little we enter into, and know, and enjoy our proper blessing in Christ! The Apocalyptic saints will have not this, but a prophetic testimony from the Spirit of Jesus.

There is no need for me to say more now on this subject. Let me simply recall your attention to the closing words, as proving more fully what has been already asserted — that the Holy Ghost, after the prophecy terminates, is shown to us at the close in unison with the hope of the Bride, which means the Church of God, and nothing else. The attempt to apply the Bride in the Revelation to Jerusalem seems to me a delusion. “The Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come.”

Here we have clearly the Spirit guiding the Church, viewed in her own bridal anticipation of Jesus. The place where it occurs makes the call all the more striking; because, after having gone through the whole course of God's dealings with man up to the very end, after even the final judgment before the great white throne, after fully describing the new heavens and the new earth, it might have detracted somewhat from the Christian's own proper joy to have been so much occupied with prophecy. Indeed, such study always depresses, where there is not a counterpoise of heavenly hope. I am persuaded prophecy, when alone, tends to produce an earthly effect on the Christian's soul, and leads one to fritter away the spiritual energy which is intended for Christ and the Church, and for souls in their need and danger, if the mind be let go after merely detailed objects of earthly judgment and curious knowledge. Of course, this is positively injurious for the saint of God, just in proportion to the measure of its exclusion of Christ and heavenly things.

Mark how the Holy Ghost has here provided against this peril in relation to the Church. We may go through all these prophetic visions which John wrote for us, and we may see in them a complete picture of the future, which unites the scattered lights of the rest of Scripture into a focus in the Apocalypse. After it is all done, the main thing that He sets Himself to do is, as it were, to establish us in looking completely out of the earthly scenes for our own proper object — Christ. And this seems to me all the more impressive if not surprising, because it is in a book so eminently prophetical. This final call, however, at once lifts US out of the lower region of prophecy into that which suits the renewed

heart in its truest affections for its right and heavenly attraction — Christ on high and coming again.

The Lord give us to enjoy with an ever deepening relish the marvellous light which God's word affords us as to the Holy Spirit who deigns to be in us (though solely for Christ's sake), and this because of His estimate both of Christ Himself and of that redemption which is our immovable foundation before God. May we not merely learn more about the Spirit, but, guided of Him, have our hearts strengthened, enjoying by Him in Christ our Lord all that God has been pleased to reveal to us in His precious word.

1 "We, apostles and Jews, that had this privilege first to trust in Christ." (T. Goodwin, in loc.) "'In whom you also,' you Ephesians you Gentiles — 'you also.'" Here is A WORK OF THE HOLY GHOST DISTINCT FROM FAITH: 'after you believed, you were sealed'. The capitals here are Dr. G.'s, who repeatedly insists on their distinctness, and controverts Piscator and Calvin, who held the common confusion He draws truly from πιστεύσαντες, "after that ye believed," that the faith was not contemporaneous with but antecedent to the sealing of the Spirit. So Ellicott. Alford is not clear.

Appendix

Having freely alluded to the doctrine of the inward light held by the Friends as derogatory to the revealed truth of the Holy Ghost, I am almost bound to add briefly some of the grounds on which a severe censure has been passed on this their fundamental peculiarity. It will be evident to the intelligent reader of G. Fox, W. Penn, I. Pennington, Sewel, and other so-called Quakers, that they call the same principle right reason, grace, the Spirit, the word of God, Christ within, and God in us. Confounding all these and more with that conscience, or knowledge of good and evil, which is the universal property of man since the fall, they thus extend to all, without exception, what Scripture says of Christians only. Mosheim's account is just and calm; and I shall quote no more than is incontrovertible. He had remarked that, though apparently novel, Quakerism was really but a modification of the mysticism of the second century, which had never died out of Christendom, fragments of which were floating about in books, tracts, and men's conversation when Fox wandered about moodily, laying claim to divine inspiration. What he expressed confusedly was systematized by his successors, especially Penn, Barclay, Keith and Fisher. "Their chief dogma then, on which depend all the rest, is that famous and very ancient burden of the mystics, that there lies hid in the minds of all men a certain part of reason and the divine nature, a spark of that wisdom which is in God Himself. Since this is overwhelmed with the weight of the body and the darkness of the flesh which surrounds us, whoever desires happiness and eternal salvation must, by retiring from external things

into self, by contemplation and by enfeebling the sensual force, draw it out, kindle, and inflame it. He who does so will feel an admirable light to dawn on him, and a heavenly voice to burst forth from the inmost recesses of his mind, — a conductor into all divine truth, and the surest pledge of our union with the Supreme Being. This treasure, natural to the human race, they call by various names, most frequently ‘divine light,’ sometimes a ‘ray of eternal wisdom,’ at others ‘the heavenly Sophia,’ the dress of whom (married to a mortal) some of these writers set forth magniloquently. The terms more familiar to us are ‘the internal word’ and ‘Christ within;’ for since they hold with the ancient mystics and Origen that Christ is the very reason and wisdom of God, and they will have all men to be endowed with a portion of the divine wisdom, they necessarily conclude that Christ or the word of God is, dwells, and speaks in all men.1 “All their singular and marvellous views flow from this parent principle. For since Christ is in all mankind, it follows, — (1.) That all religion consists in calling off the mind from outward objects, in weakening the power of the senses, in a complete introversion, and the most attentive reception of all that Christ, in the heart or the inner life, commands and dictates. — (2.) That the external word, that is, Holy Scripture, neither determines nor leads man to salvation; for letters and words, being void of life, have no adequate power to enlighten and unite man’s mind to God. The only advantage of reading Scripture is in rousing and stimulating the mind to hear the inner word, and to attend the school of Christ, who teaches within. In other words, they regard the Bible as a dumb master, which by signs points out and discovers that living master who dwells in the mind. — (3.) That those destitute of the

written word, as Polytheists, Jews, Mahometans, savage tribes, want, it is true, a certain small help toward attaining salvation, but not the way and doctrine of salvation; for if they attend to their inner monitor, who is never silent when the man is silent, they will learn abundantly from him all that is needful to be known and done. — (4.) That the kingdom of Jesus Christ is of vast extent, and embraces the entire human race; for all carry Christ within them, and thereby, though utterly barbarous and in total ignorance of Christianity, they may become wise and happy both here and hereafter. Those who live virtuously, and restrain their lusts and passions, whether Jews, Mahometans, or Polytheists, shall be united to God, both here and eternally, by Christ that lies hidden within," etc. (Mosheimii Institt. E. E. Saec. xvii sect. ii. pars ii. c. iv. § vii. viii.)

Take the following extracts from early Friends.

Fox:

"And as I was walking by the steeple-house aide, in the town of Mansfield, the Lord said unto me, That which people do trample upon must be thy food. And as the Lord spake, he opened it to me, how that people and professors did trample upon the life, even the life of Christ was trampled upon; and they fed upon words, and fed one another with words; but trampled upon the life; and trampled under foot the blood of the Son of God (which blood was my life); and they lived in their airy notions, talking of him. It seemed strange to me at the first, that I should feed on that which the high professors trampled upon; but the Lord opened it to me clearly by his eternal Spirit and power.

“Then came people from far and near to see me; and I was fearful of being drawn out by them; yet I was made to speak and open things to them. There was one Brown, who had great prophecies and sights upon his death-bed of me. And he spake openly of what I should be made instrumental by the Lord to bring forth. And of others he spake that they should come to nothing: which was fulfilled in some that were something in shew. And when this man was buried, a great work of the Lord fell upon me, to the admiration of many who thought I had been dead. And many came to see me for about fourteen days’ time; for I was very much altered in countenance and person, as if my body had been new-moulded or changed. And while I was in that condition I had a sense of discerning given me by the Lord, through which I saw plainly that when many people talked of God and of Christ, etc., the serpent spake in them. But this was hard to be borne. Yet the work of the Lord went on in some, and my sorrows and troubles began to wear off, and tears of joy dropped from me, so that I could have wept night and day with tears of joy to the Lord in humility and brokenness of heart. And I saw into that which was without end, and things which cannot be uttered, and of the greatness and infiniteness of the love of God, which cannot be express by words. For I had been brought through the very ocean of darkness and death, and through the power and over the power of Satan, by the eternal, glorious power of Christ; even through that darkness was I brought which covered over all the world, and which chained down all, and shut up all in the death. And the same eternal power of God, which brought me through these things, was that which afterwards shook the nations, priests, professors, and people. Then could I say I had been in spiritual Babylon,

Sodom, Egypt, and the grave; but by the eternal power of God I was come out of it, and was brought over it, and the power of it, into the power of Christ. And I saw the harvest white, and the seed of God lying thick in the ground as ever did wheat, that was sown outwardly; and none to gather it And for this I mourned with tears. And a report went abroad of me, that I was a young man that had a discerning spirit. Whereupon many came to me from far and near — professors, priests, and people; and the Lord's power brake forth. And I had great openings and prophecies, and spake unto them of the things of God....

"And they were discoursing of the blood of Christ. And as they were discoursing of it, I saw through the immediate opening of the invisible Spirit, the blood of Christ. And I cried out among them, and said, 'Do ye not see the blood of Christ? See it in your hearts, to sprinkle your hearts and consciences from dead works to serve the living God. For I saw it, the blood of the New Covenant, how it came into the heart.' This startled the professor, who would have the blood only without them, and not in them.....

"Now was I come up in Spirit through the flaming sword into the paradise of God. All things were new; and all the creation gave another smell unto me than before, beyond what words can utter. I knew nothing but pureness, and innocency, and righteousness, being renewed up into the image of God by Christ Jesus; so that, I say, I was come up to the state of Adam, which he was in before he fell. The creation was opened to me; and it was showed me how all things had their names given them according to their nature and virtue. And I was at a stand in my mind whether I should practise

physic for the good of mankind, seeing the nature and virtues of the creatures were so opened to me by the Lord. But I was immediately taken up in Spirit to see into another or more stedfast state than Adam's in innocency, even into a state in Christ Jesus that should never fall. And the Lord showed me that such as were faithful to him in the power and light of Christ should come up into that state in which Adam was before he fell: in which the admirable works of the creation, and the virtues thereof, may be known, through the openings of that divine word of wisdom and power by which they were made.....

"And on a certain time, as I was walking in the fields, the Lord said unto me, 'Thy name is written in the Lamb's book of life, which was before the foundation of the world.' And as the Lord spake it, I believed, and saw it in the new birth. Then, sometime after, the Lord commanded me to go abroad into the world And I was to turn them to the grace of God, and to the truth in the heart, which came by Jesus..... For I saw that Christ had died for all men, and was a propitiation for all; and had enlightened all men and women with his divine and saving light; and that none could be a true believer but who believed in it. I saw that the grace of God, which brings salvation, had appeared to all men, and that the manifestation of the Spirit of God was given to every man to profit withal These things I did not see by the help of man, nor by the letter (though they are written in the letter); but I saw them in the light of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by his immediate Spirit and power, as did the holy men of God, by whom the holy Scriptures were written. Yet I had no slight esteem of the holy Scriptures; but they were very precious to me. For I was

in that Spirit by which they were given forth; and what the Lord opened in me, I afterwards found was acceptable to them.....

“Therefore I exhorted the people to come off from all these things, and directed them to the Spirit and grace of God in themselves, and to the light of Jesus in their own hearts, that they might come to know Christ, their free Teacher, to bring them salvation, and to open the Scriptures to them.”

“Whosoever witnesseth Christ within, they witness the end of imputation, they witness the thing itself, and they possess their sanctification, and such come to know faith and love. And such as may have all the Scriptures, and preach of justification and sanctification without them, and not within them, be as the Jews, be as the witches and reprobates.”

Penn:

“The same Christ, Word-God, who has lighted all men, is by sin grieved and burdened, and bears the iniquities of such as so sin and reject his benefits. But as any hear his knocks, and let him into their hearts, he first wounds, and then heals; afterwards he atones, mediates, and reinstates man in the holy image he has fallen from by sin.” Again: “All the disadvantages the Protestant is under in this is that of his greater modesty, and that he submits his belief to be tried, while the other refuses under the pretence of unaccountable infallibility. To that authority reason demurs; right reason, I mean; the reason of the first nine verses of the first of St. John; for so Tertullian, and some other ancient as well as modern critics, give us the word Logos; and the divine reason is, one and all, the lamp of God which lights our candle,

and enlightens our darkness, and is the measure and test of our knowledge."

"I have chosen to speak in the language of the Scripture, which is that of the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of truth and wisdom, that wanted no art or direction of man to speak by, and express itself fitly to, man's understanding. But yet that blessed principle, the Eternal Word, I begun with to you, and which is that light, spirit, grace, and truth, I have exhorted you to in all its holy appearances or manifestations in yourselves, by which all things were at fist made, and man enlightened to salvation, is Pythagoras's great light and salt of ages;

Anaxagoras's divine mind;

Socrates's good spirit;

Timaeus's unbegotten principle and author of all light;

Hieron's God in man;

Plato's eternal, ineffable, and perfect principle of truth;

Zeno's Maker and Father of all; and

Plotin's root of the soul: who as they thus styled the Eternal Word; so for the appearance of it in man they wanted not very significant words:

'A domestic God or God within,' say Hieron, Pythagoras, Epictetus, and Seneca.

'Genius, angel, or guide,' say Socrates and Timaeus.

'The light and Spirit of God,' says Plato.

'The divine principle in man,' says Plotin.

'The divine power and reason, the infallible, immortal Law in the minds of men,' says Philo; and 'The law and

living rule of the mind, the interior guide of the soul, and everlasting foundation of the soul,' says Plutarch."

"The condemnation or justification of persons is not from the imputation of another's righteousness, but the actual performance and keeping of God's righteous statutes or commandments; otherwise God should forget to be equal. Therefore, how wickedly unequal are those who, not from Scripture evidences, but their own dark conjectures and interpretations of obscure passages, would frame a doctrine so manifestly inconsistent with God's most pure and equal nature, making him to condemn the righteous to death, and justify the wicked to life from the imputation of another's righteousness — a most unequal way indeed!"

"The way to justification and sonship is through the obedience of the Spirit's leadings; that is, manifesting the holy fruits thereof by an innocent life and conversation."

"The Trinity of distinct and separate Persons in the unity of essence may be refuted from Scripture, and also from right reason. "

"If each Person be God, and that God subsists in three Persons, then in each Person there are three Persons or Gods, and from three they will increase to nine, and so on ad infinitum."

"The vulgar doctrine of satisfaction, being dependent on the second Person of the Trinity, is refuted from Scripture and right reason."

"The same light and life which afterwards clothed itself with that outward body."

“Though we believe that the eternal power, light, and life, which inhabited that holy Person who was born at Bethlehem was and is chiefly and eminently the Saviour, yet we reverently confess the holy manhood was instrumentally a Saviour, as prepared and chosen for the work that Christ, the Word-God, had then to do in it.”

Barclay:

“it will not from thence follow that these divine revelations are to be subjected to the examination either of the outward testimony of Scripture, or of the human or natural reason of man, as to a more noble and certain rule and touchstone. “

“We may not call them [the Scriptures] the principal fountain of all truth and knowledge, nor yet the first adequate rule of faith and manners, because the principal fountain of truth must be the truth itself; i.e., that whose authority and certainty depends not upon another.” Again: “God hath committed and gives unto every man a measure of light of his own Son — a measure of grace, or a measure of the Spirit. This, as it is received, and not resisted, works the salvation of all, even of those who are ignorant of the death and sufferings of Christ.”

“Though we affirm that Christ dwells in us, yet not immediately, but mediately, as he is in that seed which is in us; whereas he, to wit, the Eternal Word, which was with God and was God, dwelt immediately in that holy man.”

“From this large description [John 6] of the origin, nature, and effects of this body, flesh, and blood of Christ, it is apparent that it is spiritual, and to be

understood of a spiritual body, and not of that body or temple of Jesus Christ which was born of the Virgin Mary, and in which he walked, lived, and suffered in the land of Judea, because that it is said that it came down from heaven, yea, that it is he that came down from heaven.... That this body and spiritual flesh and blood of Christ is to be understood of that divine and heavenly seed, before spoken of by us, appears both by the nature and the fruits of it.... So, then, as there was the outward visible body and temple of Jesus Christ, which took its origin from the Virgin Mary, so there is also the spiritual body of Christ, by and through which he that was the Word in the beginning with God, and was and is God, did reveal himself to the sons of men, in all ages, and whereby men in all ages come to be made partakers of eternal life, and to have communion and fellowship with God and Christ For as Jesus Christ, in obedience to the will of the [father, did by the eternal Spirit offer up that body for a propitiation for the remission of sins, and finished his testimony upon earth thereby, is a most perfect example of patience, resignation, and holiness, that all might be made partakers of the fruit of that sacrifice: so hath he likewise poured forth into the hearts of all men a measure of that divine light and seed wherewith he is clothed; that thereby, reaching unto the consciences of all, he may raise them up out of death and darkness by his life and light; and they thereby may be made partakers of his body, and there-through come to have fellowship with the Father and with the Son."

Pennington:

"How came the Scriptures to declare of Christ? Was it not from the Spirit? And is not that same light still with

the Spirit, by which the Scriptures were given forth? And can he not give it forth without the letter, where he seeth need of it, and vouchsafeth so to do? Why may not men now by the light of the Spirit come to know that Christ is come, dead, and risen, as well as these things were known and believed before the Scriptures were written'"

"But we believe the Spirit to be a touchstone beyond the Scriptures, and to be that which giveth ability to try and discern, not only words, but spirits."

"The light is near all mankind, to discover to them and help them against the darkness. The knowledge of those, and belief of those who own the light, is owned by God's Spirit (in this our day) for the true believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, and for that knowledge which is life eternal; and the knowing and believing on him, as men account it, according to their apprehension of the letter, without this, is reckoned with God for ignorance and unbelief."

Answering the question, "Whether the writings of any now be of equal weight with the Scriptures?" he says, "Yea, the immediate word of the Lord, spoken and declared this day by any man to Whom it pleaseth the Lord to commit the same, is of no less authority, nor more to be slighted now, than it was in his servants in the days past, by whom the Scriptures were given forth."

"I will grant a great deal to the letter and ministration outward, but I must attribute more to the inward, or else God's light, and the holy experience he hath given me, will condemn me." Again, "The Holy Spirit of God and the Scriptures are not always joined together; for some

in the dark corners of the earth may be visited by the Spirit, and receive the Spirit, who never heard of the Scriptures."

"The Scriptures give testimony concerning the one thing necessary to salvation; but the thing itself, Christ himself, the seed itself, is not contained in the Scriptures, but revealed in the shinings of the true light, and so received or rejected inwardly in the heart."2 1 But the modern Quakers, as appears from the latest writings of Martin and others, do not know the real sentiment of their ancestors, and perpetually confound that innate light with the Holy Spirit's light operating in the minds of the pious.

2 For most of the quotations from Pennington, I am indebted to "The British Friend" of November, 1867; and he who extracts them subscribes himself "a believer in our first principles," and commends strongly these and other such statements of an author who, he allows, was "by no means the most extreme in his views, or the most trenchant in his expressions."