Miscellaneous Writings, Volume 3

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Part 1

1 Thessalonians 1 presents a very striking and beautiful picture of what we may truly call genuine conversion. We propose to study the picture in company with the reader. If we are not much mistaken, we shall find the study at once interesting and profitable. It will furnish an answer, distinct and clear, to the question which stands at the head of this article, namely, What is conversion?

Nor is this by any means a small matter. It is well, in days like these, to have a divine answer to such a question. We hear a good deal now-a-days about cases of conversion; and we would heartily bless God for every soul truly converted to Him.

We need hardly say we believe in the absolute, the indispensable, the universal necessity of divine conversion. Let a man be what he may; be he Jew or Greek, barbarian, Scythian, bond or free, Protestant or Roman Catholic; in short, whatever be his nationality, his ecclesiastical position, or his theological creed, he must be converted else he is on the broad and direct road to an everlasting hell.

There is no one born a Christian, in the true sense of that word. Neither can anyone be educated into Christianity. It is a fatal mistake, a deadly delusion, a deceit of the arch-enemy of souls, for anyone to think

that he can be a Christian either by birth or education, or that he can be made a Christian by water baptism, or by any religious ceremony whatsoever. A man becomes a Christian only by being divinely converted. We would earnestly press on the attention of all whom it may concern, the urgent and absolute necessity in every case of true conversion to God.

This cannot be overlooked. It is the height of folly for anyone to attempt to ignore or to make light of it. For an immortal being — one who has a boundless eternity stretching away before him — to neglect the solemn question of his conversion, is the wildest fatuity of which anyone can possibly be guilty. In comparison with this most weighty subject, all other things dwindle into utter insignificance. The various objects that engage the thoughts and absorb the energies of men and women in the busy scene around us, are but as the small dust of the balance in comparison with this one grand, momentous question of the soul's conversion to God. All the speculations of commercial life, all the schemes of money-making, the absorbing question of profitable investment, all the pursuits of the pleasure hunter — the theatre the concert, the ball-room, the billiard-room, the card-table, the dice-box, the race-course, the hunting-ground, the drinking saloon — all the numberless and nameless things that the poor unsatisfied heart longs after, and grasps at — all are but as the vapour of the morning, the foam on the water, the smoke from the chimney-top, the withered leaf of autumn — all vanish away, and leave an aching void behind. The heart remains unsatisfied, the soul unsaved, because unconverted.

And what then? Tremendous question! What remains at the end of all this scene of commercial excitement, political strife and ambition, money-making and pleasure hunting? Why, then the man has to face death! "It is appointed unto men once to die." There is no getting over this. There is no discharge in this war. All the wealth of the universe could not purchase one moment's respite at the hand of the ruthless foe. All the medical skill which earth affords, all the fond solicitude of affectionate relatives and friends, all their tears, all their sighs, all their entreaties cannot stave off the dreaded moment, or cause the king of terrors to sheathe his terrible sword. Death cannot be disposed of by any art of man. The moment must come when the link is to be snapped which connects the heart with all the fair and fascinating scenes of human life. Fondly loved friends, charming pursuits, coveted objects, all must be given up. A thousand worlds could not avert the stroke. Death must be looked at straight in the face. It is an awful mystery — a tremendous fact — a stern reality. It stands full in front of every unconverted man, woman, and child beneath the canopy of Heaven; and it is merely a question of time — hours, days, months, or years — when the boundary line must be crossed which separates time, with all its empty, vain, shadowy pursuits, from eternity with all its stupendous realities.

And what then? Let Scripture answer. Nothing else can. Men would fain reply according to their own vain notions. They would have us believe that after death comes annihilation. "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." Empty conceit! Vain delusion! Foolish dream of the human imagination blinded by the god of this world! How could an immortal soul be annihilated? Man, in the

garden or Eden, became the possessor of a never-dying spirit. "The Lord God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul" — not a dying soul. The soul must live forever. Converted or unconverted, it has eternity before it. Oh, the overpowering weight of this consideration to every thoughtful spirit! No human mind can grasp its immensity. It is beyond our comprehension, but not beyond our belief.

Let us harken to the voice of God. What does Scripture teach? One line of holy Scripture is quite sufficient to sweep away ten thousand arguments and theories of the human mind. Does death annihilate? Nay! "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgement."

Mark these words, "After this the judgement." And this applies only to those who die in their sins, only to unbelievers. For the Christian, judgement is passed forever, as Scripture teaches in manifold places. It is important to note this, because men tell us that, inasmuch as there is eternal life only in Christ, therefore all who are out of Christ shall be annihilated.

Not so says the Word of God. There is judgement after death. And what will be the issue of the judgement? Again Scripture speaks in language as clear as it is solemn. "And I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened; and another book, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their

works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and Hades delivered up the dead which were in them; and they were judged every man according to their works.... This is the second death" — the lake of fire. "And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20).

All this is as plain as words can make it. There is not the slightest ground for demur or difficulty. For all whose names are in the book of life there is no judgement at all. Those whose names are not in that book shall be judged according to their works. And what then? Annihilation? Nay; but "the lake of fire;" and that forever and forever.

How overwhelming is the thought of this! An unconverted person, whoever and whatever he is, has death, judgement, and the lake of fire before him, and every throb of his pulse brings him nearer and nearer to those awful realities. It is not more sure that the sun shall rise, at a certain moment, to-morrow morning, than that the reader must, ere long, pass into eternity; and if his name is not in the book of life — if he is not converted — if he is not in Christ, he will assuredly be judged according to his works, and the certain issue of that judgement will be the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, and that through the endless ages of a dark and gloomy eternity. Oh! the terrible monotony of hell.

The reader may perhaps marvel at our dwelling at such length on this dreadful theme. He may feel disposed to ask, "Will this convert people?" If it does not convert them, it may lead them to see their need of conversion. It may lead them to see their imminent danger. It may

induce them to flee from the wrath to come. Why did the blessed apostle reason with Felix on the subject of "judgement to come"? Surely that he might persuade him to turn from his evil ways and live. Why did our blessed Lord Himself so constantly press upon His hearers the solemn reality of eternity? Why did He so often speak of the deathless worm and the unquenchable fire? Surely it was for the purpose of rousing them to a sense of their danger, that they might flee for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before them.

Are we wiser than He? Are we more tender? Have we found out some better mode of converting people? Are we to be afraid of pressing upon our readers the same solemn theme which our Lord so pressed upon the men of His time? Are we to shrink from offending polite ears by the plain declaration that all who die unconverted must inevitably stand before the great white throne, and pass into the lake of fire? God forbid! It must not be. We solemnly call upon the unconverted reader to give his undivided attention to the all-important question of his soul's salvation. Let nothing induce him to neglect it. Let neither cares, pleasures, nor duties so occupy him as to hide from his view the magnitude and deep seriousness of this matter. "What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

Oh! reader, if thou art unsaved, unconverted, let us earnestly entreat thee to ponder these things, and rouse thee to a sense of thy need of being savingly converted to God. This is the only way of entering His kingdom. So our Lord Christ distinctly tells us; and we trust you know this at least, that not one jot or tittle of His holy sayings

can ever pass away. Heaven and earth shall pass away; but His Word can never pass away. All the power of earth and hell, men and devils, cannot make void the words of our Lord Jesus Christ. Either of two things for thee — conversion here, or eternal damnation hereafter.

Thus it stands, if we are to be guided by the Word of God; and, in view of this, is it possible for us to be too earnest, too vehement, too importunate in urging upon every unconverted soul with whom we may come in contact, either with voice or pen, the indispensable necessity, this very moment, of fleeing from the wrath to come, fleeing to that blessed Saviour who died on the cross for our salvation; who stands with open arms to receive all who come; and who declares in His own sweet and precious grace, "Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out "?

Part 2

In our previous paper, we have sought to set forth the absolute need, in every case, of conversion. Scripture establishes this point in such a way as to leave no possible ground of doubt for anyone who bows to its holy authority. "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18: 3).

This applies, in all its moral force and deep solemnity, to every son and daughter of fallen Adam. There is not so much as a solitary exception, throughout the thousand millions that people this globe. Without conversion, there is — there can be — no entrance into the kingdom of God. Every unconverted soul is outside the kingdom of God. It matters not, in the smallest degree, who I am, or what I am; if I am unconverted, I am in "the kingdom

of darkness," under the power of Satan, in my sins, and on the way to hell.

I may be a person of blameless morals; of spotless reputation; a high professor of religion; a worker in the vineyard; a Sunday-school teacher; an office-bearer in some branch of the professing church; an ordained minister; a deacon, elder, pastor or bishop; a most charitable individual; a munificent donor to religious and benevolent institutions; looked up to, sought after, and reverenced by all because of my personal worth and moral influence. I may be all this and more; I may be, and I may have, all that it is possible for a human being to be or to have, and yet be unconverted, and hence outside the kingdom of God, and in the kingdom of Satan, in my guilt, and on the broad road that leads straight down to the lake that burns with fire and brimstone.

Such is the plain and obvious meaning and force of our Lord's words in Matt. 18: 3. There is no possibility of evading it. The words are as clear as a sunbeam. We cannot get over them. They bear down, with what we may truly call tremendous solemnity, upon every unconverted soul on the face of the earth. "Except ye be converted, ye cannot enter the kingdom of heaven." This applies, with equal force, to the degraded drunkard that rolls along the street, worse than a beast, and to the unconverted Good Templar or teetotaler who prides himself on his sobriety, and is perpetually boasting of the number of days, weeks, months, or years during which he has refrained from all intoxicating drink. They are both alike outside the kingdom of God; both in their sins; both on the way to eternal destruction.

True it is that the one has been converted from drunkenness to sobriety — a very great blessing indeed, in a moral and social point of view — but conversion from drunkenness to a temperance, society is not conversion to God; it is not turning from darkness to light, it is not entering the kingdom of God's dear Son. There is just this difference between the two, that the teetotaler may be building upon his temperance, pluming himself upon his morality, and thus deceiving himself into the vain notion that he is all right, whereas, in reality, he is not. The drunkard is palpably and unmistakably wrong. Everybody knows that no drunkard can inherit the kingdom of God; but neither can an unconverted teetotaler. Both are outside. Conversion to God is absolutely indispensable for the one as well as the other; and the same may be said of all classes, all grades, all shades, all castes and conditions of men under the sun. There is no difference as to this great question. It holds good as to all alike, be their outward character or social status what it may — "Except ye be converted, ye cannot enter the kingdom of heaven."

How important, then — yea, how momentous the question for each one, "Am I converted?" It is not possible for human language to set forth the magnitude and solemnity of this inquiry. For any one to think of going on, from day to day, and year to year, without a clear and thorough settlement of this most weighty question, can only be regarded as the most egregious folly of which a human being can be guilty. If a man were to leave his earthly affairs in an uncertain, unsettled condition, he would lay himself open to the charge of the grossest and most culpable neglect and carelessness. But what are the most urgent and weighty

temporal affairs when compared with the salvation of the soul? All the concerns of time are but as the chaff of the summer threshing-floor, when compared with the interests of the immortal soul — the grand realities of eternity.

Hence it is, in the very highest degree, irrational for any one to rest for a single hour without a clear and settled assurance that he is truly converted to God. A converted soul has crossed the boundary line that separates the saved from the unsaved — the children of light from the children of darkness — the Church of God from this present evil world. The converted soul has death and judgement behind him, and glory before. He can be as sure of Heaven as though he were already there; indeed as a man in Christ he belongs there already. He has a title without a blot, and a prospect without a cloud. He knows Christ as his Saviour and Lord; God as his Father and Friend; the Holy Ghost as his blessed Comforter, Guide, and Teacher; Heaven as his bright and happy home. Oh! the unspeakable blessedness of being converted. Who can utter it? "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them unto us [believers] by His Spirit; for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea the deep things of God" (1 Cor. 2: 9-10).

And now let us inquire what this conversion is, whereof we speak. Well, indeed, will it be for us to be divinely instructed as to this. An error here will prove disastrous in proportion to the interests at stake.

Many are the mistaken notions in reference to conversion. Indeed we might conclude, from the very

fact of the vast importance of the subject, that the great enemy of our souls and of the Christ of God would seek, in every possible way, to plunge us into error respecting it. If he cannot succeed in keeping people in utter carelessness as to the subject of conversion, he will endeavour to blind their eyes as to its true nature. If, for example, a person has been roused, by some means or other, to a sense of the utter vanity and unsatisfactoriness of worldly amusements, and the urgent necessity of a change of life, the arch-deceiver will seek to persuade such an one to become religious, to busy himself with ordinances, rites and ceremonies, to give up balls and parties, theatres and concerts, drinking, gambling, hunting and horse-racing; in a word, to give up all sorts of gaiety and amusement, and engage in what is called a religious life, to be diligent in attending the public ordinances of religion, to read the Bible, say prayers, and give alms, to contribute to the support of the great religious and benevolent institutions of the country.

Now, this is not conversion. A person may do all this, and yet be wholly unconverted. A religious devotee whose whole life is spent in vigils, fastings, prayers, self-mortifications and alms deeds, may be as thoroughly unconverted, as far from the kingdom of God as the thoughtless pleasure hunter, whose whole life is spent in the pursuit of objects as worthless as the withered leaf or the faded flower. The two characters, no doubt, differ widely — as widely perhaps, as any two could differ. But they are both unconverted, both outside the blessed circle of God's salvation, both in their sins. True, the one is engaged in "wicked worked and the other in "dead works;" they are both out of Christ; they are unsaved;

they are on the way to hopeless, endless misery. The one, just as surely as the other, if not savingly converted, will find his portion in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone.

Again, conversion is not a turning from one religious system to another. A man may turn from Judaism, Paganism, Mahometanism, or Popery, to Protestantism, and yet be wholly unconverted. No doubt, looked at from a social, moral, or intellectual standpoint, it is much better to be a Protestant than a Mahometan; but as regards our present thesis, they are both on one common platform, both unconverted. Of one, just as truly as the other, it can be said, unless he is converted, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God. Conversion is not joining a religious system, be that system ever so pure, ever so sound, ever so orthodox. A man may be a member of the most respectable religious body in Christendom, and yet be an unconverted, unsaved man, on his way to eternal perdition.

So also as to the theological creeds. A man may subscribe to any of the great standards of religious belief, the Thirty-nine Articles, the Westminister Confession, John Wesley's sermons, Fox and Barclay, or any other creed, and yet be wholly unconverted, dead in trespasses and sins, and on his way to that place where a single ray of hope can never break in upon the awful gloom of eternity.

Of what use, we may lawfully inquire, is a religious system or a theological creed to a man who has not a single spark of divine life? Systems and creeds cannot quicken, cannot save, cannot give eternal life. A man may work on in religious machinery like a horse in a

mill, going round and round, from one year's end to another, leaving off just where he began, in a dreary monotony of dead works. What is it all worth? what does it all come to? where does it all end? Death! Yes; and what then? Ah! that is the question Would to God the weight and seriousness of this question were more fully realized! But further, Christianity itself, in all its full-orbed light, may be embraced as a system of religious belief. A person may be intellectually delighted — almost entranced with the glorious doctrines of grace, a full, free gospel, salvation without works, justification by faith; in short, all that goes to make up our glorious New Testament Christianity. A person may profess to believe and delight in this; he may even become a powerful writer in defence of Christian doctrine, an earnest eloquent preacher of the gospel. All this may be true, and yet the man be wholly unconverted, dead in trespasses and sins, hardened, deceived and destroyed by his very familiarity with the precious truths of the gospel-truths that have never gone beyond the region of his understanding — never reached his conscience never touched his heart, never converted his soul.

This is about the most appalling case of all. nothing can be more awful, more terrible, than the case of a man professing to believe and delight in, yea, actually preaching the gospel of God, and teaching all the grand characteristic truths of Christianity, and yet wholly unconverted, unsaved, and on his way to an eternity of ineffable misery — misery which must needs be intensified to the very highest degree, by the remembrance of the fact that he once professed to believe, and actually undertook to preach the most glorious tidings that ever fell on mortal ears.

O! reader, whoever thou art, do, we entreat of thee, give thy fixed attention to these things. Rest not, for one hour, until thou art assured of thy genuine, unmistakable conversion to God.

Part 3

Having thus far seen the absolute necessity, in every case, of conversion, and having, in some measure, sought to point out what conversion is not, we have now to inquire what it is. And here we must keep close to the veritable teaching of holy Scripture. We can accept nothing less, nothing different.

It is greatly to be feared that very much of what passes, now-a-days, for conversion is not conversion at all. Many so-called cases of conversion are published and talked of, which cannot stand the test of the Word of God. Many profess to be converted, and are accredited as such, who prove to be merely stony-ground hearers. There is no depth of spiritual work in the heart, no real action of the truth of God on the conscience, no thorough breaking with the world. It may be the feelings are wrought upon by human influence, and certain evangelical sentiments take possession of the mind; but self is not judged; there is a clinging to earth and nature; a lack of that deep-toned earnestness and genuine reality which so remarkably characterise the conversions recorded in the New Testament, and for which we may always look where the work of conversion is divine.

We do not here attempt to account for all these superficial cases; we merely refer to them in order that all who are engaged in the blessed work of evangelization may be led to consider the matter in the light of holy Scripture, and to see how far their own

mode of working may call for holy correction. It may be there is too much of the merely human element in our work. We do not leave the Spirit of God to act. We are deficient in faith, in the power and efficacy of the simple work of Christ itself. There may be too much effort to work on the feelings, too much of the emotional and the sensational. Perhaps, too, in our desire to reach results — a desire which may be right enough in itself — we are too ready to accredit and announce, as cases of conversion, many which, alas! are merely ephemeral.

All this demands our serious attention. It is of the very last possible importance that we allow the Spirit of God to work and to display — as He most assuredly will — the fruit of His work. All that He does is well done, and it will speak for itself in due time. There is no necessity for us to blaze around our cases of conversion. all that is divinely real will shine out to the praise of Him to whom all praise is due. and then the workman will have his own deep and holy joy. He will see the results of his work, and think of them in adoring homage and worship at his Masters feet — the only safe and happy place to think of them.

Will this lessen our earnestness? The very reverse; it will intensify our earnestness immensely. We shall be more earnest in pleading with God in secret, and in pleading with our fellows in public.

We shall feel more deeply the divine seriousness of the work, and our own utter insufficiency. We shall ever cherish the wholesome conviction that the work must be of God from first to last. This will keep us in our right place, that of self-emptied dependence upon God, who is the Doer of all the works that are done upon the earth.

We shall be more on our faces before the mercy-seat, both in the closet and in the assembly, in reference to the glorious work of conversion; and then, when the golden sheaves and mellow clusters appear, when genuine cases of conversion turn up — cases which speak for themselves, and carry their own credentials with them to all who are capable of judging — then verily shall our hearts be filled with praise to the God of all grace who has magnified the name of His Son Jesus Christ in the salvation of precious souls.

How much better is this than to have our poor hearts puffed up with pride and self-complacency by reckoning up our cases of conversion! How much better, safer and happier to be bowed in worship before the throne, than to have our names heralded to the ends of the earth as great preachers and wonderful evangelists! No comparison, in the judgement of a truly spiritual person. The dignity, reality, and seriousness of the work will be realized; the happiness, the moral security, and the real usefulness of the workman will be promoted; and the glory of God secured and maintained.

Let us see how all this is illustrated in 1 Thessalonians 1. "Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the assembly of the Thessalonians in God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ: grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers: remembering without ceasing your work of faith and labour of love, and patience of hope" — the grand elements of true Christianity — "in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father; knowing, brethren beloved of God, your election." How did he know it? By the clear and unquestionable evidence

afforded in their practical life — the only way in which the election of any one can be known. "For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake."

The blessed apostle was, in his daily life, the exponent of the gospel which he preached. He lived the gospel. He did not demand or exact aught of them. He was not burdensome to them. He preached unto them the precious gospel of God freely; and in order that he might do so, he wrought with labour and travail, night and day. He was as a loving, tender nurse, going in and out among them. There were with him no high-sounding words about himself, or his office, or his authority, or his gifts, or his preaching, or his wonderful doings in other places. He was the loving, lowly, unpretending, earnest, devoted workman, whose work spoke for itself, and whose whole life, his spirit, style, deportment, and habits, were in lovely harmony with his preaching.

How needful for all workmen to ponder these things! We may depend upon it that very much of the shallowness of our work is the fruit of the shallowness of the workman. Where is the power? Where is the demonstration of the Spirit? Where is the "much assurance"? Is there not a terrible lack of these things in our preaching? There may be a vast amount of fluent talking; a great deal of so-called cleverness; and much that may tickle the ear, act on the imagination, awaken a temporary interest, and minister to mere curiosity. But oh! where is the holy unction, the living earnestness, the profound seriousness? And then the living exponent in the daily life and habits — where is this? May the Lord revive His

work in the hearts of His workmen, and then we may look for more of the results of the work.

Do we mean to teach that the work of conversion depends upon the workman? Far away be the monstrous notion! The work depends wholly and absolutely on the power of the Holy Ghost, as the very chapter now lying open before us proves beyond all question. It must ever hold good, in every department and every stage of the work, that it is "not by might nor by power; but by My Spirit, saith the Lord."

But what kind of instrument does the Spirit ordinarily use? Is not this a weighty question for us workmen? What sort of vessels are "meet for the Master's use"? Empty vessels — clean vessels. Are we such? Are we emptied of ourselves? Are we cured of our deplorable self-occupation? Are we "clean"? Have we clean hands? Are our associations, our ways, our circumstances, clean? If not, how can the Master use us in His holy service? May we all have grace to weigh these questions in the divine presence! May the Lord stir us all up, and make us more and more vessels such as He can use for His glory!

We shall now proceed with our quotation. The whole passage is full of power. The character of the workman on the one hand, and of the work on the other, demands our most serious attention.

"And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost: so that ye were ensamples [or models] to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. For from you sounded out the word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to Godward is

spread abroad; so that we need not to speak anything, for they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you."

This was real work. It carried its own credentials with it. There was nothing vague or unsatisfactory about it — no occasion for any reserve in forming or expressing a judgement respecting it. It was clear, distinct, and unmistakable. It bore the stamp of the Master's hand, and carried conviction to every mind capable of weighing the evidence. The work of conversion was wrought, and the fruits of conversion followed in delightful profusion. The testimony went forth far and wide, so that the workman had no need to speak about his work. There was no occasion for him to reckon up and publish the number of conversions at Thessalonica. All was divinely real. It was a thorough work of God's Spirit as to which there could be no possible mistake, and about which it was superfluous to speak.

The apostle had simply preached the Word in the power of the Holy Ghost, in much assurance. There was nothing vague, nothing doubtful about his testimony. He preached as one who fully believed and thoroughly entered into what he was preaching about. It was not the mere fluent utterance of certain known and acknowledged truths — not the cut and dry statement of certain barren dogmas. No; it was the living outpouring of the glorious gospel of God, coming from a heart that felt profoundly every utterance, and falling upon hearts prepared by God's Spirit for its reception.

Such was the work at Thessalonica — a blessed divine work — all real, the genuine fruit of God's Spirit. It was no mere religious excitement, nothing sensational, no

high pressure, no attempt to "get up a revival." All was beautifully calm. The workman, as we are told in Acts 17, "came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews; and as his manner was, he went in unto them, and three Sabbath days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures" — Precious, powerful reasoning! would to God we had more of it in our midst! — "opening and alleging that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead, and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ."

How simple! Preaching Jesus out of the Scriptures! Yes, here lay the grand secret of Paul's preaching. He preached a living Person, in living power, on the authority of a living Word, and this preaching was received in living faith, and brought forth living fruit, in the lives of the converts. This is the preaching that God has ordained and uses. It is not sermonising, not religious talk, but the preaching of Christ by the Holy Ghost speaking through men who are themselves under the power of what they are preaching. God grant us more of this!

Part 4

The last two verses of our chapter (1 Thess. 1) demand our very special attention. They furnish a remarkable statement of the real nature of conversion. They show, very distinctly, the depth, clearness, fullness, and reality of the work of God's Spirit in those Thessalonian converts. There was no mistaking it. It carried its own credentials with it. It was no uncertain work. It did not call for any careful examination ere it could be accredited. It was a manifest, unmistakable work of God, the fruits of which were apparent to all. "They

themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God; and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, Jesus, who delivered us from the wrath to come" (vers. 9-10).

Here, then, we have a divine definition of conversion — brief, but comprehensive. It is a turning from and a turning to. They turned from idols. There was a complete break with the past, a turning of the back, once and forever, on their former life and habits; a thorough surrender of all those objects that had ruled their hearts and commanded their energies.

Those dear Thessalonians were led to judge, in the light of divine truth, their whole previous course, and not only to judge it, but to abandon it unreservedly. It was no half-and-half work. There was nothing vague or equivocal about it. It was a marked epoch in their history — a grand turning-point in their moral and practical career. It was not a mere change of opinion, or the reception of a new set of principles, a certain alteration in their intellectual views. It was far more than any or all of these things. It was the solemn discovery that their whole past career had been one great, dark, monstrous lie. It was the real heart conviction of this. Divine light had broken in upon their souls, and in the power of that light they judged themselves and the entire of their previous history. There was an out-and-out surrender of that world which had hitherto ruled their hearts' affections; not a shred of it was to be spared.

And what, we may ask, produced this marvellous change? Simply the Word of God brought home to their

souls in the mighty power of the Holy Ghost. We have referred to the inspired account of the apostle's visit to Thessalonica. We are told that "he reasoned with them out of the Scriptures." He sought to bring their souls into direct contact with the living and eternal Word of God. There was no effort to act on their feelings and imagination. All this the blessed workman judged to be utterly valueless. He had no confidence whatever in it. His confidence was in the Word and Spirit of God. He assured the Thessalonians of this very thing in the most touching manner, in 1 Thess. 2: "For this cause," he says, "thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe."

This is what we may call a vital and cardinal point. The Word of God, and that alone, in the mighty hand of the Holy Ghost, produced these grand results in the case of the Thessalonians, which filled the heart of the beloved apostle with unfeigned thanksgiving to God. He rejoiced that they were not linked on to him, but to the living God Himself, by means of His Word. This is an imperishable link. It is as enduring as the Word which forms it. The word of man is as perishable as himself; but the Word of the Lord endureth forever. The apostle, as a true workman, understood and felt all this, and hence his holy jealousy, in all his ministry, lest the souls to whom he preached should, in any way, lean upon him instead of on the One whose messenger and minister he was.

Hear what he says to the Corinthians: "And I, brethren, when I came unto you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony

of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, saving Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power; that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" (1 Cor. 2: 1-5).

Here we have true ministry — "the testimony of God," and "the demonstration of the Spirit" — the Word and the Holy Ghost. Nothing else is of any value. All mere human influence, human power, and the results produced by human wisdom or energy, are perfectly worthless — yea, positively mischievous. The workman is puffed up by the apparent results of his work paraded and talked of, and the poor souls that are acted upon by this false influence are deceived, and led into an utterly false position and false profession. In a word, the whole thing is disastrous in the extreme.

Not so when the Word of God, in its mighty moral power, and the energy of the Holy Ghost, are brought to bear on the heart and conscience. Then it is we see divine results, as in the case of the Thessalonians. Then indeed it is made apparent, beyond all question, who is the workman. It is not Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, but God Himself, whose work accredits itself, and shall stand forever; all homage to His holy name! The apostle had no need to reckon up and publish the results of his work at Thessalonica, or rather God's work by his means. It spoke for itself. It was genuine. It bore, with unmistakable distinctness, the stamp of God upon it, and this was quite enough for Paul; and it is quite enough for every true-hearted, self-emptied workman. Paul

preached the Word, and that Word was brought home, in the quickening energy of the Holy Ghost, to the hearts of the Thessalonians. It fell into good ground, took root, and brought fruit in abundance.

And let us mark the fruit. "Ye turned from idols." Here we have, in one word, the whole life of every unconverted man, woman, or child on the face of the earth. It is all wrapped up and presented to our view in the one expression, "idols." It is not by any means necessary to bow down to a stock or a stone in order to be an idolater. Whatever commands the heart is an idol; the yielding of the heart to that thing is idolatry, and the one who so yields it is an idolater. Such is the plain, solemn truth in this matter, however unpalatable it may be to the proud human heart. Take that one great, crying, universal sin of "covetousness." What does the inspired apostle call it? He calls it "idolatry." How many hearts are commanded by money! How many worshipers bow down before the idol of gold! What is covetousness? Either a desire to get more, or the love of what we have. We have both forms in the New Testament. The Greek has a word to represent both. But whether it be the desire to grasp, or the desire to hoard, in either case it is idolatry.

And yet the two things may be very unlike in their outward development. The former, that is, the desire to get more, may often be found in connection with a readiness to spend; the latter, on the contrary, is generally linked with an intense spirit of hoarding. There, for example, is a man of great business capacity — a thorough commercial genius — in whose hand everything seems to prosper. He has a real zest for business, an unquenchable thirst for making money. His

one object is to get more, to add thousand to thousand, to strengthen his commercial foundation, and enlarge his sphere. He lives, thrives, and revels in the atmosphere of commerce.

He started on his career with a few pence in his pocket, and he has risen to the proud position of a merchant prince. He is not a miser. He is as ready to scatter as to obtain. He fares sumptuously, entertains with a splendid hospitality, gives munificently to manifold public objects. He is looked up to and respected by all classes of society.

But he loves to get more. He is a covetous man — an idolater. True, he despises the poor miser who spends his nights over his money-bags, "holding strange communion with his gold"; delighting his heart and feasting his eyes with the very sight of the fascinating dust, refusing himself and his family the common necessaries of life; going about in rags and wretchedness, rather than spend a penny of the precious hoard; who loves money, not for what it can get or give, but simply for its own sake; who loves to accumulate, not that he may spend, but that he may hoard; whose one ruling desire is to die worth so much wretched dust — strange, contemptible desire!

Now these two are apparently very different, but they meet in one point; they stand on one common platform; they are both covetous, and they are both idolaters. [The two Greek words to which we have alluded in the text: are, (pleonexia — the desire to get more), and (philarguria — the love of money). Now it is the former that occurs in Col. 3: 5 — "Covetousness, which is idolatry"; and there it stands in the terrible category

with some of the very vilest sins that stain the pages of human history.] This may sound harsh and severe, but it is the truth of God, and we must bow down before its holy authority. True it is that nothing is apparently more difficult to bring home to the conscience than the sin of covetousness — that very sin which the Holy Ghost declares to be idolatry. Thousands might see it in the case of the poor degraded miser, who nevertheless would be shocked by its application to a merchant prince.

It is one thing to see it in others, and quite another to judge it in ourselves. The fact is, that nothing but the light of the Word of God shining in upon the soul, and penetrating every chamber of our moral being, can enable us to detect the hateful sin of covetousness. The pursuit of gain — the desire to have more — the spirit of commerce — the ability to make money — the desire to get on — all this is so "highly esteemed amongst men," that very few, comparatively, are prepared to see that it is positively "an abomination in the sight of God." The natural heart is formed by the thoughts of men. It loves, adores and worships the objects that it finds in this world; and each heart has its own idol. One worships gold, another worships pleasure, another worships power. Every unconverted man is an idolater; and even converted men are not beyond the reach of idolatrous influences, as is evident from the warning note raised by the venerable apostle, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5: 21).

Reader, will you permit us to put a plain, pointed question to you, ere we proceed further? Are you converted? Do you profess to be so? Do you take the ground of being a Christian? If so, have you turned from

idols? Have you really broken with the world, and with your former self? Has the living Word of God entered your heart, and led you to judge the whole of your past life, whether it has been a life of gayety and thoughtless folly, a life of busy money-making, a life of abominable vice and wickedness, or a life of mere religious routine — Christless, faithless, worthless religion?

Say, how is it? Be thoroughly in earnest. Be assured there is an urgent demand for out-and-out earnestness in this matter. We cannot hide from you the fact that we are painfully conscious of the sad lack of thorough decision amongst us. We have not, with sufficient emphasis or distinctness, "turned from idols." Old habits are retained; former lusts and objects rule the heart. The temper, style, spirit and deportment do not bespeak conversion. We are sadly too like our former selves — too like the openly and confessedly worldly people around us.

All this is really terrible. We fear it is a sad hindrance to the progress of the gospel and the salvation of souls. The testimony falls powerless on the ears of those to whom we speak, because we do not seem as though we ourselves really believe what we are talking about. The apostle could not say to us, as he said to his dear Thessalonian converts, "From you sounded out the word of the Lord… so that we need not to speak anything." There is a want of depth, power and markedness in our conversion. The change is not sufficiently apparent. Even where there is a work, there is a tameness, feebleness and vagueness about it truly deplorable and discouraging.

Part 5

We are now called to consider what we may term the positive side of the great subject of conversion. We have seen that it is a turning from idols — a turning from all those objects which ruled our hearts and engaged our affections — the vanities and follies, the lusts and pleasures which made up the whole of our existence in the days of our darkness and blindness. It is, as we read in Acts 26: 18, a turning from darkness, and from the power of Satan; and, as we read in Gal. 1: 4, a turning from this present evil world.

But conversion is much more than all this. It would, in one sense, be but a poor thing if it were merely a turning "from sin, the world, and Satan." No doubt it is a signal mercy to be delivered, once and forever, from all the wretchedness and moral degradation of our former life; from the terrible thraldom of the god and prince of this world; from all the hollowness and vanity of a world that lieth in the arms of the wicked one; and from the love and practice of sin — the vile affections which once held sway over us. We cannot be too thankful for all that is included in this side of the question.

But, we repeat, there is very much more than this. The heart may feel disposed to inquire, "What have we gotten in lieu of all we have given up? Is Christianity merely a system of negations? If we have broken with the world and self — if we have given up our former pleasures and amusements — if, in short, we have turned our back upon what goes to make up life in this world, what have we instead?"

1 Thessalonians 1: 9 furnishes, in one word, the answer to all these inquiries — an answer full, clear, distinct, and comprehensive. it is — "Ye turned to God."

Precious answer! Yes, unspeakably precious to all who know aught of its meaning. What have I got instead of my former "idols"? God! Instead of this world's vain and sinful pleasures? God! Instead of its riches, honours, and distinctions? God! Oh, blessed, glorious, perfect Substitute! What had the prodigal instead of the rags of the far country? The best robe in the father's house! Instead of the swine's husks? The fatted calf of the father's providing! Instead of the degrading servitude of the far country? The father's welcome, his bosom, and his table!

Reader, is not this a blessed exchange? Have we not, in the familiar, but ever charming history of the prodigal a most touching and impressive illustration of true conversion in both its sides? May we not well exclaim, as we gaze on the inimitable picture, "What a conversion! What a turning from and turning to!" Who can utter it? What human tongue can adequately set forth the feelings of the returned wanderer when pressed to the father's bosom and bathed in the light and love of the father's house? The rags, the husks, the swine, the slavery, the cold selfishness, the destitution, the famine, the misery, the moral degradation — all gone, and gone forever; and instead thereof the ineffable delight of that bright and happy home, and, above all, the exquisite feeling that all that festive joy which surrounded him was wakened up by the very fact of his return — that it made the father glad to get him back!

But we shall, perhaps, be told that this is but a figure. Yes; but a figure of what? Of a precious, a divine reality; a figure of what takes place in every instance of true conversion, if only it be looked at from a heavenly standpoint. It is not a mere surrender of the world, with

its thousand and one vanities and follies. It is this, no doubt; but it is very much more. It is being brought to God, brought home, brought to the Father's bosom, brought into the family; made — not in the language of a barren formulary, but in the power of the Spirit, and by the mighty action of the Word — a child of God, a member of Christ, and an heir of the kingdom.

This, and nothing less, is conversion. Let the reader see that he thoroughly understands it. Let him not be satisfied with anything short of this grand reality — this turning from darkness to light, from the power of Satan, and from the worship of idols, to God. The Christian is, in one sense, as really brought to God now as if he were actually in Heaven. This may seem strong, but it is blessedly true. Hear what the apostle Peter says as to this point: "Christ hath once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, to bring us to" — what? Heaven when we die? Nay; but "to bring us to God" now. So, also, in Rom. 5 we read, "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life! And not only so, but we also joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the reconciliation. "

This is an immense principle. It is not within the compass of human language to set forth all that is involved in being "turned," or "brought to God." Our adorable Lord Jesus Christ brings all who believe in His name into God's presence, in all His own perfect acceptability. They come in all the credit, and virtue, and value of the blood of Jesus, and in all the fragrance of His most excellent name. He brings us into the very same position with Himself. He links us with Himself,

and shares with us all He has, and all He is, save His Deity, which is incommunicable. We are perfectly identified with Him.

"Yet a little while, and the world seeth Me no more; but ye see Me; because I live, ye shall live also." Again, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." "These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." "Henceforth I call you not servants, for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard of My Father I have made known unto you."

So, also, in that marvellous prayer in John 17, we read, "I have given unto them the words which Thou gavest Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from Thee, and they have believed that Thou didst send Me. I pray for them; I pray not for the world, but for them which Thou hast given Me; for they are Thine. And all Mine are Thine, and Thine are Mine, and I am glorified in them." "I have given them Thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." "As Thou hast sent Me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world."

"And the glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them; that they may be one, even as We are one: I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me, and hast loved them as Thou hast loved Me. Father, I will that they also whom Thou hast given Me be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory which Thou

hast given Me; for thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, the world hath not known Thee, but I have known Thee, and these have known that Thou hast sent Me. And I have declared unto them Thy name, and will declare it; that the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

Now it is utterly impossible to conceive anything higher or more blessed than this. To be so thoroughly identified with the Son of God, to be so wholly one with Him as to share in the very same love wherewith He is loved by the Father, to partake of His peace, His joy, His glory — all this involves the very highest possible measure and character of blessing with which any creature could be endowed. To be saved from the everlasting horrors of the pit of hell; to be pardoned, washed, and justified; to be reinstated in all that Adam lost; to be let into Heaven on any ground or in any character whatsoever, would be marvellous mercy, goodness, and loving-kindness; but to be brought to God in all the love and favour of His own beloved Son, to be intimately associated with Him in all His position before God — His acceptability now — His glory by and by — this, truly, is something which only the heart of God could think of, and only His mighty power accomplish.

Well, all this is involved in the conversion whereof we speak. Such is the magnificent grace of God, such the love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses and sins, enemies in our minds by wicked works, serving divers lusts and pleasures, worshipping idols, the blind, degraded slaves of sin and Satan, children of wrath, and going straight to hell.

And the best of it all is, that it both glorifies the name and gratifies the heart of God to bring us into this place of inconceivable blessedness, love, and glory. It would not satisfy the love of His heart to give us any lower place than that of His own Son. Well might the inspired apostle exclaim, in view of all this stupendous grace, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ; according as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love; having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (Eph. 1).

What depth of love, what fullness of blessing, have we here! It is the purpose of God to glorify Himself, throughout the countless ages of eternity, in His dealings with us. He will display, in view of all created intelligences, the riches of His grace, in His kindness toward us, by Christ Jesus. Our forgiveness, our justification, our perfect deliverance, our acceptance — all the blessings bestowed upon us in Christ — are for the display of the divine glory throughout the vast universe forever. It would not meet the claims of God's glory, or answer the affections of His heart, to have us in any other position but that of His own well-beloved and only begotten Son.

All this is marvellous. It seems too good to be true. But it is worthy of God, and it is His good pleasure so to act

toward us. This is enough for us. It may be, and most assuredly is, too good for us to get, but it is not too good for God to give. He acts toward us according to the love of His heart, and on the ground of the worthiness of Christ. The prodigal might ask to be made as one of the hired servants, but this could not be. It would not be according to the Father's heart to have him in the house as a servant. It must be as a son or not at all. If it were a question of desert, we do not deserve the place of a servant any more than that of a son. But, blessed be God, it is not according to our deserts at all, but according to the boundless love of His heart, and to the glory of His holy name.

This, then, is conversion. Thus we are brought to God. Nothing short of this. We are not merely turned from our idols, whatever they were, but we are actually brought into the very presence of God, to find our delight in Him, to joy in Him, to walk with Him, to find all our springs in Him, to draw upon His exhaustless resources, to find in Him a perfect answer to all our necessities, so that our souls are satisfied, and that for ever.

Do we want to go back to the idols? Never! Have we any hankering after our former objects? Not if our hearts are realising our place and portion in Christ. Had the prodigal any longings after the husks and the swine when folded in the father's bosom, clothed in the father's house, and seated at the father's table? We do not, and cannot, believe it. We cannot imagine his heaving a single sigh after the far country when once he found himself within the hallowed circle of that bright and blissful home of love.

We speak according to the divine standard. Alas! many profess to be converted, and seem to go on for a season; but ere long they begin to grow cold, and get weary and dissatisfied. The work was not real. They were not really brought to God. Idols may have been given up for a time, but God Himself was never reached. They never found in Him a satisfying portion for their hearts — never knew the real meaning of communion with Him — never tasted heart-satisfaction, heart-rest, in Christ. Hence, in process of time, the poor heart began to long once more for the world, and back they went, and plunged into its follies and vanities with greater avidity than ever.

Such cases are very sad, very disappointing. They bring great reproach on the cause of Christ, and are used as a plea for the enemy, and as a stumbling-block for anxious inquirers. But they leave the question of divine conversion just where it was. The soul that is truly converted is one who has not merely been turned from this present evil world, and all its promises and pretensions, but who has been led by the precious ministry of the Holy Ghost to find in the living God, and in His Son Jesus Christ, all he can possibly want for time and eternity. Such an one has divinely done with the world. He has broken with it forever. He has had his eyes opened to see, through and through, the whole thing. He has judged it in the light of the presence of God. He has measured it by the standard of the cross of Christ. He has weighed it in the balances of the sanctuary, and turned his back upon it forever, to find an absorbing and a commanding object in the Person of that blessed One who was nailed to the accursed tree, in order to deliver him, not only from everlasting burnings, but also from this present evil world.

Part 6

The more we dwell on 1 Thess. 1: 9, the more we are struck with its marvellous depth, fullness, and power. It seems like sinking a shaft into an inexhaustible mine. We have dwelt a little on that very fruitful and suggestive clause, "Turned to God from idols." How much is wrapped up in it! Do we really understand the force and fullness of it? It is a wonderful thing for the soul to be brought to God — to know Him now as our resource in all our weakness and need — the spring of all our joys — our strength and shield — our Guide and Counselor — our all in with all — to be absolutely and completely shut up me to Him, wholly dependent upon Him.

Reader, do you know the deep blessedness of all this in your own soul? If you are a child of God, a truly converted soul, then it is your happy privilege to know it, and you ought not to be satisfied without it. If we are "turned to God," what is it for but to find in Him all we can possibly want for time and eternity? Nothing can ever satisfy the human soul but God Himself. It is not within the compass of earth to meet the cravings of the heart. If we had the wealth of the universe, and all that wealth could procure, the heart would still want more; there would still be an aching void which nothing under the sun could fill.

Look at the history of Solomon. Hear him recording his own experience. "I, the preacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem; and I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven; this sore travail hath God given to the sons of men to be exercised therewith. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun, and, behold, all is vanity

and vexation of spirit. That which is crooked cannot be made straight, and that which is wanting cannot be numbered. I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem; yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge. And I gave my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit.

"For in much wisdom is much grief, and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow. I said in my heart, Go to, now, I will prove thee with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure; and behold, this also is vanity. I said of laughter, it is mad, and of mirth, what doeth it? I sought in my heart to give myself to wine, yet acquainting my heart with wisdom, and to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was that good for the sons of men which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life. I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards; I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all kind of fruits, I made me pools of water, to water there with the wood that bringeth forth trees. I got me servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house; also, I had great possessions of great and small cattle, above all that were in Jerusalem before me. I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces; I gat me men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments and that of all sorts. So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem; also, my wisdom remained with me. And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them; I withheld not my heart

from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour; and this was my portion of all my labour. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do; and behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun " (Ecc. 1-2).

Such is the withering commentary upon all earth's resources as given by the pen of one who had all that earth could give — of one who was allowed to drain to the very dregs every cup of human and earthly pleasure. And what was it all? "Vanity and vexation of spirit." "All things are full of labour; man cannot utter it; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing." The poor human heart can never be satisfied with the resources of earth. Creature streams can never quench the thirst of the immortal soul. Material things cannot possibly make us truly happy, even if they were permanent. "All is vanity and vexation of spirit."

The truth of this must be proved by every human heart. Sooner or later all must find it out. Men may turn a deaf ear to it now; they may refuse to listen to the Spirit's warning voice; they may vainly imagine that this poor world can yield them substantial comfort and happiness; they may eagerly grasp at its riches, its honours, its distinctions, its pleasures, its material comforts; but they will find out their mistake. And oh, how dreadful to find it out too late! How terrible to open one's eyes in hell, like the rich man in the parable! What human language can set forth the horrors of a soul shut out forever from the presence of God, and consigned to outer darkness, to the place of weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth? It is overwhelming to think of it. What will it be to realize it? What will it be to find

oneself in the tormenting flames of hell, at the other side of that impassable gulf where a single ray of hope can never break through the deep gloom of eternity?

Oh that men would think of all this in time! that they might flee from the wrath to come, and lay hold on the blessed hope set before them in the gospel; that they might "turn to God." But alas! the god of this world blinds their minds, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine into them. He engrosses them with present things — business, money-making, pleasures, cares, lusts, anything and everything but the one thing, in comparison with which all earthly things are but as the small dust of the balance.

But we have digressed from our special theme, to which we must return.

We are particularly anxious to press upon the Christian reader the immense importance of seeking to find all his resources in the living God. We have only for a moment turned aside from this point, in order to sound a warning note in the ear of any unconverted, careless one who may happen to take up this paper. We earnestly entreat the latter to turn to God. We entreat the former to seek a deeper acquaintance with the One to whom, by grace, he has turned. We have the two things before us in penning these papers on the great subject of "conversion." We can truly say, we long to see precious souls converted to God, and we long to see converted souls happy in God.

We are increasingly convinced of the practical importance of Christians proving in their daily life that they have found thorough rest of heart in God. It has

immense weight with worldly people. It is a grand point gained when we are able, through grace, to tell the world that we are independent of it; and the only way to do this is to live in the abiding sense of what we have in God. This would impart a moral elevation to our entire course and character. It would deliver us completely from that strong tendency to lean on human props and to betake ourselves to creature streams which we have all more or less to lament, and which assuredly issue in disappointment to us and dishonour to God.

How prone we are on all occasions to look to our fellow-men for sympathy, succour and counsel instead of looking directly and exclusively to God! This is a serious mistake. It is in principle to forsake the Fountain of living waters, and hew out for ourselves broken cisterns which can hold no water. What can we expect? What must be the issue? Barrenness and desolation. Our God, in very faithfulness to us, will cause our fellow-man to fail us, in order that we may learn the folly of leaning upon an arm of flesh.

Hear what the prophet says on this great practical question: "Thus saith the Lord, Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord. For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh, but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land, and not inhabited."

But mark the contrast. "Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green, and shall not be

careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit" (Jer. 17).

Oh! reader, it is a grand reality to lean on the arm of the living God — to find in Him our relief and our resource at all times, in all places, and under all circumstances. He never fails a trusting heart. He will never disappoint us. He may see fit to keep us waiting for an answer to our call, but the time we spend in waiting is well spent, and when the answer comes our hearts are filled with praise, and we are able to say, "Oh, how great is Thy goodness, which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee, which Thou hast wrought for them that trust in Thee before the sons of men" (Ps. 31: 19).

It is a great thing to be able to trust God before the sons of men, to confess His sufficiency for our every exigency. But it must be a reality, and not mere profession. It is no use to talk of leaning on God while at the same time we are, in one way or another, looking to some poor mortal to help us. This is a sad delusion. But, alas! how often we fall under its power! We adopt the language of dependence upon God, but in reality we are looking to man, and letting him know our wants. We deceive ourselves and dishonour God and the end is disappointment and confusion of face.

Reader, let us look closely and honestly at this matter. Let us see to it that we understand the meaning of those precious words, "Turned to God." They contain the very essence of true happiness and true holiness. When the heart is really turned to God it has found the true, the divine secret of peace, rest and full satisfaction; it finds its all in God, and has no occasion whatever to turn to the creature. Am I in any perplexity? I can look to God

for guidance. He has promised to guide me with His eye. What perfect guidance! Can man do better for me? Surely not. God sees the end from the beginning. He knows all the bearings, all the belongings, all the roots and issues of my case. He is an infallible guide. His wisdom is unerring, and, moreover, He loves me perfectly. Where could I find a better guide?

Am I in want? I can go to God about it. He is the Possessor of Heaven and earth. The treasures of the universe are at His disposal. He can help me if He sees it to be good for me; and if not, the pressure will be much better for me than the relief. "My God shall supply all your need, according to His riches in glory, by Christ Jesus." Is not this enough? Why look to a creature stream? Why turn from such a God and go with our wants to a human being? It is in reality giving up, so far, the ground of faith, the life of simple dependence on God. It is actually dishonouring our Father.

If I apply to my fellow for help, it is tantamount to saying that God has failed me. It is really betraying my loving Father who has taken me up, body, soul, and spirit, to do for me for time and eternity. He has pledged Himself to provide for all my wants, be they ever so many, ever so great, ever so varied. "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not, with Him, also freely give us all things?"

But we sometimes hear people say that, the Lord has told them, or laid upon their hearts, to apply to some human resource. This is very questionable indeed. It is not at all likely that our God would ever lead us to forsake the fountain of living waters, and betake ourselves to some broken cistern. His Word is, "Call

upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me."

True, God uses the creature to meet our need; but this is a totally different matter. The blessed apostle could say, "God who comforteth those that are cast down comforted us by the coming of Titus." Paul was looking to God for comfort, and God sent Titus to comfort him. Had Paul been looking to Titus, he would have been disappointed.

Thus it is in every case. Our immediate and exclusive reference must be to God in all our need. "We have turned to God from idols," and hence in every exigency He is our sure resource. We can go to Him for counsel, for succour, for guidance, for sympathy, for all. "My soul, wait thou only upon God, for my expectation is from Him. He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defence; I shall not be moved."

Will this most blessed habit of looking only to God lead us to undervalue the channels through which His precious grace flows to us? The very reverse. How could I undervalue one who comes to me directly from God, as His manifest instrument, to meet my need? Impossible. But I value him as a channel, instead of applying to him as a source. This makes all the difference. We must never forget that true conversion means our being brought to God; and most surely, if we are brought to God, it is in order that we should find in Him a perfect covering for our eyes, a perfect object for the heart, a perfect resource in all our exigencies, from first to last. A truly converted soul is one who is turned from all creature confidences, human hopes, and earthly

expectations, to find all he wants in the living and true God, and that forever.

Part 7

We are now called to consider a deeply practical point in our subject. It is contained in the clause, "To serve the living and true God." This is full of interest to every truly converted soul, every true Christian. We are called "to serve." Our whole life, from the moment of our conversion to the close of our earthly career, should be characterised by a spirit of true, earnest, intelligent service. This is our high privilege, not to say our hallowed duty. It matters not what our sphere of action may be, what our line of life, or what our calling; when we are converted, we have just got one thing to do, namely, to serve God. If there be anything in our calling which is contrary to the revealed will of God — contrary to the direct teaching of His Word — then we must at once abandon it, cost what it may. The very first step of an obedient servant is to step out of a false position.

Suppose for example the owner of a public house is converted to God. What is he to do? Can he go on with such a business? Can he abide in such a calling with God? Can he continue in the sale of that which entails ruin, misery, degradation, death and perdition on thousands and hundreds of thousands? Can he possibly serve the living and true God in the bar of a public house?

We cannot believe it. We may be deemed harsh, severe and narrow, in writing thus. We cannot help that. We must write what we believe to be the truth. We are persuaded that the very first act of a converted public house keeper should be to shut up his shop, and turn his

back, with stern decision on such a Godless and horrible calling. To talk of serving God in such an occupation, is, in our judgement, a miserable delusion.

No doubt the same may be said about many other callings, and the reader may be disposed to ask, “What is a Christian supposed to do? How can he get on?” Our answer is simply this;

We are called to serve God, and everything must be tried by this standard. The Christian has to ask himself this one question, "Can I fulfil the duties of this situation to the glory of God?" If not, he must abandon it. If we cannot connect the name of God with our calling in life, then, assuredly, if we want to walk with God, if we aim at serving Him, if it be our one desire to be found well-pleasing in His sight, then we must give up that calling and look to Him to open some path for us in which we can walk to His praise.

This He will do, blessed be His name. He never fails a trusting soul. All we have to do is to cleave to Him with purpose of heart, and He will make the way plain before us. It may seem difficult at first. The path may appear narrow, rough, lonely; but our simple business is to stand for God, and not to continue for one hour in connection with anything contrary to His revealed will. A tender conscience, a single eye, a devoted heart, will settle many a question, solve many a difficulty, remove many a barrier. Indeed, the very instincts of the divine nature, if only they be allowed to act, will guide in many a perplexity. "The light of the body is the eye; therefore, when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light."

When the purpose of the heart is true to Christ, true to His name and cause, true to the service of God, the Holy Spirit opens up the precious treasures of divine revelation to the soul, and pours a flood of living light upon the understanding, so that we see the path of service as clear as a sunbeam before us, and we have only got to tread it with a firm step.

But we must never, for one moment, lose sight of the grand fact that we are converted to the service of God. The outcome of the life which we possess must ever take the form of service to the living and true God. In our unconverted days we worshipped idols, and served divers lusts and pleasures; now, on the contrary, we worship God in the Spirit, and we are called to serve Him with all our ransomed powers. We have turned to God, to find in Him our perfect rest and satisfaction. There is not a single thing in the entire range of a creature's necessities, for time and eternity, that we cannot find in our own most gracious God and Father. He has treasured up in Christ, the Son of His love, all that can satisfy the desires of the new life in us. It is our privilege to have Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith, and to be so rooted and grounded in love as to be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that we may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Thus filled, satisfied, and strengthened, we are called to dedicate ourselves, spirit, soul, and body, to the service of Christ; to be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. We should have nothing else to do in this world. Whatever cannot be done as service to Christ ought not to be done at all. This simplifies the

matter amazingly. It is our sweet privilege to do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, and to the glory of God. We sometimes hear people speak of "a secular calling," as contrasted with what is "sacred." We question the correctness of such a distinction. Paul made tents and planted churches, but in both he served the Lord Christ.

All that a Christian does ought to be sacred, because it is done as service to God. If this were borne in mind, it would enable us to connect the very simplest duties of daily life with the Lord Himself, and to bring Him into them in such a way as to impart a holy dignity and interest to all that we have to do, from morning till night. In this way, instead of finding the duties of our calling a hindrance to our communion with God, we should actually make them an occasion of waiting on Him for wisdom and grace to discharge them aright, so that His holy name might be glorified in the most minute details of practical life.

The fact is that the service of God is a much simpler matter than some of us imagine. It does not consist in doing some wonderful things beyond the bounds of our divinely appointed sphere of action. Take the case of a domestic servant. How can she serve the living and true God? She cannot go about visiting and talking. Her sphere of action lies in the shade and retirement of her master's house. Were she to run about from house to house, she would be actually neglecting her proper work, her divinely appointed business. Harken to the following sound and wholesome words: "Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things; not answering again: not purloining, but showing all good fidelity; that they may

adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things" (Titus 2: 9-10).

Here we see that the servant, by obedience, humility, and honesty can adorn the doctrine of God just as effectually, according to her measure, as an evangelist ranging the world over in the discharge of his high and holy commission.

Again, we read, "Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; not with eye-service as men-pleasers, but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good-will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men; knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free" (Eph. 6).

How lovely is all this! What a fine field of service is opened up for us here! How beautiful this "fear and trembling"! Where do we see it nowadays? Where is the holy subjection to authority? Where the singleness of eye? Where the willing-hearted service? Alas! we see headiness and high-mindedness, self-will, self-pleasing, and self-interest. How must all these things dishonour the Lord, and grieve His Holy Spirit! How needful that our souls should be roused to a sense of what becomes us as those who are called to serve the living and true God! Is it not a signal mercy to every true Christian to know that he can serve and glorify God in the most commonplace domestic duties? If it were not so, what would become of ninety-nine out of every hundred Christians?

We have taken up the case of an ordinary domestic servant in order to illustrate that special line of practical truth now under our consideration. Is it not most blessed for us to know that our God graciously condescends to connect His name and His glory with the very humblest duties that can devolve upon us in our ordinary domestic life? It is this which imparts dignity, interest and freshness to every little act, from morning till night. "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as unto the Lord, and not unto men." Here lies the precious secret of the whole matter. It is not working for wages, but serving the Lord Christ, and looking to Him to receive the reward of the inheritance.

Oh that all this were more fully realized and illustrated amongst us! What moral elevation it would give to the entire Christian life! What a triumphant answer it would furnish to the infidel! What a withering rebuke to all his sneers and cavils! Better by far than ten thousand learned arguments. There is no argument so forcible as an earnest, devoted, holy, happy, self-sacrificing Christian life, and this life can be displayed by one whose sphere of action is bounded by the four walls of a kitchen.

{It is remarkable that both in Eph. 6 and Col. 3 the address to servants is far more elaborate than to any of the other classes. In Titus 2 servants are specially singled out. There is no address to husbands, none to masters, none to children. We do not attempt to account for this, but we cannot help noticing it as a very interesting fact; and most assuredly it teaches us what a very important place is assigned in Christianity to one who, in those early days of the Church's history, occupied the place of a slave. The Holy Ghost took

special pains to instruct such an one as to how he was to carry himself in his most trying sphere of work. The poor slave might think himself shut out from the service of God. So far from this, he is sweetly taught that by simply doing his duty as in the sight of God he could adorn the doctrine of God his Saviour, and bring glory to the name of Jesus. Nothing can exceed the grace that shines in this.}

And not only does the practical life of a true Christian afford the very best possible answer to the sceptic and the infidel, but it also meets in a most satisfactory manner the objections of those who talk about works, and insist upon putting Christians under the law, in order to teach them how to live. When people challenge us as to our not preaching up works, we simply ask them, "For what should we preach works?" The unconverted man cannot do any works, save "wicked works," or "dead works." "They that are in the flesh" — unconverted people — "cannot please God." Of what possible use can it be to preach works to such? It can only cast dust in their eyes, blind their minds, deceive their hearts, and send them down to hell with a lie in their right hand.

There must be a genuine conversion to God. This is a divine work from first to last. And what has the converted man got to do? He certainly has not to work for life, because he has it, even life eternal, as God's free gift, through Jesus Christ our Lord. He has not to work for salvation, because he is saved already — "saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation." What, then, is he called to do? "To serve the living and true God." How? When? Where? In everything; at all times, and in all places. The converted man has nothing else to do but to

serve God. If he does anything else, he is positively untrue, unfaithful to that blessed Lord and Master who, ere ever He called him to serve, endowed him with the life, and the grace, and the power, whereby alone the service can be rendered.

Yes, the Christian is called to serve. Let us never forget this. He is privileged to "present his body as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is his reasonable [his intelligent] service." This settles the whole question. It removes all difficulties; it silences all objections; it puts everything in its right place. It is not a question of what I am doing, but how I do it — not where I am, but how I conduct myself. Christianity as displayed in the New Testament is the outcome of the life of Christ in the believer; it is Christ reproduced in the Christian's daily life, by the power of the Holy Ghost. Everything the Christian touches, everything he does, everything he says, his whole practical life, from Lord's day morning till Saturday night, should bear the impress and breathe the spirit of that great practical clause on which we have been dwelling — "serving the living and true God." May it be so more and more! May all the Lord's beloved people, everywhere, be really stirred up to seek more earnest, out-and-out, whole-hearted devotedness to Christ and His precious service!

Part 8

The last words of our chapter — 1 Thess. 1 — now claim our attention. They furnish a very striking and forcible proof of the clearness, fullness, depth and comprehensiveness of the apostle's testimony at Thessalonica, and also of the brightness and reality of the work in the young converts in that place. It was not

only that they turned from idols to God, to serve the living and true God. This, through grace, they did; and that, too, with uncommon power, freshness, and fervour.

But there was something more; and we may assert, with all possible confidence, that there would have been a grand defect in the conversion and in the Christianity of those beloved disciples if that had been lacking. They were converted "to wait for the Son of God from the heavens."

Let the reader give to this very weighty fact his most devout attention. The bright and blessed hope of the Lord's coming formed an integral part of the gospel which Paul preached, and of the Christianity of those who were converted by his ministry. That blessed servant preached a full gospel. He not only declared that the Son of God had come into the world to accomplish the great work of redemption, and lay the everlasting foundation of the divine glory and counsels, but that He had gone back to the heavens, and taken His seat as the victorious, exalted and glorified Man, at the right hand of the throne of God; and that He is coming again; first, to receive His people to Himself, and conduct them into the very innermost circle of His Father's house — the place prepared for them: and then to come forth with them, to execute judgement upon His enemies — gather out of His kingdom all that offend, and all that do iniquity, and set up His glorious dominion from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth.

All this was included in the precious gospel which Paul preached, and which the Thessalonian converts received. We find an indirect but very interesting intimation of this in a passage in Acts 17, where the

inspired writer records what the infidel Jews thought and said about the apostle's preaching. "But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also; whom Jason hath received; and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus."

Such were the ideas which these poor, ignorant, prejudiced unbelievers gathered from the preaching of the Lord's beloved servants; and we can see in them the elements of great and solemn truths — the complete upturning of the present system of things, and the establishment of the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. "I will overturn, overturn, overturn it; and it shall be no more, until He come whose right it is; and I will give it Him" (Ezek. 21: 27).

But not only did the Lord's coming and kingdom occupy a prominent place in the preaching of the apostle, it also shines brilliantly forth in all his teaching. Not only were the Thessalonians converted to this blessed hope, they were built up, established, and led on in it. They were taught to live in the brightness of it every hour of the day. It was not a dry, barren dogma, to be received and held as part of a powerless, worthless creed; it was a living reality, a mighty moral power in the soul — a precious, purifying, sanctifying, elevating hope, detaching the heart completely from present things, and causing it to look out, moment by moment — yes, we

repeat it with emphasis, moment by moment — for the return of our beloved Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who loved us, and gave Himself for us.

It is interesting to notice that in the two Epistles to the Thessalonians there is far more allusion to the Lord's coming than in all the other Epistles put together. This is all the more remarkable inasmuch as they were the very earliest of Paul's Epistles, and they were written to an assembly very young in the faith.

If the reader will just glance rapidly through these two most precious writings, he will find the hope of the Lord's return introduced in every one of the eight chapters, and in connection with all sorts of subjects. For example, in 1 Thess. 1 we have it presented as the grand object to be ever kept before the Christian's heart, let his position or his relationship be what it may — the brilliant light shining at the end of his long pilgrimage through this dark and toilsome world. "Ye turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God; and to wait for" — what? The time of their death? No such thing, no allusion to such a thing. Death, for the believer, is abolished, and is never presented as the object of his hope. For what, then, were the Thessalonian disciples taught to wait? "For God's Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead."

And then mark the beauteous addition! "Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come." This is the Person for whom we are waiting our precious Saviour; our great Deliverer; the One who undertook our desperate case; who took, on our behalf, the cup of wrath from the hand of infinite Justice and exhausted it forever; who cleared the prospect of every cloud, so that we can gaze upward

into Heaven, and onward into eternity, and see nothing but the brightness and blessedness of His own love and glory, as our happy home throughout the everlasting ages.

Oh, how blessed to be looking out, morning, noon, eventide, and midnight, for the coming of our gracious Deliverer! What a holy reality to be ever waiting for the return of our own loving and beloved Saviour and Lord! How separating and elevating, as we arise each morning to start on our daily course of duty — whatever that duty may be, whether the scrubbing of a floor or the preaching of the gospel — to cherish the bright and blessed hope that, ere the shades of evening gather round us, we may be summoned to ascend in the folds of the cloud of glory to meet our coming Lord!

Is this the dream of a wild fanatic or a visionary enthusiast? Nay, it is an imperishable truth, resting on the very same foundation that sustains the entire fabric of our most glorious Christianity. Is it true that the Son of God has trod this earth of ours in the person of Jesus of Nazareth? Is it true that He lived and laboured here, amid the sins and sorrows of poor, fallen humanity? Is it true that He sighed, and wept, and groaned, under the sense of the widespread desolation which sin had wrought in this world?

Is it true that He went to the cross, and there offered Himself without spot to God, in order to vindicate the Divine Majesty; to answer all the claims of the throne of God; to destroy all the works of the devil; to make a public show of all the powers of hell; to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself; to bear the sins of all those who,

from the beginning to the end of time, should, through grace, believe in His name?

Is it true that He lay for three days and three nights in the heart of the earth, and on the first day of the week rose triumphant from the grave, as the Head of the new creation, and ascended into the heavens, after He had been seen by at least five hundred witnesses?

Is it true that fifty days after His resurrection He sent down the Holy Ghost, in order to fill and fit His apostles to be His witnesses to the ends of the earth? Is it true that from the day of Pentecost to this very hour He has been acting on His people's behalf as an Advocate with the Father, a great High Priest with God; interceding for us in all our failures, sins, and shortcomings, and sympathising with us in all our infirmities and in all our sorrows; and presenting continually our sacrifices of prayer and praise, in all the fragrance of His own glorious Person?

Are all these things true? Yes, thank God, they are all divinely true, all set forth in the pages of the New Testament, with most marvellous fullness, clearness, depth, and power; all rest on the solid foundation of Holy Scripture — a foundation which not all the powers of earth and hell, men and devils, can ever touch.

Well, then, the blessed hope of the Lord's coming rests on precisely the same authority. It is not more true that our Lord Jesus Christ lay as a babe in a manger of Bethlehem, that He grew up to man's estate, that He went about doing good, that he was nailed to the cross and laid in the tomb, that He is now seated on the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, than that He will come again to receive His people to Himself. He may

come tonight. No one can tell when He will come, but at any moment He may come. The only thing that detains Him is His long-suffering, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. For eighteen long centuries has He waited in lingering love, mercy, and compassion; and during all that time salvation has been ready to be revealed, and God has been ready to judge; but He has waited, and He still waits, in long-suffering grace and patience.

But He will come, and we should ever live in the hope of His coming. Thus the apostle taught his beloved Thessalonians to live. Thus he lived himself. The blessed hope was intimately bound up with all the habits and feelings of his daily life. Was it a question of reaping the fruit of his labours? Hear what he says: "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown or rejoicing? Are not even ye, in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, at His comings He would see them all then and there. No enemy will be allowed to hinder that meeting.

"We would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again, but Satan hindered us." Very wonderful! Very mysterious! Yet so it was. Satan hindered an angel of God in the discharge of his business in the days of Daniel; and he hindered an apostle of Christ in the accomplishment of his loving desire to see his brethren at Thessalonica. But, thanks be to God, he will not be able to hinder the joyful meeting of Christ and His saints for which we wait. What a moment that will be! What precious reunions! What sweet recognitions! What affectionate greetings of dear old friends! But, far above all, Himself! His smile! His welcome! His soul-stirring “Well done!"

What a precious, soul-sustaining hope! Need we wonder at the prominent place it occupied in the thoughts and the teachings of the blessed apostle? He recurs to it on all occasions, and in connection with every subject. Is it a question of progress in the divine life and practical godliness? Thus he puts it: "And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all, even as we do toward you; to the end He may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints. "

Let the reader specially mark the last clause of this touching and beautiful quotation. " With all His saints." What admirable wisdom shines here! The apostle was about to touch directly upon an error into which the Thessalonian believers had fallen in reference to their departed friends. They feared that those who had fallen asleep would not participate in the joy of the Lord's coming. This error is completely demolished by that brief sentence, "with all His saints." Not one will be absent from that joyous meeting, that festive scene. Blessed assurance! Triumphant answer to all who would have us believe that none will share the joy of our Lord's coming save those who see this, that, and the other! "With all his saints," spite of their ignorance and their errors, their wanderings and their stumblings, their shortcomings and their failures. Our blessed Saviour, the everlasting Lover of our souls, will not shut any of us out at that blissful moment.

Is all this matchless grace to make us careless? God Forbid! Nay, it is the abiding sense of it which alone can keep us alive to our holy responsibility to judge everything in us and in our ways which is contrary to the

mind of Christ. And not only so, but the hope of our Lord's return, if it be kept bright and fresh in the heart, must purify, sanctify and elevate our entire character and course as nothing else can. "Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure."

It is morally impossible for any one to live in the hope of seeing his Lord at any moment and yet have his heart set upon worldly things — upon money-making, self-indulgence, pleasure, vanity, folly. Let us not deceive ourselves. If we are daily looking out for the Son of God from Heaven, we must sit loose to the things of time and sense.

We may hold the doctrine of the Lord's coming as a mere dogma in the intellect; we may have the entire range of prophetic truth mapped out before our mind's eye, without its producing the smallest effect upon the heart, the character, or the practical life. But it is another thing altogether to have the whole moral being, the entire practical career, governed by the bright and blessed hope of seeing the One who loveth us and hath washed us from our sins in His own most precious blood.

Would there were more of this amongst us! It is to be feared that many of us have lost the freshness and power of our true and proper hope. The truth of the Lord's coming has become so familiar as a mere doctrine that we can flippantly speak of it, and discuss various points in connection with it, and argue with people about it, and all the while our ways, our deportment, our spirit and temper give the lie to what we profess to hold.

But we shall not pursue this sad and humbling side of the subject. May the Lord look upon us, and graciously

heal, restore and lift up our souls! May He revive in the hearts of all His beloved people the proper Christian hope — the hope of seeing the bright and Morning Star. May the utterance of the whole heart and the utterance of the whole life be, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"

Here we must close this paper. We had hoped to turn through the two Epistles to the Thessalonians in company with our readers, in order to prove and illustrate the statement that the hope of the Lord's return was bound up in the heart of the apostle, with all the scenes, circumstances, and associations of Christian life. But we must allow the reader to do this for himself. Sufficient, we trust, has been said to show that true conversion, according to apostolic teaching, cannot stop short of the blessed hope of the Lord's coming.

A truly converted person is one who has turned from idols — has broken with the world — broken with his former self — turned to God, to find in Him all he can possibly want for time and eternity, to serve Him, and Him only — and, finally, "to wait for the Son of God from heaven." Such we conceive to be the true and proper answer to the question, "What is conversion?"

Reader, art thou converted? If not, what then? If thou art, does thy life declare it?

Evangelization - A Word to the Evangelist

Evangelization — A word to the Evangelist.

C. H. Mackintosh.

We trust it may not be deemed out of place if we venture to offer a word of counsel and encouragement to all who have been and are engaged in the blessed work of preaching the gospel of the grace of God. We are, in some measure, aware of the difficulties and discouragements which attend upon the path of every evangelist, whatever may be his sphere of labour or measure of gift; and it is our heart's desire to hold up the hands and cheer the hearts of all who may be in danger of falling under the depressing power of these things. We increasingly feel the immense importance of an earnest, fervent gospel testimony everywhere; and we dread exceedingly any falling off therein. We are imperatively called to "do the work of an evangelist," and not be moved from that work by any arguments or considerations whatsoever.

Let none imagine that, in writing thus, we mean to detract, in the smallest degree, from the value of teaching, lecturing, or exhortation. Nothing is further from our thoughts. "These things ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone." We mean not to compare the work of the evangelist with that of the teacher, or to exalt the former at the expense of the latter. Each has its own proper place, its own distinctive interest and importance.

But is there not a danger, on the other hand, of the evangelist abandoning his own precious work in order to give himself to the work of teaching and lecturing? Is there not a danger of the evangelist becoming merged in the teacher? We fear there is; and it is under the influence of this very fear that we pen these few lines. We observe, with deep concern, some who were once known amongst us as earnest and eminently successful evangelists, now almost wholly abandoning their work and becoming teachers and lecturers.

This is most deplorable. We really want evangelists. A true evangelist is almost as great a rarity as a true pastor. Alas! how rare are both! The two are closely connected. The evangelist gathers the sheep; the pastor feeds and cares for them. The work of each lies very near the heart of Christ — the Divine Evangelist and Pastor; but it is with the former we have now more immediately to do — to encourage him in his work, and to warn him against the temptation to turn aside from it. We cannot afford to lose a single ambassador just now, or to have a single preacher silent.

We are perfectly aware of the fact that there is in some quarters a strong tendency to throw cold water upon the work of evangelization. There is a sad lack of sympathy with the preacher of the gospel; and, as a necessary consequence, of active co-operation with him in his work. Further, there is a mode of speaking of gospel preaching which argues but little sympathy with the heart of Him who wept over impenitent sinners, and who could say, at the very opening of His blessed ministry, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor" (Isa. 61; Luke 4). And again, "Let us go into the next towns, that I

may preach there also: for therefore came I forth" (Mark 1: 38).

Our blessed Lord was an indefatigable preacher of the gospel, and all who are filled with His mind and spirit will take a lively interest in the work of all those who are seeking in their feeble measure to do the same. This interest will be evinced, not only by earnest prayer for the divine blessing upon the work, but also by diligent and persevering efforts to get immortal souls under the sound of the gospel.

This is the way to help the evangelist, and this way lies open to every member of the Church of God — man, woman, or child. All can thus help forward the glorious work of evangelization. If each member of the assembly were to work diligently and prayerfully in this way, how different would it be with the Lord's dear servants who are seeking to make known the unsearchable riches of Christ.

But, alas! how often is it otherwise. How often do we hear even those who are of some repute for intelligence and spirituality, when referring to meetings for gospel testimony, say, "Oh, I am not going there; it is only the gospel." Think of that! "Only the gospel." If they would put the idea into other words, they might say, "It is only the heart of God — only the precious blood of Christ — only the glorious record of the Holy Ghost."

This would be putting the thing plainly. Nothing is more sad than to hear professing Christians speak in this way. It proves too clearly that their souls are very far away from the heart of Jesus. We have invariably found that those who think and speak slightingly of the work of the evangelist are persons of very little spirituality; and on

the other hand, the most devoted, the most true hearted, the best taught saints of God, are always sure to take a profound interest in that work. How could it be otherwise? Does not the voice of Holy Scripture bear the clearest testimony to the fact of the interest of the Trinity in the work of the gospel? Most assuredly it does.

Who first preached the gospel? Who was the first herald of salvation? Who first announced the good news of the bruised Seed of the woman? The Lord God Himself, in the garden of Eden. This is a telling fact in connection with our theme. And further, let us ask, who was the most earnest, laborious, and faithful preacher that ever trod this earth? The Son of God. And who has been preaching the gospel for the last eighteen centuries? The Holy Ghost sent down from Heaven.

Thus then we have the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost all actually engaged in the work of evangelization; and if this be so, who are we to dare to speak slightingly of such a work? Nay, rather may our whole moral being be stirred by the power of the Spirit of God so that we may be able to add our fervent and deep Amen to those precious words of inspiration, "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" (Isa. 52: 7; Rom. 10: 15)

But it may be that these lines shall be scanned by some one who has been engaged in the work of preaching the gospel, and is beginning to feel rather discouraged. It may be that he has been called to preach in the same place for years, and he feels burdened by the thought of having to address the same audience, on the same subject, week after week, month after month, year after year. He may feel at a loss for something new, something

fresh, some variety. He may sigh for some new sphere, where the subjects which are familiar to him will be new to the people. Or, if this cannot be, he may feel led to substitute lectures and expositions for the fervid, pointed, earnest preaching of the gospel.

If we have in any measure set forth the reader's feelings on this subject, we think it will greatly help him in his work to bear in mind that the one grand theme of the true evangelist is Christ. The power to handle that theme is the Holy Ghost. The one to whom that theme is to be unfolded is the poor lost sinner. Now, Christ is ever new; the power of the Holy Ghost is ever fresh; the soul's condition and destiny ever intensely interesting.

Furthermore, it is well for the evangelist to bear in mind, on every fresh occasion of rising to preach, that his unconverted hearers are totally ignorant of the gospel, and hence he should preach as though it were the first time they had ever heard the message, and the first time he had ever delivered it. For, be it remembered, the preaching of the gospel, in the divine acceptation of the phrase, is not a mere barren statement of evangelical doctrine — a certain form of words enunciated over and over again in wearisome routine. Far, very far from it. The gospel is really the large loving heart of God welling up and flowing forth toward the poor lost sinner in streams of life and salvation. It is the presentation of the atoning death and glorious resurrection of the Son of God; and all this in the present energy, glow, and freshness of the Holy Ghost, from the exhaustless mine of Holy Scripture.

Moreover, the one absorbing object of the preacher is to win souls for Christ, to the glory of God. For this he

labours and pleads; for this he prays, weeps, and agonises; for this he thunders, appeals, and grapples with the heart and conscience of his hearer. His object is not to teach doctrines, though doctrines may be taught; his object is not to expound Scripture, though Scripture may be expounded. These things lie within the range of the teacher or lecturer; but let it never be forgotten, the preacher's object is to bring the Saviour and the sinner together — to win souls to Christ. May God by His Spirit keep these things ever before our hearts, so that we may have a deeper interest in the glorious work of evangelization!

We would, in conclusion, merely add a word of exhortation in reference to the Lord's Day evening. We would, in all affection, say to our beloved and honoured fellow-labourers, Seek to give that one hour to the great business of the soul's salvation. There are 168 hours in the week, and, surely, it is the least we may devote one of these to this momentous work. It so happens that during that interesting hour we can get the ear of our fellow-sinner. Oh, let us use it to pour in the sweet story of God's free love and of Christ's full salvation.

A MOTTO FOR THE EVANGELIST.

2 Corinthians 10:16

"TO PREACH THE GOSPEL in the regions beyond you." These words, while they set forth the large-heartedness of the self-denying and devoted apostle, do also furnish a fine model for the evangelist, in every age. The gospel is a traveller; and the preacher of the gospel must be a traveller likewise. The divinely-qualified and divinely-sent evangelist will fix his eye upon "the world." He will embrace, in his benevolent design, the human family

From house to house; from street to street from city to city; from province to province — from kingdom to kingdom; from continent to continent; from pole to pole. Such is the range of "the good news," and the publisher thereof. "The regions beyond" must ever be the grand gospel motto. No sooner has the gospel lamp cast its cheering beams over a district, than the bearer of that map must think of the regions beyond. Thus the work goes on. Thus the mighty tide of grace rolls, in enlightening and saving power, over a dark world which lies in "the region of the shadow of death."Waft, waft, ye winds, the story,And you, ye waters roll,Till, like a sea of glory,It spreads from pole to pole.

Christian reader, are you thinking of "the regions beyond you"? This expression may, in your case, mean the next house, the next street, the next village, the next city, the next kingdom, or the next continent. The application is for your own heart to ponder; but say, are you thinking of "the regions beyond you"? I do not want you to abandon your present post, at all; or, at least, not until you are fully persuaded that your work, at that post, is done. But, remember, the gospel plough should never stand still. "Onward" is the motto of every true evangelist. Let the shepherds abide by the flocks; but let the evangelists betake themselves hither and thither, to gather the sheep. Let them sound the gospel trump, far and wide, over the dark mountains of this world, to gather together the elect of God. This is the design of the gospel. This should be the object of the evangelist, as he sighs after "the regions beyond." When Caesar beheld, from the coast of Gaul, the white cliffs of Britain, he earnestly longed to carry his arms thither. The evangelist, on the other hand, whose heart beats in

unison with the heart of Jesus, as he casts his eye over the map of the world, longs to carry the gospel of peace into regions which have heretofore been wrapped in midnight gloom, covered with the dark mantle of superstition, or blasted beneath the withering influences of "a form of godliness without the power."

It would, I believe, be a profitable question for many of us to put to ourselves, how far we are discharging our holy responsibilities to "the regions beyond." I believe the Christian who is not cultivating and manifesting an evangelistic spirit, is in a deplorable condition. I believe, too, that the assembly which is not cultivating and manifesting an evangelistic spirit is in a dead state. One of the truest marks of spiritual growth and prosperity, whether in an individual, or in an assembly, is earnest anxiety after the conversion of souls. This anxiety will swell the bosom with most generous emotions; yea, it will break forth, in copious streams of benevolent exertion, ever flowing toward "the regions beyond." It is hard to believe that "the Word of Christ" is "dwelling richly" in any one who is not making some effort to impart that Word to his fellow sinners. It matters not what may be the amount of the effort; it may be to drop a few words in the ear of a friend, to give a tract, to pen a note, to breathe a prayer. But one thing is certain, namely, that a healthy vigorous Christian will be an evangelistic Christian — a teller of good news — one whose sympathies, desires, and energies, are ever going forth toward "the regions beyond." "I must preach the gospel to other cities also, therefore am I sent." Such was the language of the divine Evangelist.

It is very doubtful whether many of the servants of Christ have not erred in allowing themselves, through

one influence or another, to become too much localised — too much tied to one place. They have dropped into routine work — into a round of stated preaching, in the same place, and, in many cases, have paralysed themselves and paralysed their hearers also. I speak not, now, of the labours of the pastor, the elder, or the teacher, which must, of course, be carried on in the midst of those who are the proper subjects of such labours. I refer more particularly to the evangelist. Such an one should never suffer himself to become localised. The world is his sphere — "the regions beyond," his motto — to gather out God's elect, his object — the current of the Spirit, his line of direction. If the reader should be one whom God has called and fitted to be an evangelist, let him remember these four things, the sphere, the motto, the object, and the line of direction which all must adopt, if they would prove fruitful labourers in the gospel field.

Finally, whether the reader be an evangelist or not, I would earnestly entreat him to examine how far he is seeking to further the gospel of Christ. We really must not stand idle. Time is short! Eternity is rapidly posting on! The Master is most worthy! Souls are most precious! The season for work will soon close! Let us, then, in the name of the Lord, be up and doing. And when we have done what we can, in the regions around, let us carry the precious gospel into "the regions beyond.

"THE WORK OF AN EVANGELIST Acts 16: 8-31

We ventured to offer a word to the evangelist, which we now follow up with a paper on the evangelist's work; and we cannot do better than select, as the basis of our remarks, a page from the missionary record of one of

the greatest evangelists that ever lived. The passage of Scripture that stands at the head of this article furnishes specimens of three distinct classes of hearers, and also the method in which they were met by the great apostle of the Gentiles, guided, most surely, by the Holy Ghost.

We have, first, the earnest seeker; secondly, the false professor; and thirdly, the hardened sinner. These three classes are to be met everywhere, and at all times, by the Lord's workman; and hence we may be thankful for an inspired account of the right mode of dealing with such. It is most desirable that those who go forth with the gospel should have skill in dealing with the various conditions of soul that come before them, from day to day; and there can be no more effectual way of attaining this skill than the careful study of the models given us by God the Holy Ghost.

Let us then, in the first place, look at the narrative of the earnest seeker.

The laborious apostle, in the course of his missionary journeyings, came to Troas, and there a vision appeared to him in the night, "There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia and help us. And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them. Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis; and from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days.

"And on the Sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat

down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither. And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us; whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things that were spoken of Paul. And when she was baptised, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and abide there. And she constrained us" (Acts 16: 8-15).

Here, then, we have a touching picture — something well worth gazing at and pondering. It is a picture of one who, having through grace gotten a measure of light, was living up to it, and was earnestly seeking for more. Lydia, the seller of purple, belonged to the same interesting generation as the eunuch of Ethiopia, and the centurion of Caesarea. All three appear on the page of inspiration as quickened souls not emancipated — not at rest — not satisfied. The eunuch had gone from Ethiopia to Jerusalem in search of something on which to rest his anxious soul. He had left that city still unsatisfied, and was devoutly and earnestly hanging over the precious page of inspiration. The eye of God was upon him, and He sent His servant Philip with the very message that was needed to solve his difficulties, answer his questions, and set his soul at rest.

God knows how to bring the Philips and the eunuchs together. He knows how to prepare the heart for the message and the message for the heart. The eunuch was a worshiper of God; but Philip is sent to teach him how to see God in the face of Jesus Christ. This was precisely what he wanted. It was a flood of fresh light breaking in upon his earnest spirit, setting his heart and conscience at rest, and sending him on his way rejoicing. He had

honestly followed the light as it broke in upon his soul, and God sent him more.

Thus it is ever. "To him that hath shall more be given." There never was a soul who sincerely acted up to his light that did not get more light. This is most consolatory and encouraging to all anxious inquirers. If the reader belongs to this class, let him take courage. If he is one of those with whom God has begun to work, then let him rest assured of this, that He who hath begun a good work will perform the same until the day of Jesus Christ. He will, most surely, perfect that which concerneth His people.

But let no one fold his arms, settle upon his oars, and coolly say, "I must wait God's time for more light. I can do nothing — my efforts are useless. When God's time comes I shall be all right; till then, I must remain as I am." These were not the thoughts or feelings of the Ethiopian eunuch. He was one of the earnest seekers; and all earnest seekers are sure to be happy finders. It must be so, for "God is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him" (Heb. 11: 6).

So also with the centurion of Caesarea. He was a man of the same stamp. He lived up to his light. He fasted, he prayed, and gave alms. We are not told whether he had read the sermon on the mount: but it is remarkable that he exercised himself in the three grand branches of practical righteousness set forth by our Lord in the sixth chapter of Matthew. [The reader will notice that in Matthew 6: 1, the marginal reading is the correct one: "Take heed that ye do not your righteousness before men, to be seen of them." Then we have the three departments of this righteousness, namely, alms-giving

(ver. 2); prayer (ver. 3) fasting (ver. 16). These were the very things Cornelius was doing. In short, he feared God, and was working righteousness, according to his measure of light.] He was moulding his conduct and shaping his way according to the standard which God had set before him. His righteousness exceeded the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, and therefore he entered the kingdom. He was, through grace a real man, earnestly following the light as it streamed in upon his soul, and he was led into the full blaze of the gospel of the grace of God. God sent a Peter to Cornelius, as he had sent a Philip to the eunuch. The prayers and alms had gone up as a memorial before God, and Peter was sent with a message of full salvation through a crucified and risen Saviour.

Now it is quite possible that there are persons who, having been rocked in the cradle of easy-going evangelical profession, and trained up in the flippant formalism of a self-indulgent, heaven-made-easy religion, are ready to condemn the pious conduct of Cornelius, and pronounce it the fruit of ignorance and legality. Such persons have never known what it was to deny themselves a single meal, or to spend an hour in real, earnest prayer, or to open their hand, in true benevolence, to meet the wants of the poor. They have heard and learnt, perchance, that salvation is not to be gained by such means — that we are justified by faith without works — that it is to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly.

All this is most true; but what right have we to imagine that Cornelius was praying, fasting, and giving alms in order to earn salvation? None whatever — at least if we are to be governed by the inspired narrative, and we

have no other means of knowing aught about this truly excellent and interesting character. He was informed by the angel that his prayers and his alms had gone up as a memorial before God. Is not this a clear proof that these prayers and alms were not the trappings of self-righteousness, but the fruits of a righteousness based on the knowledge which he had of God? Surely the fruits of self-righteousness and legality could never have ascended as a memorial to the throne of God; nor could Peter ever have said concerning a mere legalist that he was one who feared God and worked righteousness.

Ah, no; Cornelius was a man thoroughly in earnest. He lived up to what he knew, and he would have been quite wrong to go further. To him the salvation of his immortal soul the service of God, and eternity, were grand and all-absorbing realities. He was none of your easy-going professors, full of flippant, vapid, worthless talk, but doing nothing. He belonged to another generation altogether. He belonged to the working, not the talking class. He was one on whom the eye of God rested with complacency, and in whom the mind of heaven was profoundly interested.

And so was our friend of Thyatira, Lydia, the seller of purple. She belonged to the same school — she occupied the same platform as the centurion and the eunuch. It is truly delightful to contemplate these three precious souls — to think of one in Ethiopia; another at Caesarea; and a third at Thyatira or Philippi. It is particularly refreshing to contrast such downright thorough-going, earnest souls, with many in this our day of boasted light and knowledge, who have got the plan of salvation, as it is termed, in their heads, the doctrines of grace on the

tongue, but the world in the heart; whose absorbing object is self, self, self-miserable object!

We shall have occasion to refer more fully to these latter under our second head; but, for the present, we shall think of the earnest Lydia; and we must confess it is a far more grateful exercise. It is very plain that Lydia, like Cornelius and the eunuch, was a quickened soul; she was a worshiper of God; she was one who was right glad to lay aside her purple-selling, and betake herself to a prayer-meeting, or to any such like place where spiritual profit was to be had, and where there were good things going. "Birds of a feather flock together," and so Lydia soon found out where a few pious souls, a few kindred spirits, were in the habit of meeting to wait on God in prayer.

All this is lovely. It does the heart good to be brought in contact with this deep-toned earnestness. Surely the Holy Ghost has penned this narrative, like all Holy Scripture, for our learning. It is a specimen case, and we do well to ponder it. Lydia was found diligently availing herself of any and every opportunity; indeed she exhibited the real fruits of divine life, the genuine instincts of the new nature. She found out where saints met for prayer, and took her place among them. She did not fold her arms and settle down on her lees, to wait, in antinomian indolence and culpable idleness, for some extraordinary indefinable thing to come upon her, or some mysterious change to come over her. No; she went to a prayer-meeting — the place of expressed need — the place of expected blessing: and there God met her, as He is sure to meet all who frequent such scenes in Lydia's spirit.

God never fails an expectant heart. He has said, "They shall not be ashamed that wait for Me"; and, like a bright and blessed sunbeam on the page of inspiration, shines that pregnant, weighty, soul-stirring sentence, "God is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." He sent a Philip to the eunuch in the desert of Gaza. He sent a Peter to the centurion, in the town of Caesarea. He sent a Paul to a seller of purple, in the suburbs of Philippi; and He will send a message to the reader of these lines, if he be a really earnest seeker after God's salvation.

It is ever a moment of deepest interest when a prepared soul is brought in contact with the full gospel of the grace of God. It may be that that soul has been under deep and painful exercise for many a long day, seeking rest but finding none. The Lord has been wording by His Spirit, and preparing the ground for the good seed. He has been making deep the furrows so that the precious seed of His Word may take permanent root, and bring forth fruit to His praise. The Holy Ghost is never in haste. His work is deep, sure and solid. His plants are not like Jonah's gourd, springing up in a night and perishing in a night. All that He does will stand, blessed be His name. "I know that whatsoever God doeth, it shall be forever." When He convicts, converts, and liberates a soul, the stamp of His own eternal hand is upon the work, in all its stages.

Now, it must have been a moment of intense interest when one in Lydia's state of soul was brought in contact with that most glorious gospel which Paul carried (Acts 16: 14). She was thoroughly prepared for his message; and surely his message was thoroughly prepared for her. He carried with him truth which she had never heard

and never thought of. As we have already remarked, she had been living up to her light; she was a worshiper of God; but we are bold to assert that she had no idea of the glorious truth which was lodged in the heart of that stranger who sat beside her at the prayer meeting. She had come thither — devout and earnest woman that she was — to pray and to worship, to get some little refreshment for her spirit, after the toils of the week. How little did she imagine that at the meeting she should hear the greatest preacher that ever lived, save One, and that she should hear the very highest order of truth that had ever fallen upon mortal ears.

Yet thus it was. And, oh, how important it was for Lydia to have been at that memorable prayer meeting! How well it was she had not acted as so many, nowadays, act, who after a week of toil in the shop, the warehouse, the factory, or the field, take the opportunity of lying in bed on Sunday! How many there are whom you will see at their post from Monday morning till Saturday night, working away with all diligence at their calling, but for whom you will look in vain at the meeting on the Lord's day. How is this? They will tell you, perhaps, that they are so worn out on Saturday night that they have no energy to rise on Sunday, and therefore they spend this day in sloth, lounging, and self-indulgence. They have no care for their souls, no care for eternity, no care for Christ. They care for themselves, for their families, for the world, for money-making; and hence you will find them up with the dawn of Monday and off to their work.

Lydia did not belong to this class at all. No doubt she attended to her business, as every right-minded person will. We dare say — indeed, we are sure — she kept very excellent purple, and was a fair, honest trader, in every

sense of the word. But she did not spend her Sabbath in bed, or lounging about her house, or nursing herself up, and making a great fuss about all she had to do during the week. Neither do we believe that Lydia was one of those self-occupied folk whom a shower of rain is sufficient to keep away from a meeting. No; Lydia was of a different stamp altogether. She was an earnest woman, who felt she had a soul to save, and an eternity before her, and a living God to serve and worship.

Would to God we had more Lydias in this our day! It would give a charm, and an interest, and a freshness to the work of an evangelist, for which many of the Lord's workmen have to sigh in vain. We seem to live in a day of terrible unreality as to divine and eternal things. Men, women, and children are real enough at their money-making, their pursuits, and their pleasures; but oh, when the things of God, the things of the soul, the things of eternity, are in question, the aspect of people is that of a yawning indifference. But the moment is rapidly approaching — every beat of the pulse, every tick of the watch, brings us nearer to it — when the yawning indifference shall be exchanged for “weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth." If this were more deeply felt, we should have many more Lydias, prepared to lend an attentive ear to Paul's gospel.

What force and beauty in those words, "Whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things that were spoken of Paul." Lydia was not one of those who go to meetings to think of anything and everything but the things that are spoken by the Lord's messengers. She was not thinking of her purple, or of the prices, or the probable gains or losses. How many of those who fill our preaching rooms and lecture halls follow the example of

Lydia? Alas! we fear but very few indeed. The business, the state of the markets, the state of the funds, money, pleasure, dress, folly — a thousand and one things are thought of, and dwelt upon, and attended to, so that the poor vagrant, volatile heart is at the ends of the earth instead of "attending" to the things that are spoken.

All this is very solemn, and very awful. It really ought to be looked into and thought of. People seem to forget the responsibility involved in hearing the gospel preached. They do not seem to be in the smallest degree impressed with the weighty fact that the gospel never leaves any unconverted person where it finds him. He is either saved by receiving, or rendered more guilty by rejecting it. Hence it becomes a serious matter to hear the gospel. People may attend gospel meetings as a matter of custom, as a religious service, or because they have nothing else to do, and the time would hang heavy upon their hands; or they may go because they think that the mere act of going has a sort of merit attached to it. Thus thousands attend preachings at which Christ's servants, though not Paul's in gift, power, or intelligence, unfold the precious grace of God in sending His only begotten Son into the world to save us from everlasting torment and misery. The virtue and efficacy of the atoning death of the divine Saviour — the Lamb of God — the dread realities of eternity — the awful horrors of hell, and the unspeakable joys of Heaven — all these weighty matters are handled, according to the measure of grace bestowed upon the Lord's messengers, and yet how little impression is produced! They "reason of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come," and yet how few are made even to "tremble!"

And why? Will anyone presume to excuse himself for rejecting the gospel message on the ground of his inability to believe it? Will he appeal to the very case before us, and say, "The Lord opened her heart; and if He would only do the same for me, I, too, should attend; but until He does, I can do nothing"? We reply, and with deep seriousness, Such an argument will not avail thee in the day of judgment. Indeed we are most thoroughly convinced that thou wilt not dare to use it then. Thou art making a false use of Lydia's charming history. True it is, blessedly true, the Lord opened her heart; and He is ready to open thine also, if there were in thee but the hundredth part of Lydia's earnestness.

There are two sides to this great question, as there are to every question. It is all very well, and sounds very forcible, for thee to say, "I can do nothing." But who told thee this? Where hast thou learnt it? We solemnly challenge thee, in the presence of God, Canst thou look up to Him and say, "I can do nothing — I am not responsible"? Say, is the salvation of thy never-dying soul just the one thing in which thou canst do nothing? Thou canst do a lot of things in the service of the world, of self, and of Satan; but when it becomes a question of God, the soul, and eternity, you coolly say, "I can do nothing — I am not responsible."

Ah! it will never do. All this style of argument is the fruit of a one-sided theology. It is the result of the most pernicious reasoning of the human mind upon certain truths in Scripture which are turned the wrong way and sadly misapplied. But it will not stand. This is what we urge upon the reader. It is of no possible use arguing in this way. The sinner is responsible; and all the theology, and all the reasoning, and all the fallacious though

plausible objections that can be scraped together, can never do away with this weighty and most serious fact.

Hence, therefore, we call upon the reader to be, like Lydia, in earnest about his soul's salvation — to let every other question, every other point, every other subject, sink into utter insignificance in comparison with this one momentous question — the salvation of his precious soul. Then, he may depend upon it, the One who sent Philip to the eunuch, and sent Peter to the centurion, and sent Paul to Lydia, will send some messenger and some message to him, and will also open his heart to attend. Of this there cannot possibly be a doubt, inasmuch as Scripture declares that "God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." All who perish, after having heard the message of salvation — the sweet story of God's free love, of a Saviour's death and resurrection — shall perish without a shadow of an excuse, shall descend into hell with their blood upon their guilty heads. Their eyes shall then be open to see through all the flimsy arguments by which they have sought to prop themselves up in a false position, and lull themselves to sleep in sin and worldliness.

But let us dwell for a moment on "the things that were spoken of Paul." The Spirit of God hath not thought proper to give us even a brief outline of Paul's address at the prayer-meeting. We are therefore left to other passages of Holy Scripture to form an idea of what Lydia heard from his lips on that interesting occasion. Let us take, for example, that famous passage in which he reminds the Corinthians of the gospel which he had preached to them. "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye

have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15: 1-4).

Now we may safely conclude that the foregoing passage of Scripture contains a compendium of the things that were spoken of Paul at the prayer-meeting at Philippi. The grand theme of Paul's preaching was Christ — Christ for the sinner — Christ for the saint — Christ for the conscience — Christ for the heart. He never allowed himself to wander from this great centre, but made all his preachings and all his teachings circulate round it with admirable consistency. If he called on men, both Jews and Gentiles, to repent, the lever with which he worked was Christ. If he urged them to believe, the object which he held up for faith was Christ, on the authority of Holy Scripture. If he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, the One that gave cogency and moral power to his reasoning was Christ. In short, Christ was the very gist and marrow, the sum and substance, the foundation and top stone of Paul's preaching and teaching.

But, for our present purpose, there are three grand subjects, found in Paul's preaching, to which we desire to call the reader's attention. These are, first, the grace of God; secondly, the Person and work of Christ; and thirdly, the testimony of the Holy Ghost as given in the Holy Scriptures.

We do not attempt to go into these vast subjects here; we merely name them, and entreat the reader to ponder them, to muse over them, and seek to make them his own.

1. The grace of God — His free, sovereign favour — is the source from whence salvation flows — salvation in all the length, breadth, height, and depth of that most precious word — salvation which stretches, like a golden chain, from the bosom of God, down to the very deepest depths of the sinner's guilty and ruined condition, and back again to the throne of God — meets all the sinner's necessities, overlaps the whole of the saint's history, and glorifies God in the highest possible manner.

2. Then, in the second place, the Person of Christ and His finished work are the only channel through which salvation can possibly flow to the lost and guilty sinner. It is not the Church and her sacraments, religion and its rites and ceremonies — man or his doings in any shape or form. It is the death and resurrection of Christ. "He died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day." This was the gospel which Paul preached, by which the Corinthians were saved, and the apostle declares, with solemn emphasis, "If any man preach any other gospel, let him be accursed." Tremendous words for our day!

3. But, thirdly, the authority on which we receive the salvation is the testimony of the Holy Ghost in Scripture. It is "according to the Scriptures." This is a most solid and comforting truth. It is not a question of feelings, or experiences, or evidences, it is a simple question of faith in God's Word wrought in the heart by God's Spirit.

It is a serious reflection for the evangelist, that wherever God's Spirit is at work, there Satan is sure to be busy. We must remember, and ever be prepared for this. The enemy of Christ and the enemy of souls is always on the watch, always hovering about to see what he can do, either to hinder or corrupt the work of the gospel. This need not terrify or even discourage the workman; but it is well to bear it in mind and be watchful. Satan will leave no stone unturned to mar or hinder the blessed work of God's Spirit. He has proved himself the ceaseless, vigilant enemy of that work, from the days of Eden down to the present moment.

Now, in tracing the history of Satan, we find him acting in two characters, namely, as a serpent, or as a lion — using craft or violence. He will try to deceive; and, if he cannot succeed, then he will use violence. Thus it is in this sixteenth chapter of the Acts. The apostle's heart had been cheered and refreshed by what we moderns should pronounce, "a beautiful case of conversion." Lydia's was a very real and decided case, in every respect. It was direct, positive, and unmistakable. She received Christ into her heart, and forthwith took Christian ground by submitting to the deeply significant ordinance of baptism. Nor was this all. She immediately opened her house to the Lord's messengers. Hers was no mere lip profession. It was not merely saying she believed. She proved her faith in Christ, not only by going down under the water of baptism, but also by identifying herself and her household with the name and cause of that blessed One whom she had received into her heart by faith.

All this was clear and satisfactory. But we must now look at something quite different. The serpent appears upon the scene in the person of the deceiver.

"It came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying. The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation. And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour" (vers. 16-18).

Here, then, was a case eminently calculated to test the spirituality and integrity of the evangelist. Most men would have hailed such words from the lips of this damsel as an encouraging testimony to the work. Why then was Paul grieved? Why did he not allow her to continue to bear witness to the object of his mission? Was she not saying the truth? Were they not the servants of the most high God? And were they not showing the way of salvation? Why be grieved with — why silence such a witness? Because it was of Satan; and, most assuredly, the apostle was not going to receive testimony from him. He could not allow Satan to help him in his work. True, he might have walked about the streets of Philippi owned and honoured as a servant of God, if only he had consented to let the devil have a hand in the work. But Paul could never consent to this. He could never suffer the enemy to mix himself up with the work of the Lord. Had he done so, it would have given the deathblow to the testimony at Philippi. To have permitted Satan to put his hand to the work, would have

involved the total shipwreck of the mission to Macedonia.

It is deeply important for the Lord's workman to weigh this matter. We may rest assured that this narrative of the damsel has been written for our instruction. It is not only a statement of what has occurred, but a sample of what may and indeed what does occur every day.

Christendom is full of false profession. There are multitudes of false professors at this moment, throughout the wide domain of Christian profession. It is sad to have to say it, but so it is, and we must press the fact upon the attention of the reader. We are surrounded, on all sides, by those who give a merely nominal assent to the truths of the Christian religion. They go on, from week to week, and from year to year, professing to believe certain things which they do not in reality believe at all. There are thousands who, every Lord's Day, profess to believe in the forgiveness of sins, and yet, were such persons to be examined, it would be found that they either do not think about the matter at all, or, if they do think, they deem it the very height of presumption for any one to be sure that his sins are forgiven.

This is very serious. Only think of a person standing up in the presence of God and saying, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins," and all the while he does not believe any such thing! Can anything be more hardening to the heart, or more deadening to the conscience than this? It is our firm persuasion that the forms and the formularies of professing Christianity are doing more to ruin precious souls than all the forms of moral pravity put together. It is perfectly appalling to contemplate the

countless multitudes that are at this moment rushing along the well-trodden highway of religious profession, down to the eternal flames of hell. We feel bound to raise a warning note. We want the reader most solemnly to take heed as to this matter.

We have only instanced one special formulary, because it refers to a subject of very general interest and importance. How few, comparatively, are clear and settled as to the question of forgiveness of sins! How few are able, calmly, decidedly, and intelligently, to say, "I know that my sins are forgiven!" How few are in the real enjoyment of full forgiveness of sins, through faith in that precious blood that cleanseth from all sins! How solemn, therefore, to hear people giving utterance to such words as these, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins," while, in fact, they do not believe their own very utterance!

Is the reader in the habit of using such a form of words? Does he believe it? Say, are thy sins forgiven? Art thou washed in the precious atoning blood of Christ? If not, why not? The way is open. There is no hindrance. Thou art perfectly welcome, this moment, to the free benefits of the atoning work of Christ. Though thy sins be as scarlet; though they be black as midnight, black as hell; though they rise like a dreadful mountain before the vision of thy troubled soul, and threaten to sink thee into eternal perdition; yet do these words shine with divine and heavenly lustre on the page of inspiration, "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1: 7).

But mark, friend, do not go on, week after week, mocking God, hardening thine own heart, and carrying

out the schemes of the great enemy of Christ, by a false profession. This marks the damsel possessed by a spirit of divination, and here her history links itself with the present awful condition of Christendom. What was the burden of her song, during those "many days" in the which the apostle narrowly considered her case? "These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation." But she was not saved — she was not delivered — she was, all the while, under Satan's power And not only so, but Satan was seeking to use her for the purpose of marring and hindering the work of the gospel.

Thus it is with Christendom — thus it is with each false professor throughout the length and breadth of the professing Church. Every one who professes to believe in the forgiveness of sins, and yet does not believe in it — does not know that his sins are forgiven, does not think that anyone can know it until the day of judgment, every such person is, in principle, on the ground of the damsel possessed with the spirit of divination. What she said was true enough, but she was not true in saying it. This was the grievous point in the case. It is one thing to say, or assent to what is true, and another thing to be true in saying it. Of what possible use was it to go on from day to day, giving utterance to the formulary, “They show unto us the way of salvation”, while she remained in the same unsaved unblessed condition? None whatever, and we know of nothing, even in the deepest depths of moral evil, or in the darkest shades of heathenism, more truly awful than the state of careless, hardened, self-satisfied, fallow-ground professors, who on each successive Lord's Day give utterance, either in

their prayers or their singing, to words which, so far as they are concerned, are wholly false.

The thought of this is, at times, almost overwhelming. We cannot dwell upon it. It is really too sorrowful. We shall therefore pass on, having once more solemnly warned the reader against every shade and degree of false profession. Let him not say or sing aught that he does not heartily believe. The devil is at the bottom of all false profession, and by means thereof he seeks to bring discredit on the work of the Lord.

But how truly refreshing to contemplate the actings of the faithful apostle in the case of the damsel. Had he been seeking his own ends, or had he been merely a minister of religion, he might have welcomed her words as a tributary stream to swell the tide of his popularity, or promote the interest of his cause. But Paul was not a mere minister of religion; he was a minister of Christ — a totally different thing. And we may notice that the damsel does not say a word about Christ. She breathes not the precious, peerless name of Jesus. There is total silence as to Him. This stamps the whole thing as of Satan. "No man can call Jesus Lord but by the Holy Ghost." People may speak of God, and of religion; but Christ has no place in their hearts. The Pharisees, in John 9, could say to the poor man, "Give God the praise"; but in speaking of Jesus, they could say, "This man is a sinner."

Thus it is ever in the case of corrupt religion, or false profession. Thus it was with the damsel in Acts 16. There was not a syllable about Christ. There was no truth, no life, no reality. It was hollow and false. It was of

Satan; and hence Paul would not and could not own it; he was grieved with it and utterly rejected it.

Would that all were like him! Would that there were the singleness of eye to detect, and the integrity of heart to reject the work of Satan in much that is going on around us! We are thoroughly convinced that the Spirit of God has written the narrative of this damsel for our instruction. It may be said perhaps, that we have no such cases now. We reply, for what end did the Holy Ghost pen the record? Alas! there are thousands of cases at this moment, answering to this type of the damsel. We cannot but view it as a sample case, an illustration of Christendom's false profession, which exhibits far more of the craft and subtle wiles of the enemy than is to be found in ten thousand forms in which moral pravity clothes itself. Everyone can judge of drunkenness, theft, and such like, but it demands an eye anointed with heavenly eye salve to detect the wily workings of the serpent behind the fair profession of a baptised world.

Such an eye Paul, through grace, possessed. He was not to be deceived. He saw that the whole affair was an effort of Satan to mix himself up with the work, that thus he might spoil it altogether. "But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee, in the name of Jesus Christ, to come out of her. And he came out the same hour."

This was true spiritual action. Paul was not in any haste to come into collision with the evil one, or even to pronounce upon the case at all; he waited many days; but the very moment that the enemy was detected he is resisted and repulsed with uncompromising decision. A

less spiritual workman might have allowed the thing to pass, under the idea that it might turn to account and help forward the work. Paul thought differently; and he was right. He would take no help from Satan. He was not going to work by such an agency; and hence, in the name of Jesus Christ — that name which the enemy so sedulously excluded — he puts Satan to flight.

But no sooner was Satan repulsed as the serpent, than he assumed the character of a lion. Craft having failed, he tried violence. "And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas and drew them into the market-place unto the rulers, and brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, and teach customs which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans. And the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them. And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely" (Acts 16: 19-23).

Thus the enemy seemed to triumph; but be it remembered that Christ's warriors gain their most splendid victories by apparent defeat. The devil made a great mistake when he cast the apostle into prison. Indeed it is consolatory to reflect that he has never done anything else but make mistakes, from the moment that he left his first estate down to the present moment. His entire history, from beginning to end, is one tissue of errors.

And thus, as has been already remarked, the devil made a great mistake when he cast Paul into prison at

Philippi. To nature's view it might have seemed otherwise; but in the judgment of faith, the servant of Christ was much more in his right place in prison for the truth's sake, than outside at his Master's expense. True, Paul might have saved himself. He might have been an honoured man, owned and acknowledged as "a servant of the most high God," if he had only accepted the damsel's testimony, and suffered the devil to help him in his work. But he could not do this, and hence he had to suffer. "And the multitude [ever fickle and easily swayed] rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them. And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely. Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks" (ver. 22-24).

Here, then, some might have said, was an end to the work of the evangelist in the city of Philippi. Here was an effectual stop to the preaching. Not so; the prison was the very place, at the moment, for the evangelist. His work was there. He was to find a congregation within the prison walls which he could not have found outside. But this leads us, in the third and last place, to the case of the hardened sinner.

It was very unlikely that the jailer would ever have found his way to the prayer meeting at the river side. He had little care for such things. He was neither an earnest seeker, nor a deceiver. He was a hardened sinner, pursuing a very hardening occupation. Jailers, from the occupation of their office, are, generally speaking, hard and stern men. No doubt there are exceptions. There are some tender-hearted men to be

found in such situations; but, as a rule, jailers are not tender. It would hardly suit them to be so. They have to do with the very worst class of society. Much of the crime of the whole country comes under their notice; and many of the criminals come under their charge. Accustomed to the rough and the course, they are apt to become rough and coarse themselves.

Now, judging from the inspired narrative before us, we may well question if the Philippian jailer was an exception to the general rule with respect to men of his class. Certainly he does not seem to have shown much tenderness to Paul and Silas. "He thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks." He seems to have gone to the utmost extreme in making them uncomfortable.

But God had rich mercy in store for that poor, hardened, cruel jailer; and, as it was not at all likely that he would go to hear the gospel, the Lord sent the gospel to him; and, moreover, He made the devil the instrument of sending it. Little did the jailer know whom he was thrusting into the inner prison — little did he anticipate what was to happen ere another sun should rise. And we may add, little did the devil think of what he was doing when he sent the preachers of the gospel into jail, there to be the means of the jailer's conversion. But the Lord Jesus Christ knew what He was about to do, in the case of a poor hardened sinner. He can make the wrath of man to praise Him and restrain the remainder.

He everywhere hath sway

And all things serve His might,

His ev'ry act pure blessing is,

His path unsullied light.

When He makes bare His arm,

Who shall His work withstand?

When He His people's cause defends,

Who then shall stay His hand?

It was His purpose to save the jailer; and so far from Satan's being able to frustrate that purpose, he was actually made the instrument of accomplishing it. "God's purpose shall stand; and He will do all His pleasure." And where He sets His love upon a poor, wretched, guilty sinner, He will have him in Heaven, spite of all the malice and rage of hell.

As to Paul and Silas, it is very evident that they were in their right place in the prison. They were there for the truth's sake, and therefore the Lord was with them. Hence they were perfectly happy. What, though they were confined within the gloomy walls of the prison, with their feet made fast in the stocks, prison walls could not confine their spirits. Nothing can hinder the joy of one who has the Lord with him. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, were happy in the fiery furnace. Daniel was happy in the lions' den; and Paul and Silas were happy in the dungeon of Philippi: "And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises to God: and the prisoners heard them."

What sounds to issue from the inner prison! We may safely say that no such sounds had ever issued thence before. Curses and execrations and blasphemous words might have been heard; sighs, cries, and groans come forth from those walls. But to hear the accents of prayer and praise, ascending at the midnight hour, must have

seemed strange indeed. Faith can sing as sweetly in a dungeon as at a prayer-meeting. it matters not where we are, provided always that we have God with us. His presence lights up the darkest cell, and turns a dungeon into the very gate of Heaven He can make His servants happy anywhere, and give them victory over the most adverse circumstances, and cause them to shout for joy in scenes where nature would be overwhelmed with sorrow.

But the Lord had His eye upon the jailer. He had written his name in the Lamb's book of life before the foundation of the world, and He was now about to lead him into the full joy of His salvation. "And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed" (ver. 26).

Now if Paul had not been in full communion with the mind and heart of Christ, he would assuredly have turned to Silas and said, "Now is the moment for us to make our escape. God has most manifestly appeared for us, and set before us an open door. If ever there was an opening of divine Providence surely this is one." But no; Paul knew better. He was in the full current of His blessed Master's thoughts, and in full sympathy with his Master's heart. Hence he made no attempt to escape. The claims of truth had brought him into prison; the activities of grace kept him there. Providence opened the door; but faith refused to walk out. People talk of being guided by Providence; but if Paul had been so guided, the jailer would never have been a jewel in his crown.

"And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled" (ver 27). This proves, very plainly, that the earthquake, with all its attendant circumstances, had not touched the heart of the jailer. He naturally supposed, when he saw the doors open, that the prisoners were all gone. He could not imagine a number of prisoners sitting quietly in jail when the doors lay open and their chains were loosed. And then what was to become of him if the prisoners were gone? How could he face the authorities? Impossible. Anything but that. Death, even by his own hand, was preferable to that.

Thus the devil had conducted this hardened sinner to the very brink of the precipice, and he was about to give him the final and fatal push over the edge, and down to the eternal flames of hell; when lo, a voice of love sounded in his ear. It was the voice of Jesus through the lips of His servant — a voice of tender and deep compassion — "Do thyself no harm."

This was irresistible. A hardened sinner could meet an earthquake; he could meet death itself; but he could not withstand the mighty melting power of love. The hardest heart must yield to the moral influence of love. "Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Love can break the hardest heart. And surely there was love in those words, "Do thyself no harm," coming from the lips of one to whom he had done so much harm a few hours before.

And be it noted, there was not a single syllable of reproach, or even of reflection, uttered by Paul to the jailer. This was Christ-like. It was the way of divine grace. If we look through the Gospels, we never find the Lord casting reproach upon the sinner. He has tears of sorrow; He has touching words of grace and tenderness; but no reproaches — no reflections — no reproach to the poor distressed sinner. We cannot attempt to furnish the many illustrations and proofs of this assertion; but the reader has only to turn to the gospel story to see its truth. Look at the prodigal; look at the thief. Not one reproving word to either.

Thus it is in every case; and thus it was with God's Spirit in Paul. Not a word about the harsh treatment — the thrusting into the inner prison — not a word about the stocks. "Do thyself no harm." And then, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."

Such is the rich and precious grace of God. It shines, in this scene, with uncommon lustre. It delights in taking up hardened sinners, melting and subduing their hard hearts, and leading them into the sunlight of a full salvation; and all this in a style peculiar to itself. Yes, God has His style of doing things, blessed be His name; and when He saves a wretched sinner, He does it after such a fashion as fully proves that His whole heart is in the work. It is His joy to save a sinner — even the very chief — and He does it in a way worthy of Himself.

And now, let us look at the fruit of all this. The jailer's conversion was most unmistakable. Saved from the very brink of hell, he was brought into the very atmosphere of heaven. Preserved from self-destruction, he was

brought into the circle of God's salvation; and the evidences of this were as clear as could be desired. "And they spake unto him the Word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes; and was baptised he and all his straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house."

What a marvellous change! The ruthless jailer has become the generous host! "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away: behold, all things are become new." How clearly we can now see that Paul was right in not being guided by providences! How much better and higher to be led by the "eye" of God! What an eternal loss it would have proved to him had he walked out at the open door! How much better to be conducted out by the very hand that had thrust him in — a hand once the instrument of cruelty and sin, now the instrument of righteousness and love! What a magnificent triumph! What a scene, altogether!

How little had the devil anticipated such a result from the imprisonment of the Lord's servants! He was thoroughly outwitted. The tables were completely turned upon him. He thought to hinder the gospel, and, behold! he was made to help it on. He had hoped to get rid of two of Christ's servants, and, lo! he lost one of his own. Christ is stronger than Satan; and all who put their trust in Him and move in the current of His thoughts shall most assuredly share in the triumphs of His grace now, and shine in the brightness of His glory forever.

Thus much, then, as to "the work of an evangelist." Such are the scenes through which he may have to pass —

such the cases with which he may have to come in contact. We have seen the earnest seeker satisfied; the deceiver silenced; the hardened sinner saved. May all who go forth with the gospel of the grace of God know how to deal with the various types of character that may cross their path! May many be raised up to do the work of an evangelist!

LETTERS TO AN EVANGELIST

Letter 1 Dearest A,

I have been much interested and I trust profited, of late, by tracing through the Gospels and the Acts, the various notices of the work of evangelization; and it has occurred to me that it may not be amiss to present to you, as one much occupied in the blessed work, a few of the thoughts that have suggested themselves to my mind. I shall feel myself much more free in this way, than if I were writing a formal treatise.

First of all, I have been greatly struck with the simplicity with which the work of evangelising was carried on in primitive times; so very unlike a great deal of what obtains among us. It seems to me that we moderns are quite too much hampered by conventional rules — too much fettered by the habits of Christendom. We are sadly deficient in what I may call spiritual elasticity. We are apt to think that in order to evangelise there must be a special gift; and even where there is this special gift, there must be a great deal of machinery and human arrangement. When we speak of doing the work of an evangelist, we, for the most part, have before our minds great public halls, and crowded audiences, for which there is a demand for considerable gift and power for speaking.

Now you and I thoroughly believe, that in order to preach the gospel publicly, there must be a special gift from the Head of the Church; and, moreover, we believe according to Eph. 4: 11, that Christ has given, and does still give, "evangelists." This is clear, if we are to be guided by Scripture. But I find in the Gospels, and in the Acts of the Apostles, that a quantity of most blessed evangelistic work was done by persons who were not specially gifted at all, but who had an earnest love for souls, and a deep sense of the preciousness of Christ and His salvation. And, what is more, I find in those who were specially gifted, called, and appointed by Christ to preach the gospel, a simplicity, freedom, and naturalness in their mode of working, which I greatly covet for myself and for all my brethren.

Let us look a little into Scripture. Take that lovely scene in John 1: 36-45. John pours out his heart in testimony to Jesus: "Behold the Lamb of God!" His soul was absorbed with the glorious Object. What was the result? "Two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus." What then? "One of the two which heard John speak, and Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother." And what does he do? "He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus." Again, "The day following, Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow Me… Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found Him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph...Come and see."

Here then, is the style of thing for which I earnestly long: this individual work, this laying hold of the first

man that comes in way, this finding one's own brother, and bringing him to Jesus. I do feel we are deficient in this. It is all right enough to gather congregations, and address them, as God gives ability and opportunity. I would not pen a single word to detract from the value of such a line of work. By all means hire rooms, halls, and theatres; put out bills inviting people to come; leave no lawful means untried to spread the gospel. Seek to get at souls as best you can. Far be it from me to cast a damp upon any who are seeking to carry on the work in this public way.

But does it not strike you that we want more of the individual work? more of the private, earnest, personal dealing with souls? Do you not think that if we had more "Philips" we should have more "Nathanaels"? If we had more "Andrews," we should have more "Simons"? I cannot but believe it. There is amazing power in an earnest personal appeal. Do you not often find that it is after the more formal public preaching is finished, and the close personal work begins, that souls are reached? How is it then that there is so little of this latter? Does it not often happen at our public preachings, that when the formal address is delivered, a hymn sung, and a word of prayer offered, all disperse without any attempt at individual work? I speak not now, mark you, of the preacher — who cannot possibly reach every case, but of the scores of Christians who have been listening to him. They have seen strangers enter the room, they have sat beside them; they have, it may be, noticed their interest, seen the tear stealing down the cheek; and yet they have let them pass away without a single loving effort to reach them, or to follow up the good work.

No doubt it may be said, "It is much better to allow the Spirit of God to follow up His own Work. We may do more harm than good. And besides, people do not like to be spoken to: they will look upon it as an impertinent intrusion, and they will be driven away from the place altogether." There is considerable weight in all this. I fully appreciate it; and I am sure you do likewise dearest A. I fear great blunders are committed by injudicious persons intruding upon the sacred privacy of the soul's deep and holy exercises. It needs tact and judgment; in short, it needs direct spiritual guidance to be able to deal with souls; to know whom to speak to, and what to say.

But allowing all this, as we do in the fullest possible manner, there is, as a rule, something lacking in connection with our public preachings. Is there not a want of that deep, personal, loving interest in souls which will express itself in a thousand ways that act powerfully on the heart? I confess that I have often been pained by what has come under my own notice in our preaching-rooms. Strangers come in and are left to find a seat wherever they can. No one seems to think of them. Christians are there, and they will hardly move to make room for them. No one offers them a Bible or hymn-book. And when the preaching is over, they are allowed to go as they came; not a loving word of inquiry as to whether they enjoyed the truth preached; not even a kindly look which might win confidence and invite conversation. On the contrary, there is a chilling reserve, amounting almost to repulsiveness.

All this is very sorrowful; and perhaps my dear A. you will tell me that I am drawing too highly-coloured a picture. Alas! the picture is only too true. And what

makes it all the more deplorable is, that one knows as a fact that many persons frequent our preaching-rooms and lecture-halls in the deepest exercise, and they are only longing to open their hearts to some one who could offer them a little spiritual counsel; but through timidity, reserve, or nervousness, they shrink from making any advance, and have but to retire to their homes and to their bedchambers, lonely and sad, there to weep in solitude because no man cares for their precious souls. Now I feel persuaded that much of this might be remedied if those Christians who attend the gospel preachings were more on the look out for souls: if they would attend, not so much for their own profit, as in order to be co-workers with God, in seeking to bring souls to Jesus.

No doubt it is very refreshing to Christians to hear the gospel fully and faithfully preached. But it would not be the less refreshing because they were intensely interested in the conversion of souls, and in earnest prayer to God in the matter. Besides, it could in no wise interfere with their personal enjoyment and profit to cultivate and manifest a lively and loving interest in those who surround them, and to seek at the close of the meeting to help any who may need and desire to be helped. It has a surprising effect upon the preacher, upon the preaching, upon the whole meeting, when the Christians who attend are really entering into, and discharging, their high and holy responsibilities to Christ and to souls. It imparts a certain tone and creates a certain atmosphere which must be felt in order to be understood; but when once felt it cannot easily be dispensed with.

But, alas, how often is it otherwise! How cold, how dull, how dispiriting is it at times to see the whole congregation clear out the moment the preaching is over! No loving, lingering groups gathering round young converts or anxious inquirers. Old experienced Christians have been present; but, instead of pausing with the fond hope that God would graciously use them to speak a word in season to him that is weary, they hasten away as though it were a matter of life and death that they should be home at a certain hour.

Do not suppose that I wish to lay down rules for my brethren. Far be the thought. I am merely, in the freest possible manner, pouring out the thoughts of my heart to one with whom I have been linked in the work of the gospel for many years. I feel convinced there is a something lacking. It is my firm persuasion that no Christian is in a right condition, if he is not seeking in some way to bring souls to Christ. And, on the same principle, no assembly of Christians is in a right condition if it be not a thoroughly evangelistic assembly. We should all be on the lookout for souls; and then we may rest assured we should see soul-stirring results. But if we are satisfied to go on from week to week, month to month, and year to year, without a single leaf stirring, without a single conversion, our state must be truly lamentable.

But I think I hear you saying, "Where is all the Scripture we were to have had? where the many quotations from the Gospels and the Acts?" Well, I have gone on jotting down the thoughts which have for some considerable time occupied my mind. But if you so desire, I shall write you a second letter on the subject. Meanwhile, may the Lord, by His Spirit, make us more earnest in seeking the

salvation of immortal souls, by every legitimate agency. May our hearts be filled with genuine love for precious souls, and then we shall be sure to find ways and means of getting at them!

Ever, believe me dearest A

Your deeply affectionate yokefellow.

Letter 2

There is one point in connection with our subject which has much occupied my mind; and that is, the immense importance of cultivating an earnest faith in the presence and action of the Holy Ghost. We want to remember, at all times, that we can do nothing, and that God the Holy Ghost can do all. It holds good in the great work of evangelization, as in all beside, that it is "not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." The abiding sense of this would keep us humble, and yet full of joyful confidence. Humble, because we can do nothing; full of joyful confidence, because God can do all. Moreover, it would have the effect of keeping us very sober and quiet in our work — not cold and indifferent, but calm and serious, which is a great matter just now. I was much struck with a remark lately made by an aged workman, in a letter to one who had just entered the field. "Excitement," says this writer, "is not power, but weakness. Earnestness and energy are of God."

This is most true and most valuable. But I like the two sentences taken together. If we were to take either apart, I think you and I would prefer the latter; and for this reason: there are many, I fear, who would regard as "excitement" what you and I might really consider to be "earnestness and energy." Now I do confess, I love a

deep-toned earnestness in the work. I do not see how a man can be otherwise than deeply and thoroughly in earnest, who realises in any measure the awfulness of eternity, and the state of all those who die in their sins. How is it possible for any one to think of an immortal soul standing on the very brink of hell, and in danger at any moment of being dashed over, and not be serious and earnest?

But this is not excitement. What I understand by excitement is the working up of mere nature, and the putting forth of such efforts of nature as are designed to work on the natural feelings — all high pressure — all that is merely sensational. This is all worthless. It is evanescent. And not only so, but it superinduces weakness. We never find aught of this in the ministry of our blessed Lord or His apostles: and yet what earnestness! what untiring energy! what tenderness! We see an earnestness which wore the appearance of being beside oneself; an energy which hardly afforded a moment for rest or refreshment; and a tenderness which could weep over impenitent sinners. All this we see; but no excitement. In a word, all was the fruit of the Eternal Spirit; and all was to the glory of God. Moreover, there was ever that calmness and solemnity which becomes the presence of God, and yet that deep earnestness which proves that man's serious condition was fully realized.

Now, dearest brother, this is precisely what we want, and what we ought diligently to cultivate. It is a signal mercy to be kept from all merely natural excitement; and, at the same time, to be duly impressed with the magnitude and solemnity of the work. Thus the mind will be kept properly balanced, and we shall be preserved

from the tendency to be occupied with our work merely because it is ours. We shall rejoice that Christ is magnified, and souls are saved, whoever be the instrument used.

I have been thinking a good deal lately of that memorable time, now exactly ten years ago, when the Spirit of God wrought so marvellously in the province of Ulster. I think I gathered up some valuable instruction from what then came under my notice. That was a time never to be forgotten by those who were privileged to be eyewitnesses of the magnificent wave of blessing which rolled over the land. But I now refer to it in connection with the subject of the Spirit's action. I have no doubt whatever that the Holy Ghost was grieved and hindered in the year 1859, by man's interference.You remember dearest A. how that work began, you remember the little school-house by the road side, where two or three men met, week after week, to pour out their hearts in prayer to God, that He would be pleased to break in upon the death and darkness which reigned around: and that He revive His work, and send out His light and His truth in converting power. You know how these prayers were heard and answered. You and I were privileged to move through these soul stirring scenes in the province of Ulster; and I doubt not the memory of them is fresh with you, as it is with me, this day.

Well, what was the special character of that work in its earlier stages? Was it not most manifestly a work of God's Spirit? Did not He take up and use instruments the most unfit and unfurnished, according to human thinking, for the accomplishment of His gracious purpose? Do we not remember the style and character of the agents who were chiefly used in the conversion of

souls? Were they not for the most part "unlearned and ignorant men?" Further, can we not distinctly recall the fact that there was a most decided setting aside of all human arrangement and official routine? Working men came from the field, the factory, and the workshop, to address crowded audiences; and we have seen hundreds hanging in breathless interest upon the lips of men who could not speak five words of good grammar. In short, the mighty tide of spiritual life and power rolled in upon us, and swept away for the time being a quantity of human machinery, and ignored all question of man's authority in the things of God and the service of Christ.

Now we can well remember, that just in so far as the Holy Ghost was owned and honoured, did the glorious work progress; and, on the other hand, in proportion as man intruded himself, in bustling self-importance, upon the domain of the Eternal Spirit, was the work hindered and quashed. I saw the truth of this illustrated in numberless cases. There was a vigorous effort made to cause the living water to flow in official and denominational channels, and this the Holy Ghost would not sanction. Moreover, there was a strong desire manifested, in many quarters, to make sectarian capital out of the blessed movement; and this the Holy Ghost resented.

Nor was this all. The work and the workman were lionised in all directions. Cases of conversion which were judged to be "striking" were blazed abroad and paraded in the public prints. Travellers and tourists from all parts visited these persons, took notes of their words and ways, and wafted the report of them to the ends of the earth. Many poor creatures, who had up to that time lived in obscurity, unknown and unnoticed,

found themselves, all of a sudden, objects of interest to the wealthy, the noble, and the public at large. The pulpit and the press proclaimed their sayings and doings; and, as might be expected, they completely lost their balance. Knaves and hypocrites abounded on all hands. It became a grand point to have some strange and extravagant experience to tell; some remarkable dream or vision to relate. And even where this ill-advised line of action did not issue in producing knavery and hypocrisy, the young converts became heady and high-minded, and looked with a measure of contempt upon old established Christians, or those who did not happen to be converted after their peculiar fashion — "stricken," as it was termed.

In addition to this, some very remarkable characters — men of desperate notoriety, who seemed to be converted, were conveyed from place to place and placarded about the various streets, and crowds gathered to see them and hear them recount their history; which history was very frequently a disgusting detail of immoralities and excesses which ought never to have been named. Several of these remarkable men afterwards broke down, and returned with increased ardour to their former practices.

These things dearest A. I witnessed in various places. I believe the Holy Ghost was grieved and hindered, and the work marred thereby. I am thoroughly convinced of this: and hence it is that I think we should earnestly seek to honour the blessed Spirit; to lean upon Him in all our work; to follow where He leads, not run before Him. His work will stand: "Whatsoever God doeth it shall be forever." "The works that are done upon the earth, He is the doer of them." The remembrance of this will ever

keep the mind well balanced. There is great danger of young workmen getting so excited about their work, their preaching, their gifts, as to lose sight of the blessed Master Himself. Moreover, they are apt to make preaching the end instead of the means. This works badly in every way. It injures themselves, and it mars their work.

The moment I make preaching my end, I am out of the current of the mind of God, whose end is to glorify Christ; and I am out of the current of the heart of Christ, whose end is the salvation of souls, and the full blessing of His Church. But where the Holy Ghost gets His proper place, where He is duly owned and trusted, there all will be right. There will be no exaltation of man; no bustling self-importance; no parading of the fruits of our work; no excitement. All will be calm, quiet, real, and unpretending. There will be the simple, earnest, believing, patient waiting upon God. Self will be in the shade; Christ will be exalted.

I often recall a sentence of yours. I remember your once saying to me, "Heaven will be the best and safest place to hear the results of our work." This is a wholesome word for all workmen. I shudder when I see the names of Christ's servants paraded in the public journals, with flattering allusion to their work and its fruits. Surely those who pen such articles ought to reflect upon what they are doing: they should consider that they may be ministering to the very thing which they ought to desire to see mortified and subdued. I am most fully persuaded that the quiet, shady, retired path is the best and safest for the Christian workman. It will not make him less earnest but the contrary. It will not cramp his energy, but increase and intensify it. God forbid that you or I

should pen a line or utter a sentence which might in the most remote way tend to discourage or hinder a single worker in all the vineyard of Christ. No, this is not the moment for aught of this kind. We want to see the Lord's labourers thoroughly in earnest; but we believe, most assuredly, that true earnestness will ever result from the most absolute dependence upon God the Holy Ghost.

But only see how I have run on! And yet I have not referred to those passages of Scriptures of which I spoke in my last. Well, dearly beloved in the Lord, I am addressing one who is happily familiar with the Gospels and Acts, and who therefore knows that the great Workman Himself, and all those who sought to tread in His blessed footsteps, owned and honoured the Eternal Spirit as the One by whom all their works were to be wrought.

I must now close for the present, my much loved brother and fellow-labourer; and I do so with a full heart, commending you, in spirit and soul and body, to Him who has loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and called us to the honoured post of workers, in His gospel field. May He bless you and yours, most abundantly, and increase your usefulness a thousand fold!

As ever, and for ever

Your deeply affectionate fellow worker

Letter 3

There is another point which stands intimately connected with the subject of my last letter, and that is, the place the Word of God occupies in the work of evangelization. In my last letter, as you will remember, I

referred to the work of the Holy Ghost, and the immense importance of giving Him His proper place. How clearly the precious Word of God is connected with the action of the Holy Spirit, I need not say. Both are inseparably linked in those memorable words of our Lord to Nicodemus — words so little understood — so sadly misapplied: "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3).

Now, you and I, fully believe that in the above passage the Word is presented under the figure of "water." Thank God, we are not disposed to give any credit to the ritualistic absurdity of baptismal regeneration. We are, I believe, most thoroughly convinced that no one ever did, ever will, or ever could, get life by water baptism. That all who believe in Christ ought to be baptised we fully admit; but this is a totally different thing from the fatal error that substitutes an ordinance for the atoning death of Christ, the regenerating power of the Holy Ghost, and the life-giving virtues of the Word of God. I shall not waste your time or my own in combating this error, but at once assume that you agree with me in thinking that when our Lord speaks of being "born of water and of the Spirit," He refers to the Word and the Holy Ghost.

Thus, then, the Word is the grand instrument to be used in the work of evangelization. Many passages of holy Scripture establish this point with such clearness and decision as to leave no room whatever for dispute. In James 1: 18, we read, "Of His own will begat He us with the word of truth." Again, in 1 Peter 1: 23, we read, "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever." I must quote the whole passage

because of its immense importance in connection with our subject: "For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away; but the word of the Lord endureth forever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you."

This last clause is of unspeakable value to the evangelist. It binds him, in the most distinct manner, to the Word of God as the instrument — the only instrument — the all sufficient instrument, to be used in his glorious work. He is to give the Word to the people; and the more simply he gives it the better. The pure water should be allowed to flow from the heart of God to the heart of the sinner, without receiving a tinge from the channel through which it flows. The evangelist is to preach the Word; and he is to preach it in simple dependence upon the power of the Holy Ghost. This is the true secret of success in preaching.

But dearest A. while I urge this great cardinal point in the work of preaching — and I believe it cannot be too strongly urged — I am very far indeed from thinking that the evangelist should give his hearers a quantity of truth. So far from this, I consider it a very great mistake. He ought to leave this to the teacher, lecturer, or pastor. I often fear that very much of our preaching shoots over the heads of the people, owing to the fact of our seeking rather to unfold truth than to reach souls. We rest satisfied, it may be, with having delivered a very clear forcible lecture, a very interesting and instructive exposition of Scripture, something very valuable for the people of God; but the unconverted hearer has sat unmoved, unreached, unimpressed. There has been nothing for him. The lecturer has been more occupied

with his lecture than with the sinner — more taken up with his subject than with the soul.

Now I am thoroughly convinced that this is a serious mistake, and one to which we all — at least I am — very apt to fall. I deplore it deeply and I earnestly desire to correct it. I question if this very mistake may not be viewed as the true secret of our lack of success. But I should not perhaps say "our lack" but my lack. I do not think — so far as I know aught of your ministry — that you are exactly chargeable with the defect to which I am now just referring. Of this, however, you will be the best judge yourself; but of one thing I am certain, namely, that the most successful evangelist is the one who keeps his eye fixed on the sinner, who has his heart bent on the salvation of souls, yea, the one with whom the love for precious souls amounts almost to a passion. It is not the man who unfolds the most truth, but the man who longs most after souls, that will have the most seals to his ministry.

I assert all this, mark you, in the full and clear recognition of the fact with which I commenced this letter, namely, that the Word is the grand instrument in the work of conversion. This fact must never be lost sight of, never weakened. It matters not what agency may be used to make the furrow, or in what form the Word may clothe itself, or by what vehicle it may be conveyed; it is only by "the Word of truth" that souls are begotten.

All this is divinely true, and we would ever bear it in mind. But do we not often find that persons who undertake to preach the gospel (particularly if they continue long in one place) are very apt to leave the

domain of the evangelist — most blessed domain! — and travel into that of the teacher and lecturer? This is what I deprecate and deeply deplore. I know I have erred in this way myself, and I mourn over the error. I write in all loving freedom to you — the Lord has of late deepened immensely in my soul the sense of the vast importance of earnest gospel preaching. I do not — God forbid that I should — think the less of the work of a teacher or pastor. I believe that wherever there is a heart that loves Christ, it will delight to feed and tend the precious lambs and sheep of the flock of Christ, that flock which He purchased with His own blood.

But the sheep must be gathered before they can be fed; and how are they to be gathered but by the earnest preaching of the gospel? It is the grand business of the evangelist to go forth upon the dark mountains of sin and error, to sound the gospel trumpet and gather the sheep; and I feel convinced that he will best accomplish this work, not by elaborate exposition of truth; not by lectures however clear valuable, and instructive; not by lovely unfoldings of prophetic, dispensational, doctrinal truth — most precious and important in the right place — but by fervid, pointed, earnest dealing with immortal souls; the warning voice, the solemn appeal, the faithful reasoning of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come — the awakening presentation of death and judgment, the dread realities of eternity, the lake of fire and the worm that never dies.

In short, it strikes me we want awakening preachers. I fully admit that there is such a thing as teaching the gospel, as well as preaching it. For example, I find teaching the gospel in Rom. 1 - 8, just as I find him preaching the gospel in Acts 13 or Acts 17. This is of the

very last importance at all times, inasmuch as there are almost sure to be a number of what we call "exercised souls" at our public preachings, and these need an emancipating gospel — the full, clear, elevated, resurrection gospel.

But admitting all this, I still believe what is needed for successful evangelization is not so much a great quantity of truth as an intense love for souls. Look at that eminent evangelist George Whitefield. What think you was the secret of his success? No doubt you have looked into his printed sermons. Have you found any great breadth of truth in them? I question it. Indeed I must say I have been struck with the contrary. But oh! there was that in Whitefield which you and I may well covet and long to cultivate. There was a burning love for souls — a thirst for their salvation — a mighty grappling with the conscience — a bold, earnest, face-to-face dealing with men about their past ways, their present state, their future destiny.

These were the things that God owned and blessed; and He will own and bless them still. I am persuaded — I write as under the very eye of God — that if our hearts are bent upon the salvation of souls, God will use us in that divine and glorious work. But on the other hand, if we abandon ourselves to the withering influences of a cold, heartless, godless fatalism; if we content ourselves with a formal and official statement of the gospel — a very cheerless sort of thing; if, to use a vulgar phrase, our preaching is on the principle of "take it or leave it," need we wonder if we do not see conversions? The wonder would be if there were any to see.

No; no, I believe we want to look seriously into this great practical subject. It demands the solemn and dispassionate consideration of all who are engaged in the work. There are dangers on all sides. There are conflicting opinions on all sides. But I cannot conceive how any Christian man can be satisfied to shirk the responsibility of looking after souls. A man may say, "I am not an evangelist; that is not my line; I am more of a teacher, or a pastor." Well, I understand this; but will any one tell me that a teacher or pastor may not go forth in earnest longing after souls? I cannot admit it for a moment.

Nay more; it does not matter in the least what a man's gift is, or even though he should not possess any prominent gift at all, he can and ought, nevertheless, to cultivate a longing desire for the salvation of souls. Would it be right to pass a house on fire, without giving warning, even though one were not a member of the fire brigade? Should we not seek to save a drowning man, even though we could not command the use of a patent life-boat? Who in his senses would maintain aught so monstrous? So, in reference to souls, it is not so much a gift or knowledge of truth that is needed, as a deep and earnest longing for souls — a keen sense of their danger, and a desire for their rescue.

Ever, dearest A.

Your deeply affectionate yoke fellow.

Letter 4

When I took up my pen to address you in my first letter, I had no idea that I should have occasion to extend the series to a fourth. However, the subject is one of intense

interest to me; and there are just two or three points further on which I desire very briefly to touch.

In the first place I deeply feel our lack of a prayerful spirit in carrying on the work of evangelization. I have referred to the subject of the Spirit's work; and also to the place which God's Word ought ever to get; but it strikes me we are very deficient in reference to the matter of earnest, persevering, believing prayer. This is the true secret of power. "We," say the apostles, "will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word."

Here is the order: "Prayer, and the ministry of the Word." Prayer brings in the power of God; and this is what we want. It is not the power of eloquence, but the power of God; and this can only be had by waiting upon Him. "He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might He increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint" (Isa. 40: 29-31).

It seems to me that we are far too mechanical, if I may so express myself, in the work. There is too much of what I may call going through a service. I greatly fear that some of us are more on our legs than on our knees; more in the railway carriage than in the closet; more on the road than in the sanctuary; more before men than before God. This will never do. It is impossible that our preaching can be marked by power and crowned with results, if we fail in waiting upon God. Look at the blessed Master Himself — that great Workman. See how

often He was found in prayer. At His baptism; at His transfiguration; previous to the appointment and mission of the twelve. In short, again and again we find that blessed One in the attitude of prayer. At one time He rises up a great while before day, in order to give Himself to prayer. At another time He spends the whole night in prayer, because the day was given up to work.

What an example for us! May we follow it! May we know a little better what it is to agonise in prayer. How little we know of this! — I speak for myself. It sometimes appears to me as if we were so much taken up with preaching engagements that we have no time for prayer — no time for closet work — no time to be alone with God. We get into a sort of whirl of public work; we rush from place to place, from meeting to meeting, in a prayerless, barren condition of soul. Need we wonder at the little result? How could it be otherwise when we so fail in waiting upon God? We cannot convert souls — God alone can do this; and if we go on without waiting on Him, if we allow public preaching to displace private prayer, we may rest assured our preaching will prove barren and worthless. We really must "give ourselves to prayer" if we would succeed in the "ministry of the Word."

Nor is this all. It is not merely that we are lacking in the holy and blessed practice of private prayer. This is, alas! too true, as I have said. But there is more than this. We fail in our public meetings for prayer. The great work of evangelization is not sufficiently remembered in our prayer-meetings. It is not definitely, earnestly, and constantly kept before God in our public reunions. It may occasionally be introduced in a cursory, formal manner, and then dismissed. Indeed, I feel there is a

great lack of earnestness and perseverance in our prayer-meetings generally, not merely as to the work of the gospel, but as to other things as well. There is frequently great formality and feebleness. We do not seem like men in earnest. We lack the spirit of the widow in Luke 18, who overcame the unjust judge by the bare force of her importunity. We seem to forget that God will be inquired of; and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.

It is of no use for any one to say, "God can work without our earnest pleading; He will accomplish His purposes; He will gather out His own." We know all this; but we know also that He who has appointed the end has appointed the means; and if we fail in waiting on Him, He will get others to do His work. The work will be done, no doubt, but we shall lose the dignity, the privilege, and the reward of working. Is this nothing? Is it nothing to be deprived of the sweet privilege of being co-workers with God, of having fellowship with Him in the blessed work which He is carrying on? Alas! that we prize it so little. Still we do prize it; and perhaps there are few things in which we can more fully taste this privilege than in united earnest prayer. Here every saint can join. Here all can add their cordial Amen. All may not be preachers; but all can pray — all join in prayer; all can have fellowship.

And do you not find that there is always a stream of deep and real blessing where the assembly is drawn out in earnest prayer for the gospel, and for the salvation of souls? I have invariably seen it, and hence it is always a source of unspeakable comfort, joy, and encouragement to my heart when I see the assembly stirred up to pray,

for then I am sure God is going to give copious showers of blessing.

Moreover, when this is the case, when this most excellent spirit pervades the whole assembly, you may be sure there will be no trouble as to what is called "the responsibility of the preaching." It will be all the same who does the work, provided it is done as well as it can be. If the assembly is waiting upon God, in earnest intercession for the progress of the work, it will not be a question as to the one who is to take the preaching, provided Christ is preached and souls are blessed.

Then there is another thing which has of late occupied my mind a good deal; and that is our method of dealing with young converts. Most surely there is immense need of care and caution, lest we be found accrediting what is not the genuine work of God's Spirit at all. There is very great danger here. The enemy is ever seeking to introduce spurious materials into the assembly, in order that he may mar the testimony and bring discredit upon the truth of God.

All this is most true, and demands our serious consideration. But does it not seem to you that we often err on the other side? Do we not often, by a stiff and peculiar style, cast a chill upon young converts? Is there not frequently something repulsive in our spirit and deportment? We expect young Christians to come up to a standard of intelligence which has taken us years to attain. Nor this only. We sometimes put them through a process of examination which only tends to harass and perplex.

Now assuredly this is not right. The Spirit of God would never puzzle, perplex, or repulse a dear anxious inquirer

— never, no never. It could never be according to the mind or heart of Christ to chill the spirit of the very feeblest lamb in all His blood-bought flock. He would have us seeking to lead them on gently and tenderly — to soothe, nourish, and cherish them, according to all the deep love of His heart. It is a great thing to lay ourselves out, and hold ourselves open to discern and appreciate the work of God in souls, and not to mar it by placing our own miserable crotchets as stumbling-blocks in their pathway. We need divine guidance and help in this as much as in any other department of our work. But, blessed be God, He is sufficient for this as for all beside. Let us only wait on Him: let us cling to Him, and draw upon His exhaustless treasury for each case as it arises, for exigence of every hour. He will never fail a trusting, expectant, dependent heart.

I must now close this series of letters. I think I have touched most, if not all, of the points which I had in my mind. You will, I trust, bear in mind that I have, in all these letters, simply jotted down my thoughts in the utmost possible freedom, and in all the intimacy of true brotherly friendship. I have not been writing a formal treatise, but pouring out my heart to a beloved friend and yoke-fellow. This must be borne in mind by all who may read these letters.

May God bless and keep you. May He crown your labours with His richest and best blessing! May He keep you from every evil work, and preserve you unto His own everlasting kingdom! Ever believe me my dearest A.

Your deeply affectionate

Quick and powerful is the word,

Sharper than a two edged sword;

Wielded by the Spirits hand,

Nothing can its force withstand.

How its power was felt of old,

They who felt its power have told;

Many were the wonders wrought,

Multitudes to Jesus brought

Mighty God — who's word it is.

Hear our prayer and grant us this;

What Thy power has done before

By Thy Spirit do once more.

Letter 5

It seems as though I must once more take up my pen to address you on certain matters connected with the work of evangelisation, which have forced themselves upon my attention for some time past. There are three distinct branches of the work which I long to see occupying a far more definite and prominent place among us; and these are, the tract depot, the gospel preaching, and the Sunday-school.

It strikes me that the Lord is awakening attention to the importance of the tract depot as a valuable agency in the work of evangelization; but I question if we, on this side of the Atlantic, are thoroughly in earnest on the subject. How is this? Have books and tracts lost their interest and value in our eyes? Or does the fault lie in the mode of conducting our tract depots? To my mind there seems to be something lacking in reference to this matter.

I would fain see a well-conducted depot in every important town; by "well-conducted" I mean one taken up and carried on as a direct service to the Lord, in true love for souls, deep interest in the spread of the truth, and at the same time in a sound business way. I have known several depots fall to the ground through lack of business habits on the part of the conductors. They seemed very earnest, sincere persons, but quite unfit to conduct a business. In short, they were persons in whose hands any business would have fallen through. For example I have visited some places wherein the tract depot was managed, or rather mismanaged, by invalids. In one place, I found the business in the hands of a poor old bed-ridden woman. She was a most dear person, and it was quite delightful to spend an hour by her bedside, but how could she possibly manage a depot. I believe she had been confined to her bed for three years. One might pass her door for years, and never know that there was such a thing as a tract or a book to be had. There was no shop, no advertisements, no sort of exposure of the tracts in the window.

Nor is this an isolated instance. If it were, I should pass it over in silence. In many a large town, an obscure room in a backstreet a few tracts bundled together in dust and disgraceful confusion.

Now I should like to know who could be expected to purchase tracts under such circumstances. Most assuredly, the generality of persons would not do so. Then in many places there is the most deplorable failure as to the valuable and interesting work of conducting a depot. How can we best reach the people for whom the tracts and books are prepared? I believe by having the books and tracts exposed for sale in a shop window,

where that is possible, so that people may see them as they pass, and step in and purchase what they want. Many a soul has been laid hold of in this way. Many, I doubt not, have been saved and blessed by means of tracts, seen for the first time in a shop window or arranged on a counter. But where there is no such opportunity, the assembly's meeting room is the tract depot's natural home.

There is, manifestly, a real want of a tract depot in every large town, conducted by some one of intelligence and sound business habits, who would be able to speak to persons about the tracts, and to recommend such as might prove helpful to anxious inquirers after truth. In this way, I feel persuaded, much good might be done. The Christians in the town would know where to go for tracts, not only for their own personal reading, but also for general distribution. Surely if a thing is worth doing at all, it is worth doing well; and if the tract depot be not worth attending to, we know not what is.

The tract depot must be taken up in direct service to Christ. I feel assured that where it is so taken up and so carried on, in energy, zeal, and integrity, the Lord will own it and He will make it a blessing. Is there no one who will take up this valuable work for Christ's sake and not for the sake of remuneration? Is there no one who will enter upon it in simple faith, looking to the living God?

Here lies the root of the matter. For this branch of the work, as for every other branch, we need those who trust God and deny themselves. It seems to me that a grand point would be gained if the tract depot were placed on its proper footing, and viewed as an integral

part of the evangelistic work, to be taken up in responsibility to the Lord and carried on in the energy of faith in the living God. Every branch of gospel work — the depot, the preaching, the Sunday-school — must be carried on in this way. It is all well and most valuable to have fellowship — full cordial fellowship, in all our service; but if we wait for fellowship and co-operation in the starting of work which comes within the range of personal, as well as collective, responsibility, we shall find ourselves very much behind — or the work may not be done at all.

I shall have occasion to refer more particularly to this point, when I come to treat of the preaching and the Sunday-school. All I want now, is to establish the fact that the tract depot is a branch, and a most important and efficient branch, of evangelistic work. If this be thoroughly grasped by our friends, a great point is gained. I must confess to you that my moral sense has often been grievously offended by the cold, commercial style in which the publishing and sale of books and tracts are spoken of — a style befitting perhaps a mere commercial business, but most offensive when adopted in reference to the precious work of God.

I admit in the fullest way — nay, I actually contend for it — that the proper management of the depot demands good sound business habits, and upright business principles. But at the same time I am persuaded that the tract depot will never occupy its true ground — never realize the true idea, never reach the desired end — until it is firmly fixed on its holy basis, and viewed as an integral part of that most glorious work to which we are called — even the work of active, earnest, persevering evangelization.

And this work must be taken up in the sense of responsibility to Christ, and in the energy of faith in the living God. It will not do for an assembly of Christians, or some wealthy individual, to take up an inefficient portage, and commit to such an one the management of the affair in order to afford a means of living. It is most blessed for all to have fellowship in the work; but I am thoroughly convinced that the work must be taken up in direct service to Christ, to be carried on in love for souls, and real interest in the spread of the truth.

Letter 6

I have, in some of the earlier letters of this series, dwelt upon the unspeakable importance of keeping up with zeal and constancy, a faithful preaching of the gospel — a distinct work of evangelization, carried on in the energy of love to precious souls, and with direct reference to the glory of Christ — a work bearing entirely upon the unconverted, and therefore quite distinct from the work of teaching, lecturing, or exhorting, in the bosom of the assembly; which latter is, I need not say, of equal importance in the mind of our Lord Christ.

My object in referring again to this subject is to call your attention to a point in connection with it, respecting which, it seems to me, there is a great want of clearness amongst some of our friends. I question if we are, as a rule, thoroughly clear as to the question of individual responsibility in the work of the gospel. I admit, of course, that the teacher or lecturer is called to exercise his gift, to a very great extent, on the same principle as the evangelist; that is, on his own personal responsibility to Christ; and that the assembly is not responsible for

his individual services; unless indeed he teach unsound doctrine, in which case the assembly is bound to take it up.

But my business is with the work of the evangelist; and he is to carry on his work outside of the assembly. His sphere of action is the wide, wide world. "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." Here is the sphere and here the object of the evangelist — "All the world" — "Every creature." He may go forth from the bosom of the assembly, and return thither again laden with his golden sheaves; nevertheless he goes forth in the energy of personal faith in the living God, and on the ground of personal responsibility to Christ; nor is the assembly responsible for the peculiar mode in which he may carry on his work. No doubt the assembly is called into action when the evangelist introduces the fruit of his work in the shape of souls professing to be converted, and desiring to be received into fellowship at the Lord's table. But this is another thing altogether, and must be kept distinct. The evangelist must be left free: this is what I contend for. He must not be tied down to certain rules or regulations, nor cramped by special conventionalities. There are many things which a large-hearted evangelist willfeel perfectly free to do which might not commend themselves to the spiritual judgment and feelings of some in the assembly; but, provided he does not traverse any vital or fundamental principle, such persons have no right to interfere with him.

And be it remembered dearest A, when I use the expression, "spiritual judgment and feelings," I am taking the very highest possible view of the case, and treating the objector with the highest respect. I feel this

is but right and proper. Every true man has a right to have his feelings and judgment — not to speak of conscience — treated with all due respect. There are, alas! everywhere, men of narrow mind, who object to everything that does not square with their own notions — men who would fain tie the evangelist down to the exact line of things and mode of acting which according to their thinking would suit the assembly of God's people when gathered for worship at the table of the Lord.

All this is a thorough mistake. The evangelist should pursue the even tenor of his way, regardless of all such narrowness and meddling. Take, for example, the matter of singing hymns. The evangelist may feel perfectly free to use a class of hymns or gospel songs which would be wholly unsuitable for the assembly. The fact is, he sings the gospel for the same object that he preaches it, namely, to reach the sinner's heart. He is just as ready to sing "Come" as to preach it.

Such is the judgment which I have had on this subject for many years, though I am not quite sure if it will fully commend itself to your spiritual mind. It strikes me we are in danger of slipping into Christendom's false notion of "establishing a cause," and "organising a body." Hence it is that the four walls in which the assembly meets are regarded by many as a "chapel," and the evangelist who happens to preach there is looked upon as "the minister of the chapel."

All this has to be carefully guarded against: but my object in referring to it now is to clear up the point with respect to the gospel preaching. The true evangelist is not the minister of any chapel; or the organ of any congregation; or the representative of a body; or the

paid agent of any society. No; he is the ambassador of Christ — the messenger of a God of love — the herald of glad tidings. His heart is filled with love to souls; his lips anointed by the Holy Ghost; his words clothed with heavenly power. Let him alone! Fetter him not by your rules and regulations! Leave him to his work and to his Master!

And further, bear in mind that the Church of God can afford a platform broad enough for all sorts of workmen and every possible style of work, provided only that foundation truth be not disturbed. It is a fatal mistake to seek to reduce every one and every thing to a dead level. Christianity is a living, a divine reality. Christ's servants are sent by Him, and to Him they are responsible. "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth" (Rom. 14).

We may depend upon it these things demand our serious consideration, if we do not want to have the blessed work of evangelization marred in our hands.

I have just one other point that I would refer to before closing my letter, as it has been rather a vexed question in certain places — I allude to what has been termed "the responsibility of the preaching." How many of our friends have been and are harassed about this question! And why? I am persuaded that it is from not understanding the true nature, character, and sphere of the work of evangelization. Hence we have had some persons contending for it that the Sunday evening preaching should be left open. "Open to what?" That is the question. In too many cases it has proved to be "open" to a character of speaking altogether unsuited to

many who had come there, or who had been brought by friends, expecting to hear a full, clear, earnest gospel. On such occasions our friends have been disappointed, and the unconverted perfectly unable to understand the meaning of the service. Surely such things ought not to be; nor would they be if men would only discern the simplest thing possible, namely, the distinction between all meetings in which Christ's servants exercise their ministry on their own personal responsibility, and all meetings which are purely reunions of the assembly, whether for the Lord's Supper, for prayer, or for any other purpose whatsoever.

Your deeply affectionate

LETTER 7

Through want of space I was obliged to close my last letter without even touching upon the subject of the Sunday-school: I must, however, devote a page or two to a branch of work which has occupied a very large place in my heart for thirty years. I should deem my series incomplete were this subject left untouched.

Some may question how far the Sunday-school can be viewed as an integral part of the work of evangelization. I can only say it is mainly in this light I regard it. I look upon it as one great and most interesting branch of gospel work. The superintendent of the Sunday-school and the teacher of the Sunday-school class are workers in the wide gospel field, just as distinctly as the evangelist or preacher of the gospel.

I am fully aware that a Sunday-school differs materially from an ordinary gospel preaching. It is not convened in the same way, or conducted in the same manner. There is, if I may so express myself, a union of the parent, the

teacher, and the evangelist, in the person of the Sunday-school worker. For the time being he takes the place of the parent: he seeks to do the duty of a teacher; but he aims at the object of the evangelist — that priceless object, the salvation of the souls of the precious little ones committed to his charge. As to the mode in which he gains his end — as to the details of his work — as to the varied agencies which he may bring to bear, he alone is responsible.

I am aware that exception is taken to the Sunday-school on the ground that its tendency is to interfere with parental or domestic training. Now I must confess that I cannot see any force whatever in this objection. The true object of the Sunday-school is not to supersede parental training, but to help it where it exists, or to supply its lack where it does not exist. There are, as you and I well know, hundreds of thousands of dear children who have no parental training at all. Thousands have no parents, and thousands more have parents who are far worse than none. Look at the multitudes that throng the lanes, alleys, and courtyards of our large cities and towns, who seem hardly a degree above mere animal existence — yea, many of them like little incarnate demons.

Who can think upon all these precious souls without wishing a hearty God-speed to all true Sunday-school workers, and earnestly longing for more thorough earnestness and energy in that most blessed work?

I say "true" Sunday-school workers, because I fear that many engage in the work who are not true, not real, not fit. Many, I fear, take it up as a little bit of fashionable religious work, suited to the younger members of the religious communities. Many, too, view it as a kind of

set-off to a week of self-indulgence, folly, and worldliness. All such persons are an actual hindrance rather than a help to this sacred service.

Then again, there are many who sincerely love Christ, and long to serve Him in the Sunday-school, but who are not really fitted for the work. They are deficient in tact, energy, order, and rule. They lack that power to adapt themselves to the children, and to engage their young hearts, which is so essential to the Sunday-school worker.

It is a great mistake to suppose that every one who stands idle in the market-place is fit to turn into this particular branch of Christian labour. On the contrary, it needs a person thoroughly fitted of God for it; and if it be asked, "How are we ever to be supplied with suited agents for this branch of evangelistic service?" I reply, Just in the same way as you are to be supplied in any other department — by earnest, persevering, believing prayer.

I am most thoroughly persuaded that if Christians were more stirred up by God's Spirit to feel the importance of the Sunday school — if they could only seize the idea that it is, like the tract depot and the preaching, part and parcel of that most glorious work to which we are called in these closing days of Christendom's history — if they were more permeated by the idea of the evangelistic nature and object of Sunday-school work, they would be more instant and earnest in prayer, both in the closet and in the public assembly, that the Lord would raise up in our midst a band of earnest, devoted, whole-hearted Sunday-school workers.

This is the lack; and may God, in His abounding mercy, supply it! He is able, and surely He is willing. But then He will be waited on and inquired of; and "He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." I think we have much cause for thankfulness and praise for what has been done in the way of Sunday-schools during the last few years. I well remember the time when many of our friends seemed to overlook this branch of work altogether. Even now many treat it with indifference, thus weakening the hand and discouraging the hearts of those engaged in it.

But I shall not dwell upon this, inasmuch as my theme is the Sunday-school, and not those who neglect or oppose it. I bless God for what I see in the way of encouragement. I have often been exceedingly refreshed and delighted by seeing some of our very oldest friends rising from the table of their Lord, and proceeding to arrange the benches on which the dear little ones were soon to be ranged to hear the sweet story of a Saviour's love. And what could be more lovely, more touching, or more morally suited, than for those who had just been remembering the Saviour's dying love to seek, even by the arrangement of the benches, to carry out His living words, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me"?

There is very much I should like to add as to the mode of working the Sunday-school; but perhaps it is just as well that each worker should be wholly cast upon the living God for counsel and help as to details. We must ever remember that the Sunday-school, like the tract depot and the preaching, is entirely a work of individual responsibility. This is a grand point; and where it is fully understood, and where there is real earnestness of heart and singleness of eye, I believe there will be no great

difficulty as to the particular mode of working. A large heart, and a fixed purpose to carry on the great work and fulfil the glorious mission committed to us, will effectually deliver us from the withering influence of crotchets and prejudices — those miserable obstructions to all that is lovely and of good report.

May God pour out His blessing on all Sunday-schools, upon the pupils, the teachers, and the superintendents! May He also bless all who are engaged, in any way, in the instruction of the young! May He cheer and refresh their spirits by giving them to reap many golden sheaves in their special corner of the one great and glorious gospel field!

Ever believe me dearest A

Your deeply affectionate C H M.

Papers on the Lord's Coming - A

Papers on the Lord's Coming.

C. H. Mackintosh.

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INTRODUCTORY

The attentive reader of the New Testament will find in its pages three solemn and weighty facts presented to his view; namely, first, that the Son of God has come into this world and gone away; secondly, that the Holy Ghost has come down to this earth, and is here still; and, thirdly, that the Lord Jesus is coming again.

These are the three great subjects unfolded in the New Testament Scriptures; and we shall find that each of

them has a double bearing: it has a bearing upon the world and a bearing upon the Church; upon the world, as a whole, and upon each unconverted man, woman, and child in particular; upon the Church, as a whole, and upon each individual member thereof, in particular. It is impossible for any one to avoid the bearing of these three grand facts upon his own personal condition and future destiny.

And be it noted, we are not speaking of doctrines — though, no doubt, there are doctrines — but of facts, facts presented in the simplest possible manner by the various inspired writers employed to set them forth. There is no attempt at garnishing or setting off. The facts speak for themselves; they are recorded and left to produce their own powerful effect upon the soul.

1. And, first of all, let us look at the fact that the Son of God, has been in this world of ours. “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.” “The Son of God has come.” He came in perfect love, as the very expression of the heart and mind, the nature and character of God. He was the brightness of God's glory, and the express image of His Person, and yet a lowly, humble, gracious, social man; one who was to be seen, from day to day, about the streets; going from house to house; kind and affable to all; easily approached by the very poorest; taking up little children in His arms, in the most tender, gentle, winning way; drying the widow's tears; soothing the stricken and sorrowing heart; feeding the hungry; healing the sick; cleansing the poor leper; meeting every form of human need and misery; at the bidding of all who stood in need of succour and sympathy. “He went about doing good.” He was the unwearied servant of man's necessities. He never

thought of Himself, or sought His own interest in any one thing. He lived for others. It was His meat and His drink to do the will of God, and gladden the sad and weary hearts of the sons and daughters of men. His loving heart was ever flowing out in streams of blessing to all who felt the pressure of this sin-stricken, sorrowful world.

Here, then, we have a marvellous fact before our eyes. This world has been visited — this world has been trodden by that blessed One of whom we have spoken — the Son of God — the Creator and Sustainer of the universe — the lowly, self-emptied and loving, gracious Son of Man — Jesus of Nazareth — God over all blessed for ever, and yet a spotless, holy, absolutely perfect man. He came in love to men — came into this world as the expression of perfect love to those who had sinned against God, and deserved nothing but eternal perdition because of their sins. He came not to crush, but to heal — not to judge, but to save and to bless.

What has become of this blessed One? How has the world treated Him? It has cast Him out! It would not have Him! It preferred a robber and a murderer to this holy, gracious, perfect Man. The world got its choice. Jesus and a robber were placed before the world, and the question was put, “Which will you have?” What was the answer? “Not this man, but Barabbas.” “The chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas and destroy Jesus. The governor answered and said unto them, Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you? They said, Barabbas” (Matt. 27: 20-21). The religious leaders and guides of the people — the men who ought to have led them in the right way — persuaded the poor ignorant multitude to

reject the Son of God, and accept a robber and a murderer instead!

Reader, remember, you are in a world that has been guilty of this terrible act. And not only so, but unless you have truly repented and believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, you are part and parcel of that world, and you lie under the full guilt of that act. This is most solemn. The whole world stands charged with the deliberate rejection and murder of the Son of God. We have the testimony of no less than four inspired witnesses to this fact. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all bear record that the whole world — the Jeg and the Gentile — kings and governors, priests, and people — all classes, sects, and parties, agreed to crucify the Son of God — all agreed to murder the only perfect man that ever appeared on this earth — the perfect expression of God — God over all blessed for ever. We must either pronounce the four evangelists to be false witnesses, or admit that the world as a whole, and each constituent part thereof, is stained with the awful crime of crucifying the Lord of glory.

This is the true standard by which to measure the world, and by which to measure the condition of every unconverted man, woman, and child in the world. If I want to know what the world is I have only to reflect that the world is that which stands charged before God with the deliberate murder of His Son. Tremendous fact! A fact which stamps the world, in the most solemn manner, and places it before us in characters of appalling blackness. God has a controversy with this world. He has a question to settle with it — an awful question — the mere mention of which should make men's ears to tingle and their hearts to quake. A righteous God has to avenge the death of His Son. It is

not merely that the world accepted a vile robber and murdered an innocent man; this, in itself, would have been a dreadful act. But no; that innocent man was none other than the Son of God, the beloved of the Father's heart.

What a thought! The world will have to account to God for the death of His Son — for having nailed Him to a cross between two thieves! What a reckoning it will be! How red will be the day of vengeance! How awfully crushing the moment in the which God will draw the sword of judgment to avenge the death of His Son! How utterly vain the notion that the world is improving! Improving! — though stained with the blood of Jesus. Improving! — though under the judgment of God for that act. Improving! — though having to account to a righteous God for its treatment of the beloved of His soul, sent in love to bless and save. What blind fatuity! What wild folly! Ah, no! improvement there can be none till the besom of destruction and the sword of judgment have done their terrible work in avenging the murder — the deliberately planned and determinedly executed murder of the blessed Son of God. We cannot conceive any delusion more fatally false than to imagine that the world can ever be improved while it lies beneath the awful curse of the death of Jesus. That world which preferred Barabbas to Christ can know no improvement. There is naught before it save the overwhelming judgment of God.

Thus much as to the weighty fact of the absence of Jesus, in its bearing upon the present condition and future destiny of the world. But this fact has another bearing. It bears upon the Church of God as a whole, and upon the individual believer. If the world has cast

Christ out, the heavens have received Him. If man has rejected Him, God has exalted Him. If man has crucified Him, God has crowned Him. We must carefully distinguish these two things. The death of Christ, viewed as the act of the world — the act of man — involves naught but unmitigated wrath and judgment. On the other hand, the death of Christ, viewed as the act of God, involves naught but full and everlasting blessedness to all who repent and believe. A passage or two from the divine Word will prove this.

Let us turn for a moment to Psalm 69, which so vividly presents our blessed and adorable Lord suffering from the hand of man, and appealing to God for vengeance. “Hear Me, O Lord; for Thy loving kindness is good: turn unto Me according to the multitude of Thy tender mercies. And hide not Thy face from Thy servant; for I am in trouble: hear Me speedily: draw nigh unto My soul, and redeem it: deliver Me, because of Mine enemies. Thou hast known My reproach, and My shame, and My dishonour: Mine adversaries are all before Thee. Reproach hath broken My heart, and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none. They gave Me also gall for My meat, and in My thirst they gave Me vinegar to drink. Let their table become a snare before them: and that which should have been for their welfare, let it become a trap. Let their eyes be darkened, that they see not; and make their loins continually to shake. Pour out Thine indignation upon them, and let Thy wrathful anger take hold of them” (verses 16-28).

All this is deeply and impressively solemn. Every word of this appeal will have its answer. Not a syllable of it shall

fall to the ground. God will assuredly avenge the death of His Son. He will reckon with the world — with men for the treatment which His only begotten Son has received at their hands. We deem it right to press this home upon the heart and conscience of the reader. How awful the thought of Christ making intercession against people! How appalling to hear Him calling upon God for vengeance upon His enemies! How terrible will be the divine response to the cry of the injured Son!

But let us look at the other side of the picture. Turn to Psalm 22, which presents the blessed One suffering under the hand of God. Here the result is wholly different. Instead of judgment and vengeance, it is universal and everlasting blessedness and glory. “I will declare Thy name unto My brethren; in the midst of the congregation will I praise Thee. Ye that fear the Lord, praise Him; all ye the seed of Jacob, glorify Him; and fear Him, all ye the seed of Israel.... My praise shall be of Thee in the great congregation; I will pay My vows before them that fear Him. The meek shall eat and be satisfied; they shall praise the Lord that seek Him; your heart shall live for ever. All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord; and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before Thee. For the kingdom is the Lord's; and He is the governor among the nations.... A seed shall serve Him; it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation. They shall come, and shall declare His righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that He hath done this” (verses 22-31).

These two quotations present, with great distinctness, the two aspects of the death of Christ. He died, as a martyr, for righteousness, under the hand of man. For this, man will have to account to God. But He died, as a

victim, for sin, under the hand of God. This is the foundation of all blessing to those that believe in His name. His martyr-sufferings bring down wrath and judgment upon a godless world: His atoning sufferings open up the everlasting wellsprings of life and salvation to the Church, to Israel, and to the whole creation. The death of Jesus consummates the world's guilt; but secures the Church's acceptance. The world is stained, and the Church purged, by the blood of the cross.

Such is the double bearing of the first of our three great New Testament facts. Jesus has come and gone — come, because God loved the world — gone, because the world hated God. If God were to ask the question — and He will ask it — “What have you done with My Son?” What is the answer? “We hated Him, cast Him out, and crucified Him. We preferred a robber to Him.”

But, blessed for ever be the God of all grace, the Christian, the true believer, can look up to Heaven and say, “My absent Lord is there, and there for me. He is gone from this wretched world, and His absence makes the entire scene around me a moral wilderness — a desolate waste.”

He is not here. This stamps the world with a character unmistakable in the judgment of every loyal heart. The world would not have Jesus. This is enough. We need not marvel at any tale of horror now. Police reports, grand jury calendars, the statistics of our cities and towns need not surprise us. The world that could reject the divine personification of all human goodness, and accept a robber and a murderer instead, has proved its moral turpitude to a degree not to be exceeded. Do we wonder when we discover the hollowness and heartlessness of

the world? Are we surprised when we find out that it is not to be trusted? If so, it is plain we have not interpreted aright the absence of our beloved Lord. What does the cross of Christ prove? That God is love? No doubt. That Christ gave His precious life to save us from the flames of an everlasting hell? Blessedly true, all praise to His peerless name! But what does the cross prove as regards the world? That its guilt is consummated, and its judgment sealed. The world, in nailing to the cross the One who was perfectly good, proved, in the most unanswerable manner, that it was perfectly bad. "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin. He that hateth Me hateth My Father also. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin; but now have they both seen and hated both Me and My Father. But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated Me without a cause" (John 15: 22-26).

2. But we must now glance for a moment at our second weighty fact. God the Holy Ghost has come down to this earth. It is now over nineteen long centuries since the blessed Spirit descended from Heaven; and He has been here ever since. This is a stupendous fact. There is a divine Person on this earth; and His presence — like the absence of Jesus — has a double bearing: it has a bearing upon the world, and a bearing upon the Church — upon the world as a whole, and upon every man, woman and child therein; upon the Church as a whole, and upon every individual member thereof in particular. As regards the world, this august witness descended from Heaven to convict it of the terrible crime of

rejecting and crucifying the Son of God. As regards the Church, He came as the blessed Comforter, to take the place of the absent Jesus, and comfort by His presence and ministry the hearts of His people. Thus, to the world, the Holy Ghost is a powerful Convicter; to the Church He is a precious Comforter.

A passage or two of holy Scripture will establish these points in the heart and mind of the pious reader who bows in lowly reverence to the authority of the divine Word. Let us turn to chapter 16 of John's Gospel. “But now I go My way to Him that sent Me; and none of you asketh Me, Whither goest Thou? But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart. Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you. And when He is come, He will convict (elegxei) the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment. Of sin, because they believe not on Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father, and ye see Me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged” (verses 5-11).

Again in John 14 we read, “If ye love Me, keep My commandments. And I 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” (verses 15-19).

These quotations prove the double bearing of the presence of the Holy Ghost. We cannot attempt to dwell upon this subject in this brief introduction; but we trust

the reader may be led to study it for himself, in the light of holy Scripture; and we are persuaded that the more he thus studies it, the more deeply he will feel its interest and immense practical importance. Alas! that it should be so little understood; that Christians should so little see what is involved in the personal presence of the eternal Spirit, God the Holy Ghost, on this earth — its solemn consequences as regards the world, and its precious results as regards the assembly as a whole, and each individual member in particular.

Oh! that God's people everywhere may be led into a deeper understanding of these things; that they may consider what is due to that divine Person who dwells in them and with them; that they may have a jealous care not to “grieve” Him in their private walk, or “quench” Him in their public assemblies!

THE FACT ITSELF

In approaching this most glorious subject, we feel that we cannot do better than to lay before the reader the distinct testimony of holy Scripture to the broad fact itself, that our Lord Jesus Christ will come again — that He will leave the place which He now occupies on His Father's throne, and come in the clouds of heaven, to receive His people to Himself; to execute judgment upon the wicked; and set up His own everlasting and universal kingdom.

This fact is as clearly and fully set forth in the New Testament as either of the other two facts to which we have already referred. It is as true that the Son of God is coming from Heaven, as that He is gone to Heaven, or that the Holy Ghost is still on this earth. If we admit one

fact, we must admit all: and if we deny one, we must deny all; inasmuch as all rest upon precisely the same authority. They stand or fall together. Is it true that the Son of God was refused, cast out, crucified? Is it true that He has gone away into Heaven? Is it true that He is now seated at the right hand of God, crowned with glory and honour? Is it true that God the Holy Ghost came down to this earth, fifty days after the resurrection of our Lord; and that He is still here?

Are these things true? As true as Scripture can make them. Then just as true is it that our blessed Lord will come again, and set up His kingdom upon this earth — that He will literally, and actually, and personally come from Heaven, take to Himself His great power and reign from pole to pole, and from the river to the ends of the earth.

It may perhaps seem strange to some of our readers that we should deem it needful to undertake the proof of such a plain truth as this; but be it remembered that we are writing on this subject as though it were perfectly new to the reader; as if he had never heard of such a thing as the Lord's second coming; or as if, having heard of it, he still calls it in question. This must be our apology for handling this precious theme in so elementary a manner.

Now for our proofs.

When our adorable Lord was about to take leave of His disciples, He sought, in His infinite grace, to comfort their sorrowing hearts by words of sweetest tenderness. “Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you. I go to

prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14: 1-3).

Here we may have something most definite. Indeed it is as definite as it is cheering and consolatory. "I will come again." He does not say, I will send for you. Still less does He say, "You will come to me when you die." He says nothing of the kind. To send an angel, or a legion of angels, would not be the same thing as coming Himself. No doubt it would be very gracious of Him, and very glorious for us, if a multitude of the heavenly host were sent, with horses of fire and chariots of fire, to convey us triumphantly to Heaven. But it would not be the fulfilment of His own sweet promise. And most surely He will do what He promised to do. He will not say one thing and do another. He cannot lie or alter His Word. And not only this, but it would not satisfy the love of His heart to send an angel or a host of angels to fetch us. He will come Himself.

What touching grace shines in all this! If I am expecting a very dear and valued friend by train, I shall not be satisfied with sending a servant or an empty cab to meet him; I shall go myself. This is precisely what our loving Lord means to do. He is gone to Heaven; and His entrance there prepares and defines His people's place. Amid the many mansions of the Father's house, there would be no place for us if our Jesus had not gone before; and then, lest there should be in the heart any feeling of strangeness at the thought of our entrance into that place, He says, with such sweetness, "I will come again, and receive you unto Myself, that where I am there ye may be also." Nothing short of this can fulfil

the gracious promise of our Lord, or satisfy the love of His heart.

And be it carefully noted that this promise has no reference whatever to the death of the individual believer. Who can imagine that, when our Lord said, “I will come again,” He really meant that we should go to Him through death? How can we presume to take such liberties with the plain and precious words of our Lord? Surely if He meant to speak of our going to Him, through death, He could and would have said so. But He has not said so, because He did not mean so; nor is it possible that He could say one thing and mean another. His coming for us, and our going to Him, are totally different things; and being different ideas, they would have been clothed in different language.

Thus, for example, in the case of the penitent thief on the cross, our Lord does not speak of coming to fetch him; but He says, “Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise.” We really must remember that Scripture is as divinely definite as it is divinely inspired, and hence it never could and it never does confound two things so totally different as the Lord's coming and the Christian's falling asleep.

It may be well, at this point, to remark that there are but four passages in the entire New Testament in which allusion is made to the subject of the Christian passing through the article of death. The first is that passage in Luke 23 already referred to: “Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise.” The second occurs in Acts 7, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” The third is that most familiar and lovely utterance in 2 Corinthians 5, “Absent from the body, present with the Lord.” The fourth occurs in that

charming first of Philippians, “Having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better.”

These most precious passages make up the sum of Scripture testimony on the interesting question of the disembodied state. There is a passage in Revelation 14 often misapplied to this subject: “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.” But this has no application to Christians now, though no doubt all such who die in the Lord are blessed, and their works do follow them. The reference, however, is to a time yet future, when the Church shall have left this scene altogether, and other witnesses make their appearance. In a word, Revelation 14: 13 bears upon apocalyptic times, and must be so viewed if we would avoid confusion.

We must now resume our subject, and proceed with our proofs, and in so doing we shall ask the reader to turn to the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. The blessed Lord had just gone up from this earth, in the presence of His holy apostles. “And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by Him in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven” (verses 10, 11).

This is intensely interesting, and furnishes a most striking proof of our present thesis. Indeed it is impossible to avoid its force. Alas! that any should seek or desire to avoid it! From the manner in which the angelic witnesses speak to the men of Galilee it would

seem like tautology; but, as we well know, there is — there can be — no such thing in the volume of God. It is, therefore, lovely fulness, divine completeness, that we see in this testimony. From it we learn that the selfsame Jesus who left this earth, and ascended into Heaven, in the presence of a number of witnesses, shall so come in like manner as they had seen Him go into Heaven. How did He go? He went up personally, literally, actually, the very same person who had just been conversing familiarly with them — whom they had seen with their eyes, heard with their ears, handled with their hands — who had eaten in their presence, and "showed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs." Well then, "He shall so come in like manner."

"He who with hands uplifted,

Went from this earth below,

Shall come again all gifted,

His blessing to bestow."

And here we may ask — though it be rather anticipating what may come before us in a future paper — Who saw the blessed Lord as He went up? Did the world? Nay; not one unconverted, unbelieving person ever laid his eyes upon our precious Lord from the moment that He was laid in the tomb. The last sight the world got of Jesus was as He hung on the cross, a spectacle to angels, men, and devils. The next sight they will get of Him will be when, like the lightning flash, He shall come forth to execute judgment, and tread, in terrible vengeance, the winepress of the wrath of Almighty God. Tremendous thought!

None, therefore, but His own saw the ascending Saviour, as none but they had seen Him from the moment of His resurrection. He showed Himself, blessed be His holy name! to those who were dear to His heart. He assured and comforted, strengthened and encouraged their souls by these “many infallible proofs” of which the inspired narrator speaks to us. He led them to the very confines of the unseen world, just so far as men could go while still in the body; and there He allowed them to see Him ascending into Heaven; and while they gazed upon this glorious sight He sent the precious testimony home to their very hearts. “This same Jesus” — no other, no stranger, but the same loving, sympathizing, gracious, unchanging friend — “whom ye have seen go into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.”

Is it possible for testimony to be more distinct or satisfactory? Could proof be more clear or conclusive? How can any counter argument stand for a moment, or any objection be raised? Either those two men in white apparel were false witnesses, or our Jesus shall come again in the exact manner in which He went away. There is no middle ground between those two conclusions. We read in Scripture that, “in the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established;” and therefore in the mouth of two heavenly messengers — two heralds from the region of light and truth, we have the word established that our Lord Jesus Christ shall come again in actual bodily form, to be seen by His own first of all, apart from all others, in the holy intimacy and profound retirement which characterized His departure from this world. All this, blessed be God, is wrapped up in the two little words, “as” and “so.”

We cannot attempt, in a brief paper like the present, to adduce all the proofs which are to be found in the pages of the New Testament. We have given one from the Gospels and one from the Acts, and we shall now ask the reader to turn with us to the Epistles. Let us take, for example, the First Epistle to the Thessalonians. We select this Epistle because it is acknowledged to have been the earliest of Paul's writings; and further, because it was written to a company of very young converts. This latter point is valuable, inasmuch as we sometimes hear it stated that the truth of the Lord's coming is not suitable to bring before the minds of young believers. That the Apostle Paul did not think it unsuitable is evident from the fact that of all the Epistles which he wrote not one contains so much about the Lord's coming as that which he penned for the newly converted Thessalonians. The fact is, when a soul is converted and brought into the full light and liberty of the gospel of Christ, it becomes divinely natural for such a one to look for the Lord's coming. That most precious truth is an integral part of the gospel. The first coming and the second coming are most blessedly bound up together by the divine link of the personal presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church.

On the other hand, where the soul is not established in grace; where peace and liberty are not enjoyed; where a defective gospel has been received, there it will be found that the hope of the Lord's coming will not be cherished, for the simple reason that the soul is, of necessity, occupied with the question of its own state and prospects. If I am not certain of my salvation — if I do not know that I have eternal life — that I am a child of God — I cannot be looking out for the Lord's return. It

is only when we know what Jesus has done for us at His first coming that we can with bright and holy intelligence look out for His second coming.

But let us turn to our Epistle. Take the following sentences from the first chapter: “For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.... So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. For from you sounded out the word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to Godward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak anything. For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come” (verses 5-10).

Here we have a fine illustration of the effect of a full clear gospel, received in simple earnest faith. They turned from idols, to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son. They were actually converted to the blessed hope of the Lord's coming. It was an integral part of the gospel which Paul preached; and an integral part of their faith. Was it a reality to turn from idols? Doubtless. Was it a reality to serve the living God? Unquestionably. Well then it was just as real, just as positive, just as simple, their waiting for God's Son from Heaven. If we question the reality of one, we must question the reality of all, inasmuch as all are bound up together and form a beauteous cluster of practical Christian truth. If you had asked a Thessalonian Christian what he was waiting for, what would have been his reply? Would he have said, “I am waiting for

the world to improve by means of the gospel which I myself have received? or, I am waiting for the moment of my death when I shall go to be with Jesus?" No. His reply would have been simply this, "I am waiting for the Son of God from heaven." This, and nothing else, is the proper hope of the Christian, the proper hope of the Church. To wait for the improvement of the world is not Christian hope at all. You might as well wait for the improvement of the flesh, for there is just as much hope of the one as the other. And as to the article of death — though no doubt it may intervene — it is never once presented as the true and proper hope of the Christian. It may, with the fullest confidence, be asserted that there is not so much as a single passage in the entire New Testament in which death is spoken of as the hope of the believer; whereas, on the other hand, the hope of the Lord's coming is bound up, in the most intimate manner, with all the concerns and associations and relationships of life, as we may see in the Epistle before us. Thus, if the apostle would refer to the interesting question of his own personal connection with the beloved saints at Thessalonica, he says, "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For ye are our glory and joy."

Again, if he thinks of their progress in holiness and love, he adds, "And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you; to the end He may stablish your hearts unblamable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints" (1 Thess. 3: 12-13).

Finally, if the apostle would seek to comfort the hearts of his brethren in reference to those who had fallen asleep, how does he do it? Does he tell them that they should soon follow them? Nay; this would have been in full keeping with Old Testament times, as David says of his departed child, “I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me” (2 Sam. 12: 23). But it is not thus that the Holy Ghost instructs us in 1 Thessalonians — quite the reverse. “I would not,” he says, “have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that [not they which shall be, but] we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent [come before or take precedence of] them which are asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Thess. 4: 13-18).

It is impossible for any proof to be more simple, direct, and conclusive than this. The Thessalonian Christians, as we have already remarked, were converted to the hope of the Lord's return. They were taught to look out for it daily. It was as much a part of their Christianity to believe that He would come, as to believe that He had come and gone. Hence it came to pass that when some of their number were called to pass through death, they

were taken aback; they had not anticipated this; and they feared lest the departed should miss the joy of that blissful and longed-for moment of the Lord's return. The apostle therefore writes to correct their mistake; and, in so doing, he pours a fresh flood of light upon the whole subject, and assures them that the dead in Christ — which includes all who had or shall have fallen asleep; in short, those of Old Testament times as well as those of the New — should rise first, that is, before the living are changed, and all shall ascend together to meet their descending Lord.

We shall have occasion to refer to this remarkable passage again, when handling other branches of this glorious subject. We merely quote it here as one of the almost innumerable proofs of the fact that our Lord will come again, personally, really, and actually; and that His personal coming is the true and proper hope of the Church of God collectively, and of the believer individually.

We shall close this paper by reminding the Christian reader that he can never sit down to the table of his Lord without being reminded of this glorious hope, so long as those words shine on the page of inspiration, “For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till” — when? Till ye die? Nay; but — “till He come” (1 Cor. 11: 26). How precious is this! The table of the Lord stands between those two marvellous epochs, the cross and the advent — the death and the glory. The believer can look up from the table and see the beams of the glory gilding the horizon. It is our privilege, as we gather, on each Lord's day, round the Lord's table, to show forth the Lord's death, to be able to say, “This may be the last occasion of

celebrating this precious feast; ere another Lord's day dawn upon us, He Himself may come.” Again we say, How precious is this!

THE DOUBLE BEARING OF THE FACT

Having, as we trust, fully established the fact of the Lord's coming, we have now to place before the reader the double bearing of that fact — its bearing upon the Lord's people, and its bearing upon the world. The former is presented, in the New Testament, as the coming of Christ to receive His people to Himself; the latter is spoken of as “the day of the Lord” — a term of frequent use also in Old Testament Scriptures.

These things are never confounded in Scripture, as we shall see when we come to look at the various passages. Christians do confound them, and hence it is that we often find “that blessed hope” overcast with heavy clouds, and associated in the mind with circumstances of terror, wrath, and judgment, which have nothing whatever to do with the coming of Christ for His people, but are intimately bound up with “the day of the Lord.”

Let the Christian reader, then, have it settled in his heart, on the clear authority of holy Scripture, that the grand and specific hope for him ever to cherish is the coming of Christ for His people. This hope may be realized this very night. There is nothing whatever to wait for — no events to transpire amongst the nations — nothing to occur in the history of Israel — nothing in God's government of the world — nothing, in short, in any shape or form whatsoever, to intervene between the heart of the true believer and his heavenly hope. Christ may come for His people tonight. There is actually

nothing to hinder. No one can tell when He will come; but we can joyfully say that, at any moment, He may come. And, blessed be His name, when He does come for us, it will not be with the accompanying circumstances of terror, wrath, and judgment. It will not be with blackness and darkness and tempest. These things will accompany “the day of the Lord,” as the Apostle Peter plainly tells the Jews in his first great sermon, on the day of Pentecost, in which he quotes the following words from the solemn prophecy of Joel, “And I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath: blood and fire and vapour of smoke: the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before” — what? the coming of the Lord for His people? Nay; but before “that great and notable day of the Lord come.”

When our Lord shall come to receive His people to Himself no eye shall see Him, no ear shall hear His voice, save His own redeemed and beloved people. Let us remember the words of the angelic witnesses in the first of Acts. Who saw the blessed One ascending into the heavens? None but His own. Well, “He shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.” As was the going, so shall be the coming, if we are to bow to Scripture. To confound the day of the Lord with His coming for His Church is to overlook the plainest teachings of Scripture, and to rob the believer of his own true and proper hope.

And here perhaps we cannot do better than to call attention to a very important and interesting passage in the Second Epistle of Peter: “For we have not followed cunningly devised fables when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were

eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard when we were with Him in the holy mount. We have also the word of prophecy more sure [or confirmed], whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts" (2 Peter 1: 16-19).

This passage demands the reader's most attentive consideration. It sets forth, in the clearest possible manner, the distinction between "the word of prophecy" and the proper hope of the Christian, namely, "the morning star." We must remember that the great subject of prophecy is God's government of the world in connection with the seed of Abraham. "When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when He separated the sons of Adam, He set the bounds of the people according to the number of children of Israel. For the Lord's portion is His people; Jacob is the lot of His inheritance" (Deut. 32: 8, 9).

Here then is the scope and theme of prophecy — Israel and the nations. A child can understand this. If we range through the prophets, from the opening of Isaiah to the close of Malachi, we shall not find so much as a single line about the Church of God — its position, its portion, or its prospects. No doubt the word of prophecy is deeply interesting, and most profitable for the Christian to study; but it will be all this just in proportion as he understands its proper scope and object, and sees how it stands in contrast with his own special hope. We may fearlessly assert that it is as utterly impossible for any

one to study the Old Testament prophecies aright who does not clearly see the true place of the Church.

We cannot attempt to enter upon the subject of the Church in this brief paper. It has been repeatedly referred to and unfolded elsewhere, and we can now merely ask the reader to weigh and examine the statement which we here deliberately make, namely, that there is not so much as a single syllable about the Church of God, the body of Christ, from cover to cover of the Old Testament. Types, shadows, illustrations, there are, which, now that we have the full-orbed light of the New Testament, we can see, understand, and appreciate. But it was not possible for any Old Testament believer to see the great mystery of Christ and the Church, inasmuch as it was not revealed. The inspired apostle expressly tells us that it was “hid,” not in the Old Testament Scriptures, but “in God,” as we read in Ephesians 3: 9, “And to make all men see what is the fellowship [or rather the administration] of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ”. So also in Colossians we read, “Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints” (Col. 1: 26).

These two passages establish the truth of our statement beyond all question, for those who are willing to be governed absolutely by the authority of holy Scripture; they teach us that the great mystery — Christ and the Church — is not to be found in the Old Testament. Where have we in the Old Testament a word about Jews and Gentiles forming one body, and being united by the Holy Ghost to a living Head in Heaven? How could such a thing possibly be, so long as “the middle wall of

partition" stood as an insuperable barrier between the circumcised and the uncircumcised? If one were asked to name a special feature of the old economy he would at once reply, "The rigid separation of Jew and Gentile." On the other hand, if he were asked to name a special feature of the Church, or Christianity, he would as readily reply, "The intimate union of Jew and Gentile in one body." In short, the two conditions stand in vivid contrast, and it was wholly impossible that both could hold good at the same time. So long as the middle wall of partition stood, the truth of the Church could not be revealed; but the death of Christ having thrown down that wall, the Holy Ghost descended from Heaven to form the one body, and link it, by His presence and indwelling, to the risen and glorified Head in the heavens. Such is the great mystery of Christ and the Church, for which there could be no less a basis than accomplished redemption.

Now we entreat the reader to examine this matter for himself. Let him search the Scriptures to see if these things be indeed true. This is the only way to get at the truth. We must lay aside all our own thoughts and reasonings, our prejudices and predilections, and come like a little child, to the holy Scriptures. In this way we shall learn the mind of God on this most precious and interesting subject. We shall find that the Church of God, the body of Christ, did not exist, as a fact, until after the resurrection and ascension of Christ, and the consequent descent of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost. And further, we shall find that the full and glorious doctrine of the Church was not brought out until the days of the apostle Paul. (Compare Rom. 16: 25, 26; Eph. 1-3; Col. 1: 25-29.) Finally, we shall see that

the actual and unmistakable boundary lines of the Church's earthly history are Pentecost (Acts 2) and the rapture or taking up of the saints (1 Thessalonians 4: 13-17).

Thus we reach a position from which we can get a view of the Church's proper hope; and that hope is, most assuredly, “the bright and morning star.” Of this hope the Old Testament prophets utter not a syllable. They speak largely and clearly of “the day of the Lord” — a day of judgment upon the world and its ways (see Isaiah 2: 12-22 and parallel Scriptures). But “the day of the Lord,” with all its attendant circumstances of wrath, judgment, and terror, must never be confounded with His coming for His people. When our blessed Lord comes for His people there will be nothing to terrify. He will come in all the sweetness and tenderness of His love to receive His loved and redeemed people to Himself. He will come to finish up the precious story of His grace. “To them that look for Him shall He appear (ophthesetai) the second time, without [that is, apart from all question of] sin, unto salvation” (Heb. 9).* He will come as a bridegroom to receive the bride; and when He thus comes none but His own shall hear His voice or see His face. If He were to come this very night for His people — and He may, for aught we know — if the voice of the archangel and the trump of God were to be heard tonight, then all the dead in Christ — all who have been laid to sleep by Jesus — all the saints of God, both those of Old Testament and New Testament times, who lie sleeping in our cemeteries and graveyards, or in the ocean's depths — all these would rise from their temporary sleep. All the living saints would be changed in a moment, and all would be caught up to meet their

descending Lord, and return with Him to the Father's house. (John 14: 3; 1 Thess. 4: 16, 17; 1 Cor. 15: 51-52.)

{*The clause, “them that look for Him,” refers to all believers. It does not mean, as some suppose, those only who hold the truth of the Lord's second coming. This would make our place with Christ at His coming dependent upon knowledge, instead of upon our union with Him by the presence and power of the Holy Ghost. The Spirit of God, in the above passage, most graciously takes for granted that all God's people are looking, in some way or another, for the precious Saviour; and verily so they are. They may not see eye to eye as to all the details. They may not all enjoy equal clearness of view or depth and fulness of apprehension; but, most surely, they would all be glad at any moment to see the One who loved them and gave Himself for them.}

This is what is meant by the rapture or catching up of the saints, and has nothing to do directly with Israel or the nations. It is the distinct and only proper hope of the Church; and there is not so much as a single hint of it in the entire Old Testament. If any one asserts that there is, let him produce it. If there be such a thing, nothing is easier than to furnish it. We solemnly and deliberately declare there is no such thing. For all that respects the Church — its standing, its calling, its portion, its prospects — we must turn to the pages of the New Testament, and, of those pages, mainly the Epistles of Paul. To confound “the word of prophecy” with the hope of the Church is to damage the truth of God, and mislead the souls of His people. That the enemy has succeeded in doing all this, throughout the length and breadth of the professing Church is, alas! too true. And hence it is that so very few Christians have really

Scriptural thoughts about the coming of their Lord. They are looking into prophecy for the Church's hope — they confound “the Sun of righteousness” with “the morning Star” — they mix up the coming of Christ for His people, and His coming with them — they make His “coming” or “state of presence” to be identical with His “appearing” or “manifestation.”

All this is a most serious mistake, against which we desire to warn our readers. When Christ comes with His people, “every eye shall see Him.” When He is manifested, His people will be manifested also. “When Christ our life shall appear [or be manifested], then shall ye also appear with Him in glory” (Col. 3: 4). When Christ comes to execute judgment, His saints come with Him. “Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousand of His saints, to execute judgment upon all” (Jude 14, 15). So also in Revelation 19, the rider on the white horse is followed by the armies in Heaven upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. These armies are not angels, but saints; for we do not read of angels being clothed in white linen, which is expressly declared, in this very chapter to be “the righteousness of saints” (ver. 8).

Now, it is most evident that, if the saints accompany their Lord when He comes in judgment, they must be with Him previously. The fact of their going to Him is not presented in the book of Revelation, unless it be involved — as we doubt not it is — in the catching up of the man child, in chapter 12. The man child is, most surely, Christ; and inasmuch as Christ and His people are indissolubly joined in one, they are most completely identified with Him; blessed for ever be His holy and precious name!

But, clearly, it does not at all lie within the scope of the book of Revelation to give us the coming of Christ for His people, or their being caught up to meet Him in the air, or their return to the Father's house. For these blessed events or facts, we must look elsewhere, as, for example, in John 14: 3; 1 Corinthians 15: 23, 51, 52; 1 Thessalonians 4: 14-17. Let the reader ponder these three passages. Let him drink into his very soul their clear and precious teaching. There is nothing difficult about them, no obscurity, no mist or vagueness whatever. A babe in Christ can understand them. They set forth in the clearest and simplest possible manner, the true Christian hope, which — we repeat it emphatically, and urge it upon the reader as the direct and positive teaching of holy Scripture — is the coming of Christ to receive His people, all His people, to Himself, to take them back with Him to His Father's house, there to remain with Him, while God deals governmentally with Israel and the nations, and prepares the way, by His judicial actings, for bringing in the First-begotten into the world.

Now, if it be asked, “Why have we not the coming of Christ for His people in the book of Revelation?” Because that book is pre-eminently a book of judgment — a governmental, judicial book, at least chapter 1 to 20. Hence even the Church is presented as under judgment. We do not see the Church in chapters 2 and 3 as the body or the bride of Christ; but as a responsible witness on the earth, whose condition is being carefully examined and rigidly judged by Him who walks amongst the candlesticks.

It would not, therefore, comport with the character or object of this book to introduce, directly, the rapture of

the saints. It shows us the Church on the earth, in the place of responsibility. This it gives us, in Revelation 2 and 3, under the head of “the things that are.” But from that to Revelation 19, there is not a single syllable about the Church on earth. The plain fact is, the Church will not be on earth during that solemn period. She will be with her Head and Lord, in the divine retirement of the Father's house. The redeemed are seen in Heaven, under the title of the twenty-four crowned elders, in chapters 4 and 5. There, blessed be God, they will be, while the seals are being opened, the trumpets sounded, and the vials poured out. To think of the Church as being on the earth, from Revelation 6-18 — to place her amid the apocalyptic judgments — to pass her through “the great tribulation” — to subject her to “the hour of temptation which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth” — would be to falsify her position, to rob her of her chartered privileges, and to contradict the clear and positive promise of her Lord.*

{* We shall have occasion, in a future paper, to show that, after the Church has been removed to Heaven, the Spirit of God will act both among the Jews, and also among the Gentiles. See Revelation 7.}

No, no, beloved Christian reader; let no man deceive you, by any means. The Church is seen on earth in Revelation 2 and 3. She is seen in Heaven, together with the Old Testament saints, in Revelation 4 and 5. We are not told, in the Revelation, how she gets there; but we see her there, in high communion and holy worship; and then, in Revelation 19, the rider on the white horse comes forth, with His saints, to execute judgment upon the beast and the false prophet — to put down every

enemy and every evil, and to reign over the whole earth for the blissful period of a thousand years.

Such is the plain teaching of the New Testament, to which we earnestly invite the attention of our readers. And let no one suppose that our object is to find an easy path for Christians in thus teaching, as we do most emphatically, that the Church will not be in “the great tribulation” — will not come into “the hour of temptation.” Nothing of the kind. The fact is, the true and normal condition of the Church, and therefore of the individual Christian, in this world, is tribulation. So says our Lord: “In the world ye shall have tribulation.” And again, “We glory in tribulation.”

It cannot, therefore, be a question of avoiding that which is our appointed portion in this world, if only we are true to Christ. But the fact is, that the entire truth of the Church's position and prospect is involved in this question, and this is our reason for urging it so upon the prayerful attention of our readers.

The great object of the enemy is to drag down the Church of God to an earthly level — to set Christians entirely astray as to their divinely appointed hope — to lead them to confound things which God has made to differ, to occupy them with earthly things — to cause them to so mix up the coming of Christ for His people with His appearing in judgment upon the world, that they may not be able to cultivate those bridal affections and heavenly aspirations which become them as members of the body of Christ. He would fain have them looking out for various earthly events to come between them and their own proper hope, in order that they may not be — as God would have them — ever on the very

tiptoe of expectation, looking out, with ardent desire, for the appearing of “the bright and morning Star.”

Well does the enemy know what he is about; and surely we ought not to be ignorant of his devices, but rather give ourselves to the study of the Word of God, and thus learn, as we most surely shall, “the double bearing” of the glorious fact of the Lord's coming.

“THE COMING” AND “THE DAY”

We must now ask the reader to turn with us for a little to the two Epistles to the Thessalonians. As we have already remarked, these Christians were converted to the blessed hope of the Lord's return. They were taught to look for Him day by day. It was not merely the doctrine of the advent received and held in the mind, but a divine Person constantly expected by hearts that had learnt to love Him and long for His coming.

But, as we can easily imagine, the Thessalonian Christians were ignorant of many things connected with this blessed hope. The apostle had been “taken from them for a short time, in presence, not in heart.” He had not been allowed to remain long enough amongst them to instruct them in the details of the subject of their hope. They knew that Jesus was to return — that self-same blessed One who had graciously delivered them from the wrath to come. But as to any distinction between His coming for His people and coming with them — between His “state of presence” and His “appearing” His “coming” and His “day,” they were, at first, wholly ignorant.

Hence, as might be expected, they fell into various errors and mistakes. It is amazing how speedily the human mind wanders away into the wildest and grossest confusion and error. We need to be guarded on all sides by the pure, solid, all-adjusting truth of God. We must have our souls evenly balanced by divine revelation, else we are sure to plunge into all manner of false and foolish notions. Thus some of the Thessalonians conceived the idea of giving up their honest callings. They ceased to labour with their hands, and went about idle.

This was a great mistake. Even though we were perfectly certain that our Lord would come this very night, it would be no reason why we should not, most diligently and faithfully, attend to our daily round of duty, and do all that devolved upon us in that particular sphere in which His good hand has placed us. So far from this, the very fact of expecting the blessed Master would strengthen our desire to have everything done as it ought to be up to the very moment of His return, so that not so much as a single righteous claim should be left neglected. In point of fact, the hope of the Lord's speedy return, when held in power in the soul, is most sanctifying, purifying, and adjusting in its influence upon Christian life, conduct, and character. We know, alas! that even this most glorious truth may be held in the region of the understanding, and flippantly professed with the lips, while the heart and the life, the course, conduct, and character, remain wholly unaffected by it. But we are expressly taught by the inspired Apostle John, that “every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure” (1 John 3: 3). And, most surely, this “purifying” embraces

all that which goes to make up our whole practical life, from day to day.

But there was another grave mistake into which those dear Thessalonians fell, and out of which the blessed apostle, like a true and faithful pastor, sought to recover them. They imagined that their departed Christian friends would not have part in the joy of the Lord's return. They feared that they would fail to participate in that blissful and longed-for moment.

Now while it is quite true that this very mistake proves how vividly these Christians realized their blessed hope, still it was a mistake, and needed to be corrected. But let us carefully note the correction: “I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus [or are laid to sleep by Jesus] will God bring with Him.”

Mark this. He does not seek to comfort these sorrowing friends by the assurance that they should, ere long, follow the departed. Quite the reverse. He assures them that Jesus would bring the departed back with Him. This is plain and distinct, and founded upon the great fact that “Jesus died for us and rose again.”

But the apostle does not stop here, but goes on to pour a flood of fresh light upon the understanding of His dear children in the faith. “For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent [or precede] them which are asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the

dead in Christ shall rise first [that is, before the living are changed]. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in [the] clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

Here, then, we have presented to us what is commonly spoken of amongst us as the rapture of the saints — a most glorious, soul-stirring, and enrapturing theme — surely the brightest hope of the Church of God, and of the individual believer. The Lord Himself shall descend from Heaven with a summons designed only for the ears and the hearts of His own. Not one uncircumcised ear shall hear — not one un-renewed heart be moved by, that heavenly voice, that divine trumpet call. The dead in Christ, including, as we believe, the Old Testament saints, as well as those of the New, who shall have departed in the faith of Christ — all those shall hear the blessed sound, and come forth from their sleeping places. All the living saints shall hear it, and be changed in a moment. And oh! what a change! The poor crumbling tabernacle of clay exchanged for a glorified body, like unto the body of Jesus.

Look at yonder bent and withered frame — that body racked with pain, and worn out with years of acute suffering. It is the body of a saint. How humiliating to see it like that! Yes; but wait a little. Let but the trumpet sound, and in one moment that poor crushed and withered frame shall be changed, and made like to the glorified body of the descending Lord.

And there, in yonder mental hospital, is a poor patient. He has been there for years. He is a saint of God. How mysterious! True; we cannot fathom the mystery; it lies

beyond our present narrow range. But so it is; that poor patient is a saint of God, an heir of glory. He too shall hear the voice of the archangel and the trump of God, and leave his illness behind him for ever, while he mounts into the heavens, in his glorified body, to meet his descending Lord.

Oh! what a brilliant moment! How many sick beds shall be vacant then! What marvellous changes shall then take place! How the heart bounds at the thought, and longs to sing, in full chorus, that lovely hymn, “Christ, the Lord, will come again, None shall wait for Him in vain:

I shall then His glory see:

Christ will come and call for me.

Then, when the archangel's voice

Calls the sleeping saints to rise,

Rising millions shall proclaim

Blessings on the Saviour's name.

'This is our redeeming God!'

Ransomed hosts will shout aloud:

Praise, eternal praise, be given

To the Lord of earth and Heaven!”

Amen and amen!

How glorious the thought of those “rising millions”! How truly delightful to be amongst them! How precious the hope of seeing that blessed One who loveth us and who gave Himself for us! Such is the hope of the Christian, a hope concerning which there is not a single line from cover to cover of the Old Testament. “The word of

prophecy" is of all importance. We do well to take heed to it. It is an unspeakable mercy for those who find themselves in a dark place to have a bright lamp to cast its light athwart the gloom. But let the Christian bear in mind that what he wants is to have "the day star arising in his heart"; in other words, to have his whole heart governed by the hope of seeing Jesus as the bright and morning Star. When the heart is thus filled and ruled by the proper Christian hope, then the eye can intelligently scan the prophetic chart: it can take in the whole field of prophecy as our God has graciously opened it before us, and find interest and profit in every page and in every line. But, on the other hand, we may rest assured that the man who looks into prophecy in order to find the Church or its hope there has his face turned the wrong way. He will find "the Jew" there, and "Gentile" there, but not "the Church of God." We earnestly trust that not one of our readers will fail to lay hold of this fact — a fact, we may safely say, of the very deepest moment.

But it will perhaps be asked, "Of what use, then, is prophecy? If indeed it be true that we cannot find aught about the Church on the prophetic page, of what possible use can it be to Christians? Why should we be told to take heed to it if it does not immediately concern us?" We reply, Is nothing of any value to us save what immediately concerns ourselves? Shall we take no interest in anything unless we ourselves form the immediate subject thereof? Is it nothing to us to have the counsels and purposes and plans of God laid open before us? Do we lightly esteem the high favour of having the thoughts of God communicated to us in His holy Word of prophecy? Surely it was not thus that Abraham treated the divine communications made to

him in Genesis 18: “Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?” And what was that thing? Did it immediately concern Abraham? Not at all. It concerned Sodom and the neighbouring cities, and Abraham had no stake in them. But did that prevent his interest in the divine communication? Did it hinder his appreciation of the mark of special favour in his being made the honoured and trusted depository of the thoughts of God? Surely not. We may safely assert that the faithful patriarch highly esteemed the privilege conferred upon him.

And so should we. We should study prophecy with all the interest arising from the fact that therein we have unfolded to us, with divine precision, what God is about to do on this earth with Israel and with the nations. Prophecy is God's history of the future; and just in proportion as we love Him shall we delight to study His history; not indeed, as some have said, that we may know its truth by its fulfilment, but that we may possess all that absolute, that divine certainty as to the future which God's Word is capable of imparting. Nothing can be more absurd, in the judgment of faith, than to suppose that we must wait until the accomplishment of a prophecy to know that it is true. What an insult offered — unwittingly, no doubt — to the peerless revelation of our God.

But we must now turn, for a moment, to the solemn subject of “the day of the Lord.” This is a term of frequent occurrence in Old Testament Scriptures. We cannot attempt to quote all the passages; but we shall refer to one or two, and then the reader can follow up the subject for himself.

In Isaiah 2 we read, “For the day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up, and he shall be brought low.... And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low: and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day. And the idols he shall utterly abolish. And they shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of His majesty, when He ariseth to shake terribly the earth.”

So also in Joel 2. “Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand. A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains; a great people and a strong; there has not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations... the earth shall quake before them; the heavens shall tremble; the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining... for the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?”

From these and similar passages, we learn that “the day of the Lord” stands associated with the deeply solemn thought of judgment upon the world — upon apostate Israel — upon man and his ways — upon all that which the human heart prizes and longs after. In short, the day of the Lord stands in striking contrast with man's day. Man has the upper hand now, the Lord will have the upper hand then.

Now, while it is perfectly true that all the Lord's people can rejoice in the prospect of that day, which, though it will open in judgment upon the world, shall, nevertheless, be marked by the universal reign of righteousness; yet we must remember that the peculiar hope of the Christian is not that day with its awful accompaniments of judgment, wrath, and terror; but the coming or presence of Jesus, with its precious accompaniments of peace and joy, love and glory. The Church shall have met her Lord, and returned with Him to the Father's house, before that terrible day bursts upon the world. It will be her blissful portion to taste the sublime communion of that heavenly home, for an indefinite period previous to the opening of the day of the Lord. Her eyes shall be gladdened by the sight of "the bright and morning Star," long before even "the Sun of righteousness" shall arise, in healing virtue, upon the pious portion of the nation of Israel — the God-fearing remnant of the seed of Abraham.

We are intensely anxious that the Christian reader should thoroughly enter into this grand and important distinction. We feel persuaded that it will have an immense effect upon all his thoughts and views and hopes of the future. It will enable him to see, without a single intervening cloud, his true prospect as a Christian. It will deliver him from all mist, vagueness, and confusion; and further, it will divest his mind of all that feeling of dread with which so many even of the Lord's dear people contemplate the future. It will teach him to look for the Saviour — the blessed Bridegroom - the everlasting Lover of his soul, and not for judgments and terror, eclipses and earthquakes, convulsions and revolutions, it will keep his spirit tranquil and happy, in

the sure and certain hope of being with Jesus, ere that great and terrible day of the Lord come.

See how the faithful apostle laboured to lead his dear Thessalonian converts into the clear understanding of the difference between “the coming” and “the day.”

“But of the times and seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they [not ye] shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day; we are not of the night, nor of darkness” — The Lord be praised! — “Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep, sleep in the night; and they that are drunken, are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and for an helmet, the hope of salvation. For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep [that is, are dead or alive] we should live together with Him. Wherefore comfort yourselves together and edify one another, even as also ye do” (1 Thessalonians 5: 1-11).

Here we have the distinction set forth with unmistakable clearness. The Lord Himself shall come for us as the Bridegroom. The day of the Lord shall come upon the world as a thief. Is it possible for contrast to be more striking? How can any one confound these two things? They are as distinct as any two things can be. A

bridegroom and a thief are surely two different things; and just as different are the coming of the Lord for His waiting people and the coming of His day upon a slumbering or intoxicated world.

Some perhaps may find a difficulty in the fact that the Church in Sardis is addressed in such solemn words as these, “If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee” (Rev. 3: 3). The difficulty will vanish when we reflect that, in the case of Sardis, the professing body is looked upon as having a mere name to live while dead. It has sunk to the level of the world, and can only see things from the world's standpoint. The Church has failed utterly; it has fallen from its high and holy position; it is under judgment; it cannot therefore be cheered by the Church's proper hope; but is threatened by the world's terrible doom. We do not see the Church here as the body or bride of Christ, but as the responsible witness for God on the earth — the golden candlestick which ought to have held forth the divine light of testimony in this dark world, in the absence of her Lord. But alas! the professing Church has sunk lower and become darker than even the world itself. Hence the solemn threatening. The exception confirms the rule.

We shall proceed with this subject as presented in 2 Thessalonians.

It is a fact full of the richest comfort and consolation to the heart of a true believer, that our God, in His marvellous grace, ever makes the eater to yield meat, and the strong, sweetness. He brings light out of darkness, life out of death, and causes the bright beams

of His glory to shine amid the most disastrous ruin caused by the enemy's hand. The truth of this is illustrated throughout the Scriptures, and it should fill our hearts with peace and our mouths with praise.

Hence it is that the varied doctrinal errors and practical evils, into which the early Christians were permitted to fall, have been overruled of God, and used for the instruction, guidance, and solid profit of the Church to the close of her earthly history.

Thus, for example, the error of the Thessalonian Christians in reference to their departed brethren was made the occasion of pouring such a flood of divine light upon the Lord's coming, and upon the rapture of the saints, that it is impossible for any simple mind that bows to Scripture ever to fall into a similar mistake. They looked for the Lord to come, and in that they were right. They expected Him to set up His kingdom on the earth, and in that they were right, as to the broad fact.

But they made a great mistake in leaving out the heavenly side of this glorious hope. Their intelligence was defective — their faith lacking. They did not see the two parts — the double bearing of the advent of Christ — His descent into the air to receive His people to Himself, and His appearing in glory to set up His kingdom in manifested power. Hence they feared that their departed brethren would necessarily be absent from the sphere of blessing — the circle of glory. This mistake is divinely corrected, as we have seen, in 1 Thess. 4. The heavenly side of the hope — the Christian's proper portion — is placed before the heart as the true corrective for the error in reference to the sleeping saints. Christ will gather all (and not merely

part of) His people to Himself; and if there is to be any advantage — a shade of difference in the matter — it will be on the side of those very people about whom they were mourning. “The dead in Christ shall rise first.”

But from the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians we learn that those dear young converts had been led into another grave error — an error, not as to the dead, but as to the living — a mistake, not respecting “the coming,” but respecting “the day of the Lord.” In the one case they feared that the dead would not participate in the blissful triumph of “the coming”; and in the other case they feared that the living were actually, at the very moment, involved in the terrors of the day.

Such is the mistake with which the inspired apostle deals in his second letter to the Thessalonian believers; and nothing can exceed the tenderness and delicacy, and yet withal the wisdom and faithfulness of his dealing.

The Christians at Thessalonica were passing through intense persecution and tribulation; and it is very evident that the enemy, by means of false teachers, sought to upset their minds, by leading them to think that “the great and terrible day of the Lord” had actually arrived, and that the troubles through which they were passing were the accompaniments of that day. If this were so the entire teaching of the apostle was proved false; for if there was one truth that shone forth more brightly and prominently in his teaching than another, it was the association and identification of believers with Christ — an association so intimate, an identification so close, that it was impossible for Christ to appear in glory without His people. “When Christ, who is our life, shall

appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory." But He must appear in order to introduce "the day."

Furthermore, when the day of the Lord does actually arrive it will not be to trouble His people, but, on the contrary, to trouble their persecutors. Of this the apostle reminds them, in the most simple, forcible manner, in his very opening lines: "We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth, so that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure; which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer: seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven and with His mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God [Gentiles], and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ [Jews]" (2 Thess. 1: 6).

Thus, not only was the Christian position involved in this matter, but the very glory of God — His actual righteousness. If, indeed, the day of the Lord brought tribulation to Christians, then was there no truth in the doctrine — the grand prominent doctrine of Paul's teaching — that Christ and His people are one; and moreover it would impugn the righteousness of God. In short, then, if Christians were in tribulation, it was morally impossible that the day of the Lord could have set in, for when that day comes, it will be rest for believers, as their public recompense, in the kingdom —

not merely in the Father's house; which is not the point here. The tables will be completely turned. The Church will be in rest, the Church's troublers in tribulation. During man's day, the Church is called to tribulation; but in the day of the Lord all will be reversed.

Note this carefully. It is not the question of Christians suffering tribulation. They are actually called to it in this world, so long as wickedness has the upper hand. Christ suffered, and so must they. But the point we want to fasten upon the mind and heart of the Christian is that, when Christ comes to set up His kingdom, it is utterly impossible that His people can be in trouble. Thus the entire teaching of the enemy, by which he sought to upset the Thessalonian believers, was proved to be utterly fallacious. The apostle sweeps away the very foundation of the whole fabric by the simple statement of the precious truth of God. This is the divine way of delivering people from false notions and vain fears. Give them the truth, and error must flee before it. Let in the sunshine of God's eternal Word, and all the mists and clouds of false doctrine must be rolled away.

Let us, for a moment, examine the further teaching of our apostle, in this remarkable writing. In so doing, we shall see how thoroughly he establishes the distinction between “the coming” and “the day” — a distinction which the reader will do well to ponder.

“Now we beseech you, brethren, by [or on the ground of] the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto Him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter, as from us, as that the day of the Lord is present.”*

{*We have no pretensions whatever to scholarship; we are merely gleaners in the deeply interesting field of criticism in which others have reaped a golden harvest. We do not mean to occupy our readers with arguments in defence of readings given in the text; but we feel that there is no use in giving them what we consider to be erroneous. We believe there is no doubt whatever that the true reading of 2 Thessalonians 2 is as we have given it above, “as that the day of the Lord is present,” the word enesteken can only be thus rendered. It occurs in Romans 3: 38, where it is translated “things present.” So also in 1 Corinthians 3: 22, “things present”; 1 Corinthians 7: 25, “present distress”; Galatians 3: 4, “present evil world”; Hebrews 9: 9, “time then present.”

Now apart altogether from the question of various readings, a moment's reflection will suffice to show the simple minded Christian that the apostle could not possibly mean to teach the Thessalonians that the day of the Lord was not, even then, at hand. Scripture can never contradict itself. No one sentence of divine revelation can possibly collide with another. But if the reading given in our excellent Authorized Version were correct, it would stand in direct opposition to Romans 13: 12, where we are plainly and expressly told that “the day is at hand.” What “day”? The day of the Lord, most surely, which is always the term used in connection with our individual responsibility in walk and service.

This, we may remark in passing, is a point of much interest and practical value. If the reader will take the trouble to examine the various passages in which “the day” is spoken of, he will find that they have reference, more or less, to the question of work, service or responsibility. For instance, “That ye may be blameless

[not at the coming, but] in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1: 8). Again, "Every man's work shall be made manifest, for the day shall declare it" (1 Cor. 3: 13). "Without offence till the day of Christ" (Phil. 1: 10). "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day" (2 Timothy 4: 8).

From all these passages, and many more which might be adduced, we learn that "the day of the Lord" will be the grand time for reckoning with the workers; for the divine appraisal of service; for the setting of all questions of personal responsibility; for the distribution of rewards — the "ten cities" and the "five cities."

Thus, wherever we turn, in whatever way we look at the subject, we are more and more confirmed in the truth of the clear distinction between our Lord's "coming," or "state of presence," and His "appearing," or "day." The former is ever held up before the heart as the bright and blessed hope of the believer, which may be realized at any moment. The latter is pressed rather upon the conscience, in deep solemnity, as bearing upon the entire practical career of those who are set in this world to work and witness for an absent Lord. Scripture never confounds these things, however much we may do it; nor is there a single sentence from cover to cover of the holy volume which teaches that believers are not always to be looking out for the coming of the Lord, and eager to bear in mind that "the day is at hand." It is only "that evil servant" — referred to in our Lord's discourse in Matthew 24 — that "says in his heart, My Lord delayeth His coming"; and there we see the terrible results which must ever flow from the harbouring of such a thought in the heart.

We shall now return for a moment to 2 Thessalonians 2, a passage of Scripture which has given rise to much discussion amongst prophetic expositors, and presented considerable difficulty to the students of prophecy.

It is very evident that the false teachers had been seeking to disturb the minds of the Thessalonians by leading them to think that they were, even then, surrounded by the terrors of the day of the Lord. Not so, says the apostle; that cannot be. Before ever that day opens we must all be gathered to meet the Lord in the air. He beseeches them, on the ground (huper) of the Lord's coming and our gathering together unto Him, not to be troubled about the day. He had already opened to them the heavenly side of the Lord's coming. He had taught them that they, as Christians, belonged to the day; that their home and their portion and their hope were all in that very region from which the day was to shine out. It was wholly impossible, therefore, that the day of the Lord could involve any terror or trouble to those who were actually, through grace, the sons of the day.

Further, even in looking at the subject from the earthly side of it, the false teachers were all wrong. “Let no man deceive you by any means: for [that day shall not come] except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he, as God, sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Remember ye not that when I was with you I told you these things. And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he

be taken out of the way. And then shall that wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming [for the appearing of His presence]. Even him whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved" (verses 3-10).

Here, then, we are taught that ere the day of the Lord arrives, the lawless one, the man of sin, the son of perdition, must be revealed. The mystery of iniquity must rise to a head. Man shall set himself up in open opposition to God, nay, shall even assume to himself the name and the worship of God. All this has to be developed on the earth before that great and terrible day of the Lord shall burst in judgment upon the scene. For the present there is a barrier, a hindrance to the manifestation of this awful personage. We are not told here what this barrier or hindrance is. God may vary it at different times.* But we learn, most distinctly, from the book of Revelation that ere the mystery of iniquity culminates in the person of the man of sin, the Church shall have been removed from this scene altogether. It is impossible to read, with an enlightened eye, Revelation 4, 5 and not see that the Church shall be in the very innermost circle of heavenly glory ere a single seal is opened, a single trumpet sounded, a single vial poured out. We do not believe that any one can understand the book of the Apocalypse who does not see this.

{* Some have considered that the hinderer is the Holy Ghost. This, at least, we know from other parts of Scripture, that ere the lawless one appears on the scene,

the Church will have been safely and blessedly housed in her own eternal home above — her prepared place. How precious the thought of this!}

We may have occasion to go more freely into this profoundly interesting point by-and-by. We can only now entreat the reader to study the subject for himself. Let him ponder Revelation 4, 5, and ask God to interpret their precious contents to his soul. In this way we feel persuaded that he will learn that the twenty-four crowned elders set forth the heavenly saints, who shall be gathered round the Lamb, in glory, before a single line of the prophetic portion of the book is fulfilled.

We should like to put a very plain question to the reader — a question which can only be answered rightly in the immediate presence of God. It is this, What is it you are looking for? What is your hope? Are you looking forward to certain events which are to transpire on this earth, such as the revival of the Roman Empire, the development of the ten kingdoms; the gathering back of the Jews to their own land of Palestine; the rebuilding of Jerusalem; the appearance of Antichrist; the great tribulation; and finally, the appalling judgments which shall, most surely, usher in the day of the Lord?

Are these the things which fill the vision of your soul? Is it for these you are looking and waiting? If so, be assured of it, you are not governed by the Church's proper hope. It is quite true that all these things which we have named shall come to pass in their appointed time; but not one of them should be allowed to come between you and your proper hope. They all stand on the prophetic page: they are all recorded in God's history of the future; but they were never intended to

cast a shadow athwart the Christian's bright and blessed hope. That hope stands forth in glorious relief from the background of prophecy. What is it? Yes, we again say, what is it? It is the appearing of the bright and morning Star — the coming of the Lord Jesus, the blessed Bridegroom of the Church.

This, and naught else, is the true and proper hope of the Church of God. “I will give him the morning star” (Rev. 2: 23). “Behold the bridegroom cometh” (Matt. 25). When, we may ask, does the morning star appear in the natural world? Just before the dawning of the day. Who sees it? The one who has been watching during the dark and dreary hours of the night. How plain, how practical, how telling the application. The Church is supposed to be watching — to be lovingly wakeful — to be looking out. Alas! the Church has failed in this. But that is no reason why the individual believer should not be in the full present power of the blessed hope. “Let him that heareth say, Come.” This is deeply personal. Oh! that the writer and the reader of these lines may realize habitually the purifying, sanctifying, elevating power of this heavenly hope! May we understand and exhibit the practical power of those words of the Apostle John, “Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure.”

THE TWO RESURRECTIONS

It may be that some of our readers will feel startled by the title of this section. Accustomed, from their earliest days, to look at this great question through the medium of christendom's standards of doctrine and confessions of faith, the idea of two resurrections has never once

entered their minds. Nevertheless Scripture does speak, in the most distinct and unequivocal terms, of a "resurrection of life," and a "resurrection of judgment" — two resurrections, distinct in character, and distinct in time.

And not only so, but it informs us that there will be, at least, a thousand years between the two. If men teach otherwise — if they build up systems of divinity, and set forth creeds and confessions of faith contrary to the direct and positive teaching of holy Scripture, they must settle that with their Lord, as must all who commit themselves to their guidance. But remember, reader, it is your bounden duty and ours to hearken only to the authority of the Word of God, and to bow down, in unqualified submission, to its holy teaching. Let us, then, reverently inquire, what saith the Scripture on the subject indicated at the head of this article? May God the Spirit guide and instruct!

We shall first quote that remarkable passage in John 5: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth My word and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment; but is passed from death unto life. Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live. For as the Father hath life in Himself; so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself; and hath given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of man. Marvel not at this; for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth, they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment."*

{* The English reader should be informed that, in the entire passage, John 5: 22-26, the words “judgment,” “condemnation,” “damnation,” are all expressed by the same word in the original, and that word is simply “judgment,” krisis, the process, not the result. It is much to be deplored that our Authorized Version should not have so rendered the word throughout. It would have made the teaching of the passage so very much clearer. It is with extreme reluctance that we ever venture to touch our unrivalled English Bible, but it is, at times, absolutely necessary for the truth's sake, and for the sake of our readers. As to the rendering of verse 24, it really comes to the same thing whether we say “condemnation” or “judgment,” inasmuch as if there be judgment at all, its issue must be condemnation. But why not be accurate?}

Here, then, we have, indicated in the most unmistakable terms, the two resurrections. True, they are not distinguished as to time, in this passage; but they are as to character. We have a life resurrection; and a judgment resurrection, and nothing can be more distinct than these. There is no possible ground here on which to build the theory of a general resurrection. The resurrection of believers will be eclectic; it will be on the same principle, and partake of the same character as the resurrection of our blessed and adorable Lord; it will be a resurrection from among the dead. It will be an act of divine power, founded upon accomplished redemption, whereby God will interpose on behalf of His sleeping saints, and raise them up from among the dead, leaving the rest of the dead in their graves for a thousand years (Revelation 20: 5).

There is an interesting passage in Mark 9 which throws great light on this subject. The opening verses contain the record of the transfiguration; and then we read, “As they came down from the mountain, He charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen, till the Son of man were risen from the dead. And they kept that saying with themselves, questioning one with another what the rising from [ek, from among] the dead should mean.”

The disciples felt that there was something special, something entirely beyond the ordinary orthodox idea of the resurrection of the dead, and verily so there was, though they understood it not then. It lay beyond their range of vision at that moment.

Let us turn to Philippians 3, and hearken to the breathings of one who thoroughly entered into and appreciated this grand Christian doctrine, and fondly cherished this glorious and heavenly hope. “That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death: if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection from among the dead” [exanastasin] (verses 10, 11).

A moment's just reflection will suffice to convince the reader that the apostle is not speaking here of the great broad truth of “the resurrection of the dead,” inasmuch as every one must rise again. But there was something specific before the heart of this dear servant of Christ, namely, “a resurrection from among the dead” — an eclectic resurrection — a resurrection formed on the model of Christ's resurrection. It was for this he longed continually. This was the bright and blessed hope that

shone upon his soul and cheered him amid the sorrows and trials, the toils and the difficulties, the buffetings and the conflicts of his extraordinary career.

But it may be asked, “Does the apostle always use this distinguishing little word (ek) when speaking of resurrection?” Not always. Turn, for example, to Acts 24: 15: “And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.” Here, there is no word to indicate the Christian or heavenly side of the subject, for the simplest possible reason that the apostle was speaking to those who were utterly incapable of entering into the Christian's proper hope — far more incapable than even the disciples in Mark 9. How could he possibly unbosom himself in the presence of such men as Tertullus, Ananias, and Felix? How could he speak to them of his own specific and fondly cherished hope? No; he could only take his stand on the great broad truth of resurrection, common to all orthodox Jews. Had he spoken of a “resurrection from among the dead,” he could not have added the words, “which they themselves also allow,” for they did not “allow” anything of the kind.

But oh! what a contrast between this precious servant of Christ, defending himself from his accusers, in Acts 24, and baring his heart to his beloved brethren, in Philippians 3! To the latter he can speak of the true Christian hope in the full-orbed light which the glory of Christ pours upon it. He can give utterance to the inmost thoughts, feelings, and aspirations of the great, large, loving heart, with its earnest throbbings after the life-resurrection in the which he shall be satisfied as he wakes up in the likeness of his blessed Lord.

But we must return, for a moment, to our first quotation, from John 5. It may perhaps present a difficulty to some of our readers in laying hold of the truth of the Christian's hope of resurrection, that our Lord makes use of the word “hour” in speaking of the two classes. “How,” it is argued, “can there be a thousand years between the two resurrections, when our Lord expressly tells us that all shall occur within the limits of an hour?”

To this question we have a double reply. In the first place, we find our Lord making use of the selfsame word, “hour,” at verse 25, where He is speaking of the great and glorious work of quickening dead souls. “Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live.”

Now, here we have a work which has been going on for nearly nineteen long centuries. During all that time, here spoken of as an “hour,” the voice of Jesus, the Son of God, has been heard calling precious souls from death to life. If, therefore, in the very same discourse, our Lord used the word “hour” when speaking of a period which has already extended to well-nigh two thousand years, what difficulty can there be in applying the word to a period of one thousand years?

Surely, none whatever, as we judge. But even if any little difficulty yet remained it must be thoroughly met by the direct testimony of the Holy Ghost in Revelation 20, where we read, “But the rest of the dead lived not again till the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no

power, but they shall be priests of God, and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years" (verses 5, 6).

This settles the question absolutely and forever, for all those who are willing to be taught exclusively by holy Scripture, as every true Christian ought to be. There will be two resurrections, the first and the second: and there will be a thousand years between the two. To the former belong all the Old Testament saints — referred to in Hebrews 12 under the title of the spirits of just men made perfect — then the Church of the firstborn ones — and finally all those who shall be put to death during "the great tribulation," and throughout the entire period between the rapture of the saints and the appearing of Christ in judgment upon the beast and his armies, in Revelation 19.

To the latter, on the other hand, belong all those who shall have died in their sins, from the days of Cain, in Genesis 4, down to the last apostate from millennial glory, in Revelation 20.

How solemn is all this! How real! How soul-subduing! If our Lord were to come to night what a scene would be enacted in all our cemeteries and graveyards! What tongue, what pen can portray — what heart can conceive — the grand realities of such a moment? There are thousands of tombs in which lie mingled the dust of the dead in Christ and the dust of the dead out of Christ. In many a family vault may be found the dust of both. Well, then, when the voice of the archangel is heard all the sleeping saints shall rise from their graves, leaving behind them those who have died in their sins, to remain in the darkness and silence of the tomb for a thousand years.

Yes, reader, such is the direct and simple testimony of the Word of God. True, it does not enter into any curious details. It does not furnish any food for a morbid imagination or idle curiosity. But it sets forth the solemn and weighty fact of a first and second resurrection — a resurrection of life and everlasting glory, and a resurrection of judgment and everlasting misery. There is, positively, no such thing in Scripture as a general resurrection — a common rising of all at the same time. We must abandon this idea altogether, like many others which we have received to hold, in which we have been trained from our earliest days, which have grown with our growth and strengthened with our strength, until they have become actually ingrained as a part of our very mental, moral, and religious constitution, so that to part with them is like the sundering of limb from limb, or rending the flesh from our bones.

Nevertheless it must be done if we really desire to grow in the knowledge of divine revelation. There is no greater hindrance to our getting into the thoughts of God than having our minds filled with our own thoughts, or the thoughts of men. Thus, for example, in reference to the subject of this paper, almost all of us have, at one time, held the opinion that all will rise together, both believers and unbelievers, and all stand together to be judged. Whereas, when we come to Scripture, like a little child, nothing can be simpler, nothing clearer, nothing more explicit than its teaching as to this question. Revelation 20: 5 teaches us that there will be an interval of a thousand years between the resurrection of the saints and the resurrection of the wicked.

It is of no use to speak of a resurrection of spirits. Indeed it is a manifest piece of absurdity; for inasmuch

as spirits cannot die they cannot be raised from the dead. Equally absurd is it to speak of a resurrection of principles. There is no such thing in Scripture. The language is as plain as plainness itself. “The rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.” Why should any one seek to set aside the plain force of such a passage? Why not bow to it? Why not get rid, at once, of all our old and fondly cherished notions, and receive with meekness the engrafted Word?

Reader, does it not seem plain to you that if Scripture speaks of a first resurrection, then it must follow that all will not rise together? Why should it be said, “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection,” if all are to rise at the same time?

In fact it seems to us impossible for any unprejudiced mind to study the New Testament and yet hold to the theory of a general resurrection. It is due to the glory of Christ, the Head, that His members should have a specific resurrection — a resurrection like His own — a resurrection from among the dead. And verily, so they shall. “Behold I show you a mystery: we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the

law. But thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" 1 Corinthians 15: 51-58. _____

Papers on the Lord's Coming - B

THE JUDGMENT

There is something peculiarly painful in the thought of having so frequently to come in collision with the generally received opinions of the professing Church. It looks presumptuous to contradict, on so many subjects, all the great standards and creeds of Christendom. But what is one to do? Were it indeed a mere question of human opinion it might seem a piece of bold and unwarrantable temerity for any one individual to set himself in direct opposition to the established faith of the whole professing Church — a faith which has held sway for centuries over the minds of millions.

But we would ever impress upon our readers the fact that it is not at all a question of human opinion or of a difference of judgment amongst even the very best of men. It is entirely a question as to the teaching and authority of holy Scripture. There have been, and there are, and there will be, schools of doctrine, varieties of opinion, and shades of thought; but it is the obvious duty of every child of God and every servant of Christ to bow down, in holy reverence, and hearken to the voice of God in Scripture. If it be merely a matter of human authority, it must simply go for what it is worth; but, on the other hand, if it be a matter of divine authority, then all discussion is closed, and our place — the place of all — is to bow and believe.

Thus, in our previous section we were led to see that there is no such thing in Scripture as a general resurrection — a common rising of all at the same time. We trust our readers have, like the Bereans of old,

searched the Scriptures as to this, and that they are now prepared to accompany us in our examination of the Word of God as to the subject of the judgment.

The great question at the outset is this, Does Scripture teach the doctrine of a general judgment? Christendom holds it; but does Scripture teach it? Let us see.

In the first place, as to the Christian individually, and the Church of God, collectively, the New Testament sets forth the precious truth that there is no judgment at all. So far as the believer is concerned judgment is past and gone. The heavy cloud of judgment has burst upon the head of our divine Sin-bearer. He has exhausted, on our behalf, the cup of wrath and judgment, and planted us on the new ground of resurrection, to which judgment can never, by any possibility, apply. It is just as impossible that a member of the body of Christ can come into judgment as that the divine Head Himself can do so. This seems a very strong statement to make; but is it true? If so, its strength is part of its moral value and glory.

For what, let us ask, was Jesus judged on the cross? For His people. He was made sin for us. He represented us there. He stood in our stead. He bore all that was due to us. Our entire condition, with all its belongings, was dealt with in the death of Christ; and so dealt with that it is utterly impossible that any question can ever be raised. Has God any question to settle with Christ, the Head? Clearly not. Well, then, neither has He any question to settle with the members. Every question is divinely and definitively settled, and, in proof of the settlement, the Head is crowned with glory and honour,

and seated at the right hand of the majesty in the heavens.

Hence, to suppose that Christians are to come to judgment, at any time, or on any ground, for any object whatsoever, is to deny the very foundation truth of Christianity, and to contradict the plain words of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has expressly declared, in reference to all who believe in Him, that they “shall not come into judgment” (John 5: 24).

In point of fact, the idea of Christians being arraigned at the bar of judgment to try the question of their title and fitness for Heaven is as absurd as it is unscriptural. For example, how can we think of Paul or the penitent thief standing to be judged as to their title to heaven, after having been there already for nearly two thousand years? But thus it must be if there be any truth in the theory of a general judgment. If the great question of our title to Heaven has to be settled at the day of judgment, then clearly it was not settled on the cross; and if it was not settled on the cross, then most surely we shall be damned; for if we are to be judged at all it must be according to our works, and the only possible issue of such a judgment is the lake of fire.

If, however, it be maintained that Christians shall only stand in the judgment in order to make it manifest that they are clear through the death of Christ, then would the day of judgment be turned into a mere formality, the bare thought of which is most revolting to every pious and well regulated mind.

But, in truth, there is no need of reasoning on the point. One sentence of holy Scripture is better far than ten thousand of man's most cogent arguments. Our Lord

Christ hath declared, in the clearest and most emphatic terms, that believers “shall not come into judgment.” This is enough. The believer was judged over eighteen hundred years ago in the Person of his Head; and to bring him into judgment again would be to ignore completely the cross of Christ in its atoning efficacy; and most assuredly God will not, cannot allow this. The very feeblest believer may say, in thankfulness and triumph, “So far as I am concerned, all that had to be judged is judged already. Every question that had to be settled is settled. Judgment is past and gone forever. I know my work must be tried, my service appraised; but as to myself, my person, my standing, my title, all is divinely settled. The Man who answered for me on the tree is now crowned on the throne; and the crown which He wears is the proof that there remains no judgment for me. I am waiting for a life-resurrection.”

This, and nothing short of this, is the proper language of the Christian. It is simply due to the work of the cross that the believer should thus feel and thus express himself. For such a one to be looking forward to the day of judgment for a settlement of the question of his eternal destiny is to dishonour his Lord and deny the efficacy of His atoning sacrifice. It may sound like humility and savour of piety to hover in doubt. But we may rest assured that all who harbour doubts, all who live in a state of uncertainty, all who are looking forward to the day of judgment for a final settlement of their affairs — all such are more occupied with themselves than with Christ. They have not yet understood the application of the cross to their sins and to their nature. They are doubting the Word of God and the work of Christ, and this is not Christianity. There is — there can

be — no judgment for those who, sheltered by the cross, have planted a firm foot on the new and everlasting ground of resurrection. For such all judgment is over forever, and nothing remains but a prospect of cloudless glory and everlasting blessedness in the presence of God and of the Lamb.

However, it is not at all improbable that all this while the mind of the reader has been recurring to Matthew 25: 31-46 as a Scripture which directly establishes the theory of a general judgment; and we feel it to be our sacred duty to turn with him for a moment to that very solemn and important passage; at the same time reminding him of the fact that no one Scripture can possibly clash with another, and hence if we read, in John 5: 24, that believers shall not come into judgment, we cannot read in Matthew 25 that they shall. This is a fixed and invulnerable principle — a general rule to which there is, and can be, no exception. Nevertheless, let us turn to Matthew 25.

“When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory. And before Him shall be gathered all nations; and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats.”

Now, it is most necessary to pay strict attention to the precise terms made use of in this Scripture. We must avoid all looseness of thought, all that haste, carelessness, and inaccuracy which have caused such serious damage to the teaching of this weighty Scripture, and thrown so many of the Lord's people into the utmost confusion respecting it.

And, first of all, let us see who are the parties arraigned. “Before Him shall be gathered all nations.” This is very definite. It is the living nations. It is not a question of individuals, but of nations — all the Gentiles. Israel is not here, for we read in Numbers 23: 9, that “the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations.” If Israel were to be included in this scene of judgment, then would Matthew 25 stand in palpable contradiction to Numbers 23, which is wholly out of the question. Israel is never reckoned amongst the Gentiles, on any ground or for any object whatever. Looked at from a divine point of view, Israel stands alone. They may, because of their sins, and under the governmental dealings of God, be scattered among the nations; but God's Word declares that they shall not be reckoned among them; and this should suffice for us.

If then it be true that Israel is not included in the judgment of Matthew 25 then, without proceeding one step further, the idea of its being a general judgment must be abandoned. It cannot be general, if all are not included; but Israel is never included under the term “Gentiles.” Scripture speaks of three distinct classes, namely, “The Jew, and the Gentile, and the Church of God,” and these three are never confounded. But, further, we have to remark that the Church of God is not included in the judgment of Matthew 25. Nor is this statement based merely upon the fact which has been already gone into of the Church's necessary exemption from judgment; but also upon the grand truth that the Church is taken from among the nations, as Peter declared in the council at Jerusalem. “God did visit the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name.” If then the Church be taken out of the nations, it cannot be

reckoned among them; and thus we have additional evidence against the theory of a general judgment in Matthew 25. The Jew is not there; the Church is not there; and therefore the idea of a general judgment must be abandoned as something wholly untenable.

Who then are included in this judgment? The passage itself supplies the answer to any simple mind. It says, “Before Him shall be gathered all nations.” This is distinct and definite. It is not a judgment of individuals, but of nations, as such. And further, we may add that not one of those here indicated shall have passed through the article of death. In this it stands in vivid contrast with the scene in Revelation 20: 11-15, in the which there will not be one who has not died. In short, in Matthew 25, we have the judgment of “the quick”; and in Revelation 20 the judgment of “the dead.” Both these are referred to in 2 Timothy 4, “I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom.” Our Lord Christ shall judge the living nations at His appearing; and He shall “judge the dead, small and great,” at the close of His millennial reign.

But let us glance, for a moment, at the mode in which the parties are arranged in the judgment, in Matthew 25: “He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.” Now, the almost universal belief of the professing Church is that “the sheep” represent all the people of God, from the beginning to the end of time; and that “the goats,” on the other hand, set forth all the wicked, from first to last. But, if this be so, what are we to make of the third party referred to here, under the title of “these My brethren”? The King addresses both the sheep and the goats in respect to this third class.

Indeed the very ground of judgment is the treatment of the King's brethren. It would involve a manifest absurdity to say that the sheep were themselves the parties referred to. If that were so the language would be wholly different, and in place of saying, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren” we should hear the King saying, “Inasmuch as ye have done it to one another,” or “amongst yourselves.”

We would beg the reader's special attention to this point. We consider that were there no other argument and no other Scripture on the subject, this one point would prove fatal to the theory of a general judgment. It is impossible not to see three parties in the scene, namely, “the sheep,” and “the goats,” and “these My brethren”; and if there are three parties it cannot possibly be a general judgment, inasmuch as “these My brethren” are not included either in the sheep or the goats.

No, dear reader, it is not a general judgment at all, but a very partial and specific one. It is a judgment of living nations, previous to the opening of the millennial kingdom. Scripture teaches us that after the Church has left the earth a testimony will go forth to the nations; the gospel of the kingdom shall be borne, by Jewish messengers, far and wide, over the earth, into those regions which are wrapped in heathen darkness. These nations which shall receive the messengers and treat them kindly will be found on the King's right hand. Those, on the contrary, who shall reject them and treat them unkindly will be found on His left. “These My brethren” are Jews — the brethren of the Messiah.

The treatment of the Jews is the ground on which the nations will be judged by-and-by; and this is another argument against a general judgment. We know full well that all those who have lived and died in the rejection of the gospel of Christ will have something more to answer for than unkindness to the King's brethren. And, on the other hand, those who shall surround the Lamb in heavenly glory will do so on a very different title from aught that their works can furnish.

In short, there is not a single feature in the scene, not a single fact in the history, not a single point in the narrative which does not make against the notion of a general judgment. And not only so, but the more we study Scripture, the more we know of the ways of God; the more we know of His nature, His character, His purposes, His counsels, His thoughts; the more we know of Christ, His Person, His work, His glory; the more we know of the Church, its standing before God in Christ, its completeness, its perfect acceptance in Christ; the more closely we study Scripture; the more profoundly we meditate therein — the more thoroughly convinced we must be that there can be no such thing as a general judgment.

Who that knows aught of God could suppose that He would justify His people today and arraign them in judgment tomorrow — that He would blot out their transgressions today and judge them according to their works tomorrow? Who that knows aught of our adorable Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ could suppose that He would ever arraign His Church, His body, His bride, before the judgment seat in company with all those who have died in their sins? Could it be possible that He would enter into judgment with His people for sins and

iniquities of which He has said, “I will remember no more!”

But enough. We fondly trust that the reader is now most fully persuaded in his own mind that there is, and can be, no such thing as a general resurrection — no such thing as a general judgment.

We cannot now enter upon the judgment in Rev. 20: 11-15 further than to say that it is a post-millennial scene, and that it includes all the wicked dead, from the days of Cain down to the last apostate from millennial glory. There will not be one there who has not passed through the article of death — not one there whose name has been set down in life's fair book — not one there who shall not be judged according to his own very deeds — not one there who shall not pass from the dread realities of the great white throne into the everlasting horrors and torments of the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone. How awful! How terrible! How dreadful!

O! reader, what do you say to these things? Are you a true believer in Jesus? Are you washed in His precious blood? Are you sheltered in Him from coming judgment? If not, let me entreat you now, with all tenderness and earnestness, to flee, this very hour, from the wrath to come! Turn to Jesus, who now waits to receive you to Himself, and to present you to God in the full value of His atoning work, and in the full credit of His peerless name.

THE JEWISH REMNANT

Matt. 24: 1-44 forms a part of one of the most profound and comprehensive discourses that ever fell on human ears — a discourse which takes in, in its marvellous sweep, the destiny of the Jewish remnant; the history of Christendom; and the judgment of the nations. At the last-named subject we have already glanced. It remains for us now to consider the subject of the remnant of Israel, and the history of professing Christianity, whether genuine or spurious.

First, let us look at the Jewish remnant.

In order to understand Matt. 24: 1-44, it will be needful for us to place ourselves at the standpoint of those whom our Lord was addressing at the moment. If we attempt to import into this discourse the light which shines in the Epistle to the Ephesians, we shall only involve our minds in confusion, and miss the solemn teaching of the passage which now lies open before us. We shall find nothing about the Church of God, the body of Christ, here. The teaching of our Lord is divinely perfect, and hence we cannot, for a moment, imagine anything premature therein. But it would be premature to have introduced a subject which, as yet, was hid in God. The great truth of the Church could not be unfolded until Christ, being cut off as the Messiah, had taken His place at the right hand of God, and sent down the Holy Ghost, to form by His presence the one body, composed of Jew and Gentile.

Of this we hear nothing in Matt. 24. We are entirely on Jewish ground, surrounded by Jewish circumstances and influences. The scenery and the allusions are all purely Jewish. To attempt to apply the passage to the Church would be to miss completely our Lord's object, and to

falsify the real position of the Church of God. The more closely we examine the Scripture, the more clearly we shall see that the persons addressed occupy a Jewish standpoint, and are on Jewish ground, whether we think of those very persons whom our Lord was then addressing, or those who shall occupy the selfsame ground at the close, when the Church shall have left the scene altogether.

Let us examine the passage.

At the close of Matt. 23, our Lord sums up His appeal to the leaders of the Jewish nation with the following words of awful solemnity: “Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers! how can ye escape the damnation of hell? Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city. That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zecharias, son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see Me henceforth till ye shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord” (verses 32-39).

Thus closes Messiah's testimony to the apostate nation of Israel. Every effort that love, even divine love, could

put forth had been tried, and tried in vain. Prophets had been sent, and stoned; messenger after messenger had gone and pleaded, and reasoned, and warned, and entreated; but to no purpose. Their mighty words had fallen upon deaf ears and hardened hearts. The only return made to all these messengers was shameful handling, stoning, and death.

At length, the Son Himself was sent, and sent with this touching utterance: “It may be they will reverence My Son, when they see Him.” Did they? Alas! no. When they saw Him, there was no beauty that they should desire Him. The daughter of Zion had no heart for her King. The vineyard was under the control of wicked husbandmen who wanted to keep it for themselves. “The husbandmen said among themselves, This is the heir, come, let us kill Him, that the inheritance may be ours.”

Thus much as to the moral condition of Israel, in view of which our Lord spoke those unusually awful words quoted above; and, then, “He went out and departed from the temple.” How reluctant He was to do this we know; for, blessed be His name, whenever He leaves a place of mercy, or enters a place of judgment, He moves with a slow and measured pace. Witness the departure of the glory, in the opening chapters of Ezekiel. “Then the glory of the Lord departed from off the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubims. And the cherubims lifted up their wings, and mounted up from the earth in my sight; when they went out, the wheels also were beside them, and every one stood at the door of the east gate of the Lord's house; and the glory of the God of Israel was over them above” (Ezek. 10: 18, 19). “Then did the cherubims lift up their wings, and the wheels beside them; and the glory of the God of Israel

was over them above. And the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city, and stood upon the mountain which is on the east side of the city" (Ezek. 11: 22, 23).

Thus, with slow and measured pace, did the glory of the God of Israel take its departure from the house at Jerusalem. Jehovah lingered near the spot, reluctant to depart.* He had come, with loving alacrity, with His whole heart and with His whole soul, to dwell in the midst of His people, to find a home in the very bosom of His assembly; but He was forced away by their sins and iniquities. He would fain have remained; but it was impossible; and yet He proved, by the very mode of His departure, how unwilling He was to go.

Nor was it otherwise with Jehovah Messiah, in Matt. 23. Witness His touching words, "How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" Here lay the deep secret "I would." This was the heart of God. "Ye would not." This was the heart of Israel. He, too, like the glory in the days of Ezekiel, was forced away; but not, blessed be His name, without dropping a word which forms the precious basis of hope as to the brighter days to come, when the glory shall return, and the daughter of Zion shall welcome her King with joyful accents. "Blessed is He that cometh in the name of Jehovah."

{*Contrast with this reluctant departure His ready entrance into the tabernacle in Exodus 40: 34 and into the temple, 2 Chr. 7: 1. No sooner was the habitation ready for Him, than down He came to occupy it, and fill it with His glory. He was as quick to enter as He was slow to depart. And not only so, but ere the book of

Ezekiel closes, we see the glory coming back again; and “Jehovah Shammah” stands engraved in everlasting characters upon the gates of the beloved city. Nothing changeth God's affection. Whom He loves, and as He loves, He loves to the end. “The same yesterday, today, and for ever.”}

But, until that bright day dawn, darkness, desolation, and ruin make up the sum of Israel's history. The very thing which the leaders sought, by the rejection of Christ, to avert, came upon them, in stern and awful reality. “The Romans shall come, and take away both our place and nation.” How literally, how solemnly this was fulfilled! Alas! their place and their nation were gone already, and the significant movement of Jesus, in Matt. 24: 1, was but the passing sentence, and writing desolation upon the whole Jewish system. “Jesus went out and departed from the temple.” The case was hopeless. All must be given up. A long period of darkness and dreariness must pass over the infatuated nation — a period which shall culminate in that “great tribulation” which must precede the hour of final deliverance.

But, as in the days of Ezekiel, there were those who sighed and cried over the sins and sorrows of the nation, so in the days of Matt. 24, there was a remnant of godly souls who attached themselves to the rejected Messiah, and who cherished the fond hope of redemption and restoration for Israel. Very dim indeed were their perceptions, and their thoughts full of confusion. Nevertheless their hearts, as touched by divine grace, beat true to the Messiah, and they were full of hope as to Israel's future.

Now, it is of the utmost importance that the reader should recognize and understand the position of this remnant, and that it is with it our Lord is occupied in His marvellous discourse on the mount of Olives. To suppose for a moment that the persons here addressed were on Christian ground would involve the abandonment of all true thoughts of what Christianity is, and the ignoring of a company whose existence is recognized throughout the Psalms, the Prophets, and various parts of the New Testament. There was, and there always is, “a remnant according to the election of grace.” To quote the passages which present the history, the sorrows, the experiences, and the exercises of that remnant would demand a volume, and hence we shall not attempt it; but we are extremely desirous that the reader should seize the thought that this godly remnant is represented by the handful of disciples which gathered round our Lord on the mount of Olives. We feel persuaded that if this be not seen, the true scope, bearing, and application of this remarkable discourse must be lost.

“And Jesus went out and departed from the temple; and His disciples came to Him for to show Him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? Verily I say unto you, there shall not be left one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down. And as He sat upon the mount of Olives the disciples came unto Him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world?” (or age, aionos.)

The disciples were, naturally, occupied with earthly and Jewish objects and expectations — the temple and its surroundings. This must be borne in mind if we would understand their question and our Lord's reply. As yet

they had no thought beyond the earthly side of things. They looked for the setting up of the kingdom, the glory of the Messiah, the accomplishment of the promises made to the fathers. They had not yet fully taken in the solemn and momentous fact that the Messiah was to be “cut off and have nothing” (Dan. 9: 26). True, the blessed Master had, from time to time, sought to prepare their minds for the solemn event. He had faithfully warned them in reference to the dark shadows that were to gather round His path. He had told them that the Son of Man should be delivered to the Gentiles to be mocked and scourged and crucified.

But they understood Him not. Such sayings seemed dark, hard, and incomprehensible; and their hearts still fondly clung to the hope of national restoration and blessing. They longed to see the star of Jacob in the ascendant. Their minds were full of expectancy as to the restoration of the kingdom to Israel. As yet they knew nothing — how could they? — of that which was to spring out of the rejection and death of the Messiah. The Lord had no doubt spoken of building an assembly; but as to the position and privileges of that assembly, its calling, its standing, its hopes, they knew absolutely nothing. The thought of a body composed of Jew and Gentile, united by the Holy Ghost to a living and glorified Head in the heavens, had never entered — how could it have entered? — their minds. The middle wall of partition was still standing; and one of their number — the very foremost amongst them — had, long after, to be taught, with much difficulty, to take in the idea of even admitting the Gentiles into the kingdom.

All this, we repeat, must be taken into account if we would read aright our Lord's reply to the inquiry as to

His coming and the end of the age. There is not a single syllable about the Church, as such, from beginning to end of that reply. Up to verse 14, He passes on to the end, giving a rapid survey of the events which should transpire amongst the nations. “Take heed,” He says, “that no man deceive you. For many shall come in My name saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. And ye shall hear of wars, and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for My name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure to the end, the same shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations: and then shall the end come.”

Here then we have a most comprehensive sketch of the entire period from the moment in which our Lord was speaking, down to the time of the end. But the reader will need to bear in mind that there is an unnoticed interval — a parenthesis, a break — in this period, during which the great mystery of the Church is unfolded.

This interval or break is entirely passed over in this discourse, inasmuch as the time had not arrived for its development. It was as yet “hid in God,” and could not

be unfolded until the Messiah was finally rejected and cut off from the earth and received up into glory. The whole of this discourse would have its full and perfect accomplishment, although such a thing as the Church had never been heard of. For, let it never be forgotten, the Church forms no part of the ways of God with Israel and the earth. And as to the allusion, in verse 14, to the preaching of the gospel, we are not to suppose that it is at all the same thing as “The glorious gospel of the grace of God,” as preached by Paul. It is styled, “This gospel of the kingdom”; and, moreover, it is to be preached, not for the purpose of gathering the Church, but “as a witness to all nations.” We must not confound things which God, in His infinite wisdom, has made to differ. The Church must not be confounded with the kingdom; nor yet the gospel of the grace of God with the gospel of the kingdom. The two things are perfectly distinct; and, if we confound them, we shall understand neither the one nor the other. And, further, we would desire to press upon the reader the absolute necessity of seeing the break, parenthesis, or unnoticed interval in which the great mystery of the Church is inserted. If this be not clearly seen, Matt. 24 cannot be understood.

But we must proceed with our Lord's discourse.

At verse 15, He seems to call His hearers back a little, as it were, to something very specific — something with which a Jewish believer would be familiar from the fact of Daniel's allusion to it. “When ye, therefore, shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place (whoso readeth let him understand): then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains. Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take anything out of his house: neither let

him which is in the field return back to take his clothes.... But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day. For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be."

All this is most definite. The quotation from Daniel 12 fixes the application beyond all question. It proves that the reference is not to the siege of Jerusalem under Titus; for we read in Daniel 12 that, "At that time thy people shall be delivered"; and, most clearly, they were not delivered in the days of Titus. No; the reference is to the time of the end. The scene is laid at Jerusalem. The persons addressed and contemplated are Jewish believers — the pious remnant of Israel, in the great tribulation, after the Church has left the scene. How can any imagine that the persons here instructed are viewed as on Church ground? What force would there be to such in the allusion to the winter or the Sabbath day?

Then, again, "If any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there, believe it not.... If they shall say unto you, Behold He is in the desert, go not forth: Behold He is in the secret chambers, believe it not." What possible application could such words have to persons who are instructed to wait for God's Son from Heaven, and who know that ere He returns to this earth they shall have met Him in the clouds and returned with Him to the Father's house? Could any Christian, instructed in his proper hope, be deceived by persons saying that Christ is here or there, in the desert or in the secret chambers? Impossible. Such a one is looking out for the Bridegroom to come from Heaven; and he knows that it is wholly out of the question that Christ can appear on this earth without bringing all His people with Him.

Thus, the simple truth settles everything; and all we want is to be simple in taking it in. The simplest Christian knows full well that his Lord will not appear to him like a flash of lightning, but as the bright and morning Star, and hence he understands that Matt. 24 cannot apply to the Church, though most surely the Church can study it with interest and profit, as it can all the other prophetic Scriptures; and, we may add, the interest will be all the more intense, and the profit all the deeper, in proportion as we see the true application of such Scriptures.

Limited space forbids our entering as fully as we could wish into the remaining portion of this marvellous discourse; but the more closely each sentence is examined, the more fully each circumstance is weighed, the more clearly we must see that the persons addressed are not on proper Christian ground. The entire scene is earthly and Jewish, not heavenly and Christian. There is ample instruction supplied for those who shall find themselves, by-and-by, in the position here contemplated; and nothing can be clearer than that the entire paragraph, from verse 15-42, refers to the period which shall elapse between the rapture of the saints and the appearing of the Son of Man.

Some may perhaps feel a difficulty in understanding verse 34: “This generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled.” But we must remember that the word “generation” is constantly used in Scripture in a moral sense. It is not to be confined to a certain number of persons actually living at the time, but takes in the race. In the passage before us it simply applies to the Jewish race; but the wording is such as to leave the question of time entirely open, so that the heart might

ever be kept in readiness for the Lord's coming. There is nothing in Scripture to interfere with the constant expectation of that grand event. On the contrary, every parable, every figure, every allusion is so worded as to warrant each one to look for the Lord's return in his own lifetime, and yet to leave margin for the elongation of the time according to the longsuffering grace of a Saviour God.

CHRISTENDOM

What varied thoughts and feelings are awakened in the soul by the very sound of the word “Christendom”! It is a terrible word. It brings before us, at once, that vast mass of baptized profession which calls itself the Church of God, but is not; which calls itself Christianity, but is not. Christendom is dark and a dreadful anomaly. It is neither one thing nor the other. It is not “the Jew or the Gentile, or the Church of God.” It is a corrupt mysterious mixture, a spiritual malformation, the masterpiece of Satan, the corrupter of the truth of God, and the destroyer of the souls of men, a trap, a snare, a stumbling-block, the darkest moral blot in the universe of God. It is the corruption of the very best thing, and therefore the very worst of corruptions. It is that thing which Satan has made of professing Christianity. It is worse, by far, than Judaism; worse by far than all the darkest forms of paganism, because it has higher light and richer privileges, makes the very highest profession, and occupies the very loftiest platform. Finally, it is that awful apostasy for which is reserved the very heaviest judgments of God — the most bitter dregs in the cup of His righteous wrath.

True it is, blessed be God, there are a few names even in Christendom who, through grace, have not defiled their garments. There are some brilliant embers amid the smouldering ashes — precious stones amid the terrible débris. But as to the mass of Christian profession to which the term Christendom applies, nothing can be more appalling, whether we think of its present condition or its future destiny. We doubt if Christians generally have anything like an adequate sense of the true character and inevitable doom of that which surrounds them. If they had it would solemnize their minds, and cause them to feel the urgent need of standing apart, in holy separation, from christendom's ways, and distinct testimony against its spirit and principles.

But let us turn again to our Lord's profound discourse on the mount of Olives, in which, as we have already observed, He deals with the subject of the Christian profession. This He does in three distinct parables, namely, the household servant; the ten virgins; and the talents. In each and all we have the two things noticed above, the genuine and the spurious; the true and the false; the bright and the dark; that which is of Christ, and that which is of Satan; that which belongs to Heaven, and that which emanates from hell.

We shall glance at the three parables which embody, in their brief compass, a vast mine of most solemn and practical instruction.

Turn to Matt. 24: 45-47. “Who, then, is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord, when he cometh shall find

so doing. Verily I say unto you that he shall make him ruler over all his goods."

Here, then, we have at once the source and object of all ministry in the house of God. "Whom his lord hath made ruler." This is the source. "To give them meat in due season." This is the object.

These things are of the very highest possible moment, and they are worthy of the reader's most profound thought. All ministry in the house of God, whether in Old or New Testament times, is of divine appointment. There is no such thing recognized in Scripture as human authority in appointing to the ministry. Neither is there such a thing as a self-constituted ministry. None but God can make or appoint a minister of any sort or description. Thus, in Old Testament times, Jehovah appointed Aaron and his sons to the priesthood; and if a stranger presumed to meddle with the functions of the holy office, he was to be put to death. Even the king himself dared not touch the priestly censer, for we are told of Uzziah, king of Judah, that, "When he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction; for he transgressed against the Lord his God, and went into the temple of the Lord to burn incense upon the altar of incense. And Azariah the priest went in after him, and with him fourscore priests of the Lord, that were valiant men. And they withstood Uzziah the king, and said unto him, It appertaineth not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense unto the Lord, but to the priests the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense; go out of the sanctuary: for thou hast trespassed: neither shall it be for thine honour from the Lord God.... And Uzziah the king was a leper unto the day of his death" (2 Chr. 26).

Such was the solemn result — the awful consequence of man's daring intrusion upon that which was wholly of divine appointment. Has this no voice for Christendom? Assuredly it has. It sounds a warning note in our ears. It tells the professing Church, in accents not to be mistaken, to beware of human intrusion upon a domain which belongs only to God. “Every high priest taken from among men is ordained for [not by] men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins.... And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called [not of men but] of God, as was Aaron” (Heb. 5).

Nor was this principle of divine appointment confined to the high and holy office of the tabernacle. No man dare put his hand to the most insignificant part of that sacred structure unless by Jehovah's direct authority. “The Lord spake unto Moses, saying, See I have called by name Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah.” Nor could Bezaleel choose his companions in labour, or appoint whom he would to the work, any more than he could choose or appoint himself. No; this, too, was divine. “And I,” says Jehovah, “Behold I have given with him Aholiab.” Thus Aholiab, as well as Bezaleel, held his commission immediately from Jehovah Himself, the only true source of all ministerial authority.

Nor was it otherwise in the case of the prophetic office and ministry. God alone could make, and fit, and send a prophet. Alas! there were those of whom Jehovah had to say, “I have not sent them, yet they ran.” They were unhallowed intruders upon the domain of prophecy, just as there were upon the office of the priesthood; but all such brought down upon themselves the judgment of God.

And, may we not ask, Is this great principle changed? Has ministry been shifted from its ancient base? Has the living stream been diverted from its divine source? Is it true that this more precious and glorious institution has been shorn of its lofty dignities? Can it be possible that, under the times of the New Testament, ministry has been cast down from its divine excellency? Has it become a mere human appointment? Can man appoint his fellow, or appoint himself to any one branch of ministry in the house of God?

What answer is to be returned to these questions? No doubtful one, thank God; but a distinct and emphatic No! Ministry was, is, and ever shall be, divine; divine in its source; divine in its nature; divine in its every feature and principle. “There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And 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” (1 Cor. 12: 46). “But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body as it hath pleased Him.” “And God hath set some in the Church; first, apostles; secondarily prophets; thirdly, teachers; after that, miracles; then gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of tongues” (verses 18, 28). “But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore He saith, when He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.... And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ; till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge

of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4: 7-13).

Here lies the grand source of all ministry in the Church of God, from first to last — from the foundation laid in grace, to the topstone, in glory. It is divine and heavenly, not human or earthly. It is not of man or by man, but of Jesus Christ, and God the Father who raised Him from the dead, and in the power of the Holy Ghost (see Gal. 1). There is no such thing recognized in Scripture as human authority in any one branch of ministry in the Church. If it be a question of gift, it is emphatically stated to be "the gift of Christ." If it be a question of assigned position, we are, with equal clearness and emphasis, told that "God hath set the members." If it be a question of local charge, whether elder or deacon, it was entirely of divine appointment, by apostolic hands or apostolic delegates.

All this is so clear, so distinct, so palpable, on the very surface of Scripture, that it is only necessary to say, "How readest thou?" And the more we penetrate beneath the surface — the more we are conducted by the Eternal Spirit into the profound and precious depths of inspiration — the more thoroughly convinced we shall be that ministry, in its every department and every branch, is divine in its source, nature, and principles. The truth of this shines out in full-orbed brightness, in the Epistles; but we have the germ of it in the words of our Lord in Matt 25: 45, "Whom his lord hath made ruler over his household." The household belongs to the Lord, and He alone can appoint the servants, and this He does according to His own sovereign will.

Equally plain is the object of ministry, as stated in this parable, and elaborated in the Epistles. “To give them meat in due season.” “For the edifying of the body of Christ” — “that the Church may receive edifying.” It is this that lies near the loving heart of Jesus. He would have His household perfected — His Church edified — His body nourished and cherished. For this end, He bestows gifts, and maintains them in the Church, and will maintain them until they shall be no longer needed.

But alas! there is a dark side of the picture. For this we must be prepared since we have the picture of Christendom before us. If there is a “faithful, wise, and blessed servant,” there is also “an evil servant” who “says in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming.” Mark this. It is in the heart of the wicked servant that the thought originates as to the delay of the coming.

And what is the result? “He shall begin to smite his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken.” How awfully this has been exemplified in the history of Christendom, we need not say. Instead of true ministry flowing from the risen and glorified Head in the heavens, and promoting the edification of the body, the blessing of souls, and the prosperity of the household, we have a false clerical authority, arbitrary rule, a lording it over God's heritage, a grasping after this world's wealth and power, fleshly ease, self-indulgence, and personal aggrandizement, priestly domination in its nameless and numberless forms and practical consequences.

The reader will do well to apply his heart to the understanding of these things. He will need to seize, with clearness and power, the distinction between

clericalism and ministry. The one is a thoroughly human assumption; the other, a purely divine institution. The former has its source in man's evil heart; the latter has its source in a risen and exalted Saviour, who, being raised from the dead, received gifts for men, and sheds them forth upon His Church, according to His own will. That is a positive scourge and curse; this, a divine blessing to men. In fine, this in its root-principle flows from Heaven and leads back thither; that in its root-principle flows from hell and leads thither again.

All this is most solemn, and it should exert a mighty influence upon our souls. There is a day coming when the Lord Christ will deal, in summary justice, with that which man has dared to set up in His house. We speak not of individuals — though surely it is a most serious and terrible thing for any one to put his hand unto, or have aught to do with, that on which such awful judgment is about to be executed — but we speak of a positive system — a great principle which runs, in a deep and dark current, through the length and breadth of the professing Church — we speak of clericalism and priestcraft, in all its forms and in all its ramifications.

Against this dreadful thing we solemnly warn our readers. No human language can possibly depict the evil of it, nor can human language adequately set forth the deep blessedness of all true ministry in the Church of God. The Lord Jesus not only bestows ministerial gifts, but, in His marvellous grace, He will abundantly reward the faithful and diligent exercise of those gifts. But as to that which man has set up, we read its destiny in those burning words, “The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint

him his portion with the hypocrites; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

May the gracious Lord deliver His servants and His people from all participation in this great wickedness which is perpetrated in the very bosom of that which calls itself the Church of God. And, on the other hand, may He lead them to understand, to appreciate, and to exercise that true, that precious, that divine ministry which emanates from Himself, and is designed, in His infinite love, for the true blessing and growth of that Church which is so dear to His heart. We are in danger, very great danger, while seeking (as we most surely should) to keep clear of the evil of clericalism — of rushing into the opposite extreme of despising ministry.

This must be carefully guarded against. We have ever to bear in mind that [properly] ministry in the Church is of God. Its source is divine. Its nature is heavenly and spiritual. Its object is the calling out, the building up of the Church of God. Our Lord Christ imparts the varied gifts, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. He holds the great reservoir of spiritual gifts. He has never given it up, and He never will. Spite of all that Satan has wrought in the professing Church; spite of all the actings of "that evil servant"; spite of all man's daring assumption of authority which in no wise belongs to him; spite of all these things, our risen and glorified Lord "hath the seven stars." He possesses all ministerial gifts, power, and authority. It is He alone who can make any one a minister. Unless He impart a gift there can be no true ministry. There may be hollow assumption — guilty usurpation — empty affectation — worthless talking; but not one atom of true, loving, divine ministry can there be unless where our sovereign Lord is pleased to bestow

the gift. And even where He does bestow the gift that gift must be “stirred up,” and diligently cultivated, else “the profiting” will not “appear unto all.” The gift must be exercised in the power of the Holy Ghost, else it will not promote the divinely appointed end.

But we are rather anticipating what is yet to come before us in the parable of the talents, so we shall close here by simply reminding the reader that the weighty subject on which we have been dwelling has direct reference to the coming of our Lord, inasmuch as all true ministry is carried on in view of that great and glorious event. And not only so, but the counterfeit, the corrupt, the evil thing will be judicially dealt with when the Lord Christ shall appear in His glory.

THE TEN VIRGINS

We now approach that solemn section of our Lord's discourse in which He presents the kingdom of Heaven under the similitude of “ten virgins.” The instruction contained in this most weighty and interesting parable is of wider application than that of the servant to which we have already referred, inasmuch as it takes in the whole range of Christian profession, and is not confined to ministry either within the house or outside. It bears directly and pointedly upon Christian profession, whether true or false.

“Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.” Some have considered that this parable refers to the Jewish remnant; but it does not seem that this idea is borne out, either by the context in

which this parable occurs or by the terms in which it is couched.

As to the entire context, the more closely we examine it the more clearly we shall see that the Jewish portion of the discourse ends with Matthew 24: 44. This is so distinct as not to admit of a question. Equally distinct is the Christian portion, extending, as we have seen, from Matthew 24: 45 to Matthew 25: 30; while from Matthew 25: 31 to the end, we have the Gentiles. Thus the order and fulness of this marvellous discourse must strike any thoughtful reader. It presents the Jew, the Christian, and the Gentile, each on his own distinct ground, and according to his own distinctive principles. There is no merging of one thing in another, no confounding of things that differ. In a word, the order, the fulness, and the comprehensiveness of this profound discourse are divine, and fill the soul "with wonder, love, and praise." We rise from the study of it, as a whole, with those words of the apostle upon our lips, "O, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out."

And then, when we examine the precise terms made use of by our Lord in the parable of the ten virgins we must see that it applies not to Jews but to Christian professors — it applies to us — it utters a voice, and teaches a solemn lesson to the writer and the reader of these lines.

Let us apply our hearts thereto.

"Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom."

Primitive Christianity was especially characterized by the fact here indicated, namely, a going forth to meet a returning and an expected bridegroom. The early Christians were led to detach themselves from present things, and go forth, in the spirit of their minds, and in the affections of their hearts, to meet the Saviour whom they loved, and for whom they waited. It was not, of course, a question of going forth from one place to another; it was not local, but moral, and spiritual. It was the outgoing of the heart after a beloved Saviour whose return was eagerly looked for day by day.

It is impossible to read the Epistles to the various churches and not see that the hope of the Lord's sure and speedy return governed the hearts of the Lord's dear people in early days. “They waited for the Son from heaven.” They knew He was to come and take them away, to be with Himself forever; and the knowledge and power of this hope had the effect of detaching their hearts from present things. Their bright, heavenly hope caused them to sit loose to the things of earth. “They looked for the Saviour.” They believed that He might come at any moment, and hence the concerns of this life were just to be taken up and attended to for the moment — properly, thoroughly attended to, no doubt — but only, as it were, on the very tiptoe of expectation.

All this is conveyed to our hearts, briefly but clearly, by the expression, “They went forth to meet the bridegroom.” This could not be intelligently applied to the Jewish remnant, inasmuch as they will not go forth to meet their Messiah, but, on the contrary, they will remain in their position and amid their circumstances until He come and plant His foot on the mount of Olives. They will not look for the Lord to come and take them

away from this earth to be with Him in Heaven; but He will come to bring deliverance to them in their own land, and make them happy there under His own peaceful and blessed reign during the millennial age.

But the call to Christians was to “go forth.” They are supposed to be always on the move; not settling down on the earth, but going out in earnest and holy aspirations after that heavenly glory to which they are called, and after the heavenly Bridegroom to whom they are espoused, and for whose speedy advent they are taught to wait.

Such is the true, the divine, the normal idea of the Christian's attitude and state. And this lovely idea was marvellously realized and practically carried out by the primitive Christians. But alas! we are reminded of the fact that we have to do with the spurious as well as the true in Christendom. There are “tares” as well as “wheat” in the kingdom of Heaven; and thus we read of these ten virgins, that “five of them were wise, and five were foolish.” There are the true and the false, the genuine and the counterfeit, the real and the hollow, in professing Christianity.

Yes, and this is to continue unto the time of the end, until the Bridegroom come. The tares are not converted into wheat, nor are the foolish virgins converted into wise ones. No, never. The tares will be burnt and the foolish virgins shut out. So far from a gradual improvement by the means now in operation — the preaching of the gospel and the various beneficent agencies which are brought to bear upon the world — we find, from all the parables, and from the teaching of the entire New Testament, that the kingdom of Heaven

presents a most deplorable admixture of evil; a corrupting process; a grievous tampering with the work of God, on the part of the enemy; a positive progress of evil in principle, in profession, and in practice.

And all this goes on to the end. There are foolish virgins found when the Bridegroom appears. Whence come they, if all are to be converted before the Lord comes? If all are to be brought to the knowledge of the Lord by the means now in operation, then how comes it to pass that when the Bridegroom comes, there are quite as many foolish as wise?

But it will perhaps be said that this is but a parable, a figure. Granted; but a figure of what? Not surely of a whole world converted. To assert this would be to offer a grievous insult to the holy volume, and to treat our Lord's solemn teaching in a manner in which we would not dare to treat the teaching of a fellow mortal.

No, reader, the parable of the ten virgins teaches, beyond all question, that when the Bridegroom comes, there will be foolish virgins on the scene, and clearly, if there are foolish virgins, all cannot have been previously converted. A child can understand this. We cannot see how it is possible, in the face of even this one parable, to maintain the theory of a world converted before the coming of the Bridegroom.

But let us look a little closely at these foolish virgins. Their history is full of admonition for all Christian professors. It is very brief, but awfully comprehensive. “They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them.” There is the outward profession, but no inward reality — no spiritual life — no unction — no vital link with the source of eternal life — no union with

Christ. There is nothing but the lamp of profession, and the dry wick of a nominal, notional, head belief.

This is peculiarly solemn. It bears down with tremendous weight upon that vast mass of baptized profession which surrounds us, at the present moment, in which there is so much of outward semblance, but so little of inward reality. All profess to be Christians. The lamp of profession may be seen in every hand; but ah! how few have the oil in their vessels, the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, the Holy Ghost dwelling in their hearts. Without this, all is utterly worthless and vain. There may be the very highest profession; there may be a most orthodox creed; one may be baptized; he may receive the Lord's supper; be a regularly enrolled and duly recognized member of a Christian community; be a Sunday-school teacher; an ordained minister of religion; one may be all this, and not have one spark of divine life, not one ray of heavenly light, not one link with the Christ of God.

Now there is something peculiarly awful in the thought of having just enough religion to deceive the heart, deaden the conscience, and ruin the soul — just enough religion to give a name to live while dead — enough to leave one without Christ, without God, and without hope in the world — enough to prop the soul up with a false confidence, and fill it with a false peace, until the Bridegroom come, and then the eyes are opened when it is too late.

Thus it is with the foolish virgins. They seem to be very like the wise ones. An ordinary observer might not be able to see any difference, for the time being. They all set out together. All have lamps. And, moreover, all turn

aside to slumber and sleep, the wise as well as the foolish. All rouse up at the midnight cry, and trim their lamps. Thus far there is no apparent difference. The foolish virgins light their lamps — the lamp of profession lighted up with the dry wick of a lifeless, notional, nominal faith; alas! a worthless — worse than worthless — thing, a fatal soul-destroying delusion.

Here the grand distinction — the broad line of demarcation — comes out with awful, yea, with appalling clearness. “The foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are going out” (see margin). This proves that their lamps had been lighted; for had they not been lighted, they could not go out. But it was only a false, flickering, transient light. It was not fed from a divine source. It was the light of mere lip profession, fed by a head belief, lasting just long enough to deceive themselves and others, and going out at the very moment when they most needed it, leaving them in the dreadful darkness of eternal night.

“Our lamps are going out.” Terrible discovery! “The Bridegroom is at hand, and our lamps are going out. Our hollow profession is being made manifest by the light of His coming. We thought we were all right. We professed the same faith, had the same shaped lamp, the same kind of wick; but alas! we now find to our unspeakable horror, that we have been deceiving ourselves, that we lack the one thing needful, the spirit of life in Christ, the unction from the Holy One, the living link with the Bridegroom. Whatever shall we do? O ye wise virgins, take pity upon us, and share with us your oil. Do, do, for mercy's sake, give us a little, even one drop of that all-essential thing, that we may not perish forever.”

Ah! it is all utterly vain. No one can give of his oil to another. Each has just enough for himself. Moreover, it can only be had from God Himself. A man can give light, but he cannot give oil. This latter is the gift of God alone. “The wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the Bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage; and the door was shut.” It is of no use looking to Christian friends to help us or prop us up. No use in flying hither and thither for some one to lean upon — some holy man, or some eminent teacher — no use building upon our Church, or our creed, or our sacraments. We want oil. We cannot do without it. Where are we to get it? Not from man, not from the Church, not from the saints, not from the fathers. We must get it from God; and He, blessed be His name, gives freely. “The gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

But, mark, it is an individual thing. Each must have it for himself. No man can believe, or get life for another. Each must have to do with God for himself. The link which connects the soul with Christ is intensely individual. There is no such thing as secondhand faith. A man may teach us religion, or theology, or the letter of Scripture; but he cannot give us oil; he cannot give us faith; he cannot give us life. “It is the gift of God.” Precious little word, “gift.” It is like God. It is free as God's air; free as His sunlight; free as His refreshing dewdrops. But, we repeat, and with solemn emphasis, each one must get it for himself, and have it in himself. “None can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him: that he should still live forever

and not see corruption. For the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceaseth forever" (Psalm 49: 79).

Reader, what do you say to these solemn realities? Are you a wise or a foolish virgin? Have you got life in a risen and glorified Saviour? Are you a mere professor of religion, content with the mere ordinary dead routine of churchgoing, having just sufficient religion to make you respectable on earth, but not enough to link you with Heaven?

We earnestly beseech you to think seriously of these things. Think of them now. Think how unspeakably dreadful it will be to find your lamp of profession going out and leaving you in obscure darkness — darkness that may be felt — the outer darkness of an everlasting night. How terrible to find the door shut behind that brilliant train which shall go in to the marriage; but shut in your face! How agonizing the cry, "Lord, Lord, open unto us!" How withering, how crushing the response, "I know you not."

O, beloved friend, do give these weighty matters a place in your heart now, while yet the door is open, and while yet the day of grace is lengthened out in God's marvellous long suffering. The moment is rapidly approaching in the which the door of mercy shall be closed against you forever, when all hope shall be gone, and your precious soul be plunged in black and eternal despair. May God's Spirit rouse you from your fatal slumber, and give you no rest until you find it in the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ, and at His blessed feet in adoration and worship.

We must now draw this paper to a close; but, ere doing so, we shall just for a moment glance at the wise virgins.

The great distinguishing feature which, according to the teaching of this parable, marks them off from the foolish virgins is that when starting at the first they “took oil in their vessels with their lamps.” In other words, what distinguishes true believers from mere professors is that the former have in their hearts the grace of God's Holy Spirit; they have got the spirit of life in Christ Jesus; and the Holy Ghost dwelling in them as the seal, the earnest, the unction, and the witness. This grand and glorious fact characterizes now all true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ — a stupendous, wondrous fact, most surely — an immense and ineffable privilege, which should ever bow our souls in holy adoration before our God and our Lord Jesus Christ, whose accomplished redemption has procured for us this great blessing.

How sad to think that, notwithstanding this high and holy privilege, we should have to read, as in the words of our parable, “They all slumbered and slept!” All alike, wise as well as foolish, fell asleep. The Bridegroom tarried, and all, without exception, lost the freshness, fervour, and power of the hope of His coming, and fell fast asleep.

Such is the statement of our parable, and such is the solemn fact of the history. The whole professing body fell asleep. “That blessed hope” which shone so brightly on the horizon of the early Christians, very speedily waned and faded away; and as we scan the page of Church history for eighteen centuries, from the Apostolic Fathers to the opening of the current century, we look in vain for any intelligent reference to the Church's specific hope — the personal return of the blessed Bridegroom. In fact, that hope was virtually lost to the Church; nay, more, it became almost heresy to teach it.

And even now, in these last days, there are hundreds of thousands of professed ministers of Christ who dare not preach or teach the coming of the Lord as it is taught in Scripture.

True it is, blessed be God, a mighty change took place within the last century. There was then a great awakening. God, by His Holy Spirit, recalled His people to long-forgotten truths, and amongst the rest, to the glorious truth of the coming of the Bridegroom. Many saw then that the reason why the Bridegroom tarried was simply because God was longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. Precious reason!

But they also saw that, spite of this longsuffering, our Lord is at hand. Christ is coming. The midnight cry has gone forth, “Behold, the Bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet Him.” May millions of voices re-echo the soul-stirring cry until it passes in its mighty moral power, from pole to pole, and from the river to the ends of the earth, rousing the whole Church to wait, as one man, for the glorious appearing of the blessed Bridegroom of our hearts.

Brethren beloved in the Lord, awake! Let every soul be roused. Let us shake off the sloth and the slumber of worldly ease and self-indulgence — let us rise above the withering influence of religious formality and dull routine — let us fling aside the dogmas of false theology, and go forth, in the spirit of our minds and in the affections of our hearts, to meet our returning Bridegroom. May His own solemn words come with fresh power to our souls, “Watch therefore, for ye know

neither the day nor the hour.” May the language of our hearts and our lives be, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus.”

The dark stream of evil is flowing apace:

Awake, and be doing, ye children of grace,

Let's seek with compassion the souls that are lost,

Well knowing the price their redemption has cost.

While singing with rapture the Saviour's great love,

And waiting for Him to translate us above —

“It may be tomorrow, or even tonight” —

Let our loins be well girded, and lamps burning bright.

THE TALENTS

It only remains for us now to consider that portion of our Lord's discourse in which He again takes up the deeply solemn subject of ministerial responsibility during the time of His absence. That this stands closely connected with the hope of His coming is evident from the fact that having summed up the parable of the ten virgins with these most weighty words, “Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour,” He goes on to say, “For as a man travelling into a far country, who called his servants, and delivered unto them his goods.”

There is a material difference between the parable of the talents and that of the servant in Matthew 24: 45-51. In the latter, we have ministry inside the house. In the former, on the other hand, we have ministry abroad in the world. But in each we find the grand foundation of all ministry, namely, the gift and authority of Christ. “He called his own servants, and delivered unto them his

goods." The servants are His, and the goods are His. No one but the Lord Christ can put a man into the ministry, as none but He can impart spiritual gift. It is utterly impossible for any one to be a minister of Christ unless He calls him and fits him for the work. This is so plain as not to admit of a single question. A man may be a minister of religion; he may preach the doctrines of the gospel, and teach theology; but a minister of Christ he cannot possibly be unless Christ calls him to, and gifts him for, the work. If it be a question of ministry inside the house, it is "whom his lord hath made ruler over his house." And if it be a question of ministry abroad in the world, we are told that "He called his own servants and delivered unto them his goods."

This great root-principle of ministry is powerfully embodied in these words of one of the greatest ministers that ever lived, when he says, "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry" (1 Tim. 1: 12).

Thus it must be in every case, whatever be the measure, the character, or the sphere of ministry. The Lord Christ alone can put any one into the ministry, and enable him to fulfil it. If it be not this, it will be either a man putting himself into the ministry, or his fellow man doing it, both of which are alike opposed to the mind of God, and to all the principles of the true ministry as taught in the Word. If we are to be guided by Scripture, we must see that all ministry in or out of the house must be by divine appointment and divine ability. If it be not thus, it is worse than worthless. A man may set himself up as a minister, or he may be set up by his fellows; but it is all utterly vain. It is not from heaven — it is not of God — it is not by Jesus Christ; and, in the sequel, it will be made

manifest and judged as a most horrible and daring usurpation.

It is of the very last importance that the Christian reader should thoroughly seize this grand principle of ministry. It is as simple as it is solemn. And, moreover, that it rests on a basis truly divine cannot be questioned by any one who bows down — as every Christian ought — with unqualified and absolute submission, to the authority of the divine Word. Let the reader take his Bible, and read carefully every line therein which bears upon the subject of ministry. If he turns to the parable of the house-steward, he will read, “Whom his Lord hath made ruler.” He does not make himself ruler; neither is he appointed by his fellows. The appointment is divine.

So, also, in the parable of the talents, the master calls his own servants, and delivers unto them his goods. The call and the equipment are divine.

We have another aspect of the same truth in Luke 19. “A certain nobleman went into a far country, to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come.” The difference between Luke and Matthew appears to be this: in the former, human responsibility; in the latter, divine sovereignty is prominent. But in both the great root-principle is distinctly maintained and unanswerably established, namely, that all ministry is by divine appointment.

The same truth meets us in the Acts of the Apostles. When one was to be appointed to fill the place of Judas, the appeal is made to Jehovah, “Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all, show whether of these two

Thou hast chosen; that he may take part of this ministry and apostleship."

And even where it is a question of local charge, as of deacons, in Acts 6, or of elders, in Acts 14, it is by direct apostolic appointment. In other words, it is divine. A man could not even appoint himself to a deaconship, much less to an eldership. In the case of the former, inasmuch as the deacons were to take charge of the people's property, these latter were, in the grace and lovely moral order of the Spirit, permitted to select men in whom they could confide; but the appointment was divine, whether of deacons or elders. Thus, whether it be a question of gift or of local charge, all rests on a purely divine basis. This is the all-important point.

Again, if we turn to the Epistles, the same great truth shines in full and undimmed lustre before us. Thus, at the opening of Romans 12, we read, "For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office; so we being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given us," etc. In 1 Cor. 12 we read, "But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body as it hath pleased Him" (verse 18). And again, "God hath set some in the Church, first, apostles," etc. (verse 28). So also in Ephesians 4, "But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ."

All these Scriptures, and many more that might be quoted, go to establish the truth which we are intensely anxious to impress upon our readers, namely, that ministry in all its departments, is divine — is of God — is from heaven — is by Jesus Christ. There is positively no such thing in the New Testament as human authority to minister in the Church of God. Turn where we may, throughout its sacred pages, and we find only the same blessed doctrine as is contained in that one brief sentence in our parable, “He called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods.” The whole New Testament doctrine of ministry is embodied here; and we earnestly entreat the Christian reader to let this doctrine take full possession of his soul, and exert its full sway over his conduct, course and character.*

*We do not, by any means, restrict the application of the “talents” to direct, specific, spiritual gifts. We believe the parable takes in the wide range of Christian service: just as the parable of the ten virgins takes in the wide range of Christian profession.

But it may perhaps be asked, “Is there no adaptation of the vessel to the ministerial gift deposited therein?” Unquestionably there is; and this very adaptation is distinctly presented in the words of our parable, “Unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability.”

This is a point of deepest interest, and it must never be lost sight of. The Lord knows what use He means to make of a man. He knows the character of gift which He purposes to deposit in the vessel, and He shapes the vessel and moulds the man accordingly. We cannot doubt that Paul was a vessel specially formed of God for

the place he was afterwards to fill, and the work he had to do. And so in every case. If God designs a man to be a public speaker, He gives him lungs, He gives him a voice, He gives him a physical constitution adapted to the work which He designs him to do. The gift is from God; but there is always the most distinct reference to the ability of the man.

If this be lost sight of, our apprehension of the true character of ministry will be very defective indeed. We must never forget the two things, namely, the divine gift, and the human vessel in which the gift is deposited. There is the sovereignty of God, and the responsibility of man. How perfect and how beautiful are all the ways of God! But alas! man mars everything, and the touch of the human finger only dims the lustre of divine workmanship. Still, let us never forget that ministry is divine in its source, its nature, its power, and its object. If the reader rises from this paper convinced in heart and soul of this grand truth, we have so far gained our object in penning it.

But it is not improbable the question may be asked, “What has all this subject of ministry to do with the Lord's coming?” Much every way. Does not our blessed Lord introduce the subject again and again, in His discourse on the mount of Olives? And is not this entire discourse a reply to the question of the disciples, “What shall be the sign of Thy coming and the end of the age?” Is not His coming the great prominent point of the discourse as a whole, and of each section of it in particular? Unquestionably.

And what is the next prominent theme? Is it not ministry? Look at the parable of the servant made ruler

over the household. How is he to serve? In view of his Lord's return. The ministry links itself on, as it were, to the departing and the return of the Master. It stands between, and is to be characterized by, these two grand events. And what is it that leads to failure in the ministry? Losing sight of the Lord's return. The evil servant says in his heart, “My Lord delayeth His coming,” and, as a consequence, “he begins to smite his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken.”

So also in the parable of the talents. The solemn and soul-stirring word is “Occupy till I come.” In short, we learn that ministry, whether in the house of God or abroad in the world, is to be carried on in full view of the Lord's return. “After a long time the lord of those servants cometh and reckoneth with them.” All the servants are to keep continually before their minds the solemn fact that there is a reckoning time coming. This will regulate their thoughts and feelings in reference to every branch of their ministry. Hearken to the following weighty words in which one servant seeks to animate another, “I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears. And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry. For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a

good fight. I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing" (2 Tim. 4: 18).

Does not this touching and weighty passage show how intimately the subject of ministry stands connected with the Lord's coming? The blessed apostle — the most devoted, gifted, and effective workman that ever wrought in the vineyard of Christ — the most skilful steward that ever handled the mysteries of God — the wise master builder — the great minister of the Church and preacher of the gospel — the incomparable servant — this rare and precious vessel carried on his work, fulfilled his ministry, and discharged his holy responsibilities in full view of "that day." He looked forward, and is still looking, to that solemn and glorious occasion when the righteous Judge shall place on his brow "the crown of righteousness." And he adds, with such affecting sweetness, "not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing."

This is peculiarly touching. There will be a crown of righteousness in "that day," not merely for the gifted, laborious, and devoted Paul, but for every one that loves the appearing of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. No doubt Paul shall have gems in his crown of peculiar lustre; but, lest any one should think that the crown of righteousness was only for Paul, he adds these lovely words, "unto all them also that love His appearing." The Lord be praised for such words! May they have the effect of stirring up our hearts, not only to love the appearing of our Lord, but also to serve with more intense and wholehearted devotedness in view of that

glorious day! That the two things are very closely connected we may see in the sequel of the parable of the talents. We can do little more than quote the words of our Lord.

When the servants had received the talents, we read, “Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. But he that had received one went and digged in the earth and hid his lord's money. After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents; behold I have gained besides them five talents more. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents; behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things; I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.”

It is interesting and instructive to note the difference between the parable of the talents as given in Matthew, and the parable of the ten servants, in Luke 19. In the former, it is a question of divine sovereignty; in the latter, of human responsibility. In that, each receives a like sum; in this, one receives five, another two, according to the master's will. Then, when the day of reckoning comes, we find in Luke a definite reward according to the work; whereas, in Matthew, the word

is, “I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy lord.” They are not told what they are to have, or how many things they are to rule over. The master is sovereign both in His gifts and rewards; and the crowning point of all is, “Enter thou into the joy of thy lord.”

This, to a heart that loves the Lord, is beyond everything. True, there will be the ten cities and the five cities. There will be ample, distinct, and definite reward for responsibility discharged, service rendered, and work done. All will be rewarded. But above and beyond all, shines this precious word, “Enter thou into the joy of thy lord.” No reward can possibly come up to this. The sense of the love that breathes in these words will lead each one to cast his “crown of righteousness” at the feet of his Lord. The very crown which the righteous Judge shall give, we shall willingly cast at the feet of a loving Saviour and Lord. One smile from Him will touch the heart far more deeply and powerfully than the brightest crown that could be placed on the brow.

But one word ere we close. Who would not work? Who hid his lord's money? Who proved to be “a wicked and slothful servant?” The man who did not know his master's heart — his master's character — his master's love. “Then he which had received the one talent, came and said, Lord, I know thee, that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strewed; and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. His Lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strewed. Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money

to the exchangers, and then at my coming, I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

How awfully solemn! How striking the contrast between the two servants! One knows, and loves, and trusts, and serves his lord. The other belies, fears, distrusts, and does nothing. The one enters into the joy of his lord, the other is cast out into outer darkness, into the place of weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. How solemn! How soul-subduing is all this! And when does it all come out? When the Master returns!

NOTE. — We may add, in connection with the foregoing remarks on ministry, that every Christian has his and her own specific place and work to do. All are solemnly responsible to the Lord to know their place and fill it, to know their work and do it. This is a plain practical truth, and most fully confirmed by the principle upon which we have been insisting, namely, that all ministry and all work must be received from the Master's hand, carried on under His eye, and in full view of His coming. These things must never be forgotten.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

We must now draw this series of papers to a close; and it is with a strong feeling of reluctance that we do so. The theme is intensely interesting, deeply practical, and abundantly fruitful. Moreover, it is very suggestive, and

opens up an extensive field of vision for the spiritual mind to range through with an interest that never flags, because the subject is inexhaustible.

However, we must, FOR THE PRESENT AT LEAST, close our meditations on this most marvellous line of truth; but ere doing so, we are anxious to call the reader's attention, as briefly as possible, to one or two things which have been barely hinted at in the progress of these papers. We deem them not only interesting, but of real practical value in helping to a clearer understanding of many branches of the great subject which has been engaging our attention.

The reader who has travelled in company with us through the various branches of our subject will remember a cursory reference to what we ventured to call “an unnoticed interval — break — or parenthesis” in the dealings of God with Israel and with the earth. This is a point of the deepest interest; and we hope to be able to show the reader that it is not some curious question, a dark mysterious subject, or a favourite notion of some special school of prophetic interpretation. Quite the contrary. We consider it to be a point which throws a flood of light on very many branches of our general subject. Such we have found it for ourselves, and as such we desire to present it to our readers. Indeed we strongly question if any one can rightly understand prophecy or his own true position and bearings, who does not see the unnoticed interval or break above referred to.

But let us turn directly to the Word, and open at chapter 9 of the book of Daniel.

The opening verses of this remarkable section show us the beloved servant of God in profound exercise of soul in reference to the sad condition of his much loved people Israel — a condition into which, through the Spirit of Christ, he most thoroughly enters. Though not having himself personally participated in these actings which had brought ruin upon the nation, yet he identifies himself, most completely, with the people, and makes their sins his own in confession and self-judgment before his God.

We cannot attempt to quote from Daniel's remarkable prayer and confession on this occasion; but the subject which immediately concerns us now is introduced in verse 20.

“And while I was speaking, and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the Lord my God for the holy mountain of my God; yea, while I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation. And he informed me and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding. At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment came forth, and I am come to show thee; for thou art greatly beloved: therefore understand the matter, and consider the vision. Seventy weeks are determined [or portioned out] upon thy people, and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy.”

Now we cannot, in our limited space, enter upon any elaborate argument to prove that the “seventy weeks,” in the above quotation, mean really four hundred and ninety years. We assume this to be the fact. We believe that Gabriel was commissioned to instruct the beloved prophet, and to inform him of the fact that, from the going forth of the decree to rebuild Jerusalem, a period of four hundred and ninety years was to elapse, and that then Israel would be brought into blessing.

This is as simple and definite as anything can be. We may assert, with all possible confidence, that it is not so certain that the sun shall rise, at the appointed moment, tomorrow morning, as that at the close of the period above named by the angelic messenger, Daniel's people shall be brought into blessing. It is as sure as the throne of God. Nothing can hinder. Not all the powers of earth and hell combined shall be allowed to stand in the way of the full and perfect accomplishment of the Word of God by the mouth of Gabriel. When the last sand of the four hundred and ninetieth year shall have run out of the glass, Israel shall enter upon the possession of all their destined pre-eminence and glory. It is impossible to read Daniel 9: 24, and not see this.

But, it may be, the reader feels disposed to ask — and ask, too, with astonishment, “Have not the four hundred and ninety years expired long ago?” We reply, Certainly not. Had they done so, Israel would be now in their own land, under the blessed reign of their own loved Messiah. Scripture cannot be broken; nor can we play fast and loose with its statements, as though they might mean anything or everything, or nothing at all. The word is precise. “Seventy weeks are portioned out upon thy people.” Neither more nor less than seventy weeks. If

this be taken to mean literal weeks, the passage has no sense or meaning whatever. It would be an insult to our readers to occupy time in combating such an absurdity as this.

But if, as we are most thoroughly persuaded, Gabriel meant seventy weeks of years, then have we a period most distinct and definite before us — a period extending from the moment in which Cyrus issued his decree to restore Jerusalem, to the moment of Israel's restoration.

Still, however, the reader may feel led to ask, “How can these things be? It is very much more than four hundred and ninety years, four times told, since the king of Persia issued his decree, and yet there is no sign of Israel's restoration. There must surely be some other mode of interpreting the seventy weeks.”

We can only repeat our statement, that the four hundred and ninety years are not out yet. There has been a break — a parenthesis, a long unnoticed interval. Let the reader look closely at Daniel 9: 25-26: “Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem, unto the Messiah the Prince, shall be seven weeks [49 years] and threescore and two weeks [434 years]; the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times;” or, as the margin reads it, “in strait of times,” that is, the street and the wall of Jerusalem were built in the shorter of the two periods named, or in forty-nine years. “And after threescore and two weeks [434 years from the rebuilding of Jerusalem], shall Messiah be cut off, and have nothing” (see margin).

Here then we reach the marked, memorable, and solemn epoch. The Messiah, instead of being received, is cut off. In place of ascending the throne of David, He goes to the cross. Instead of entering upon the possession of all the promises, He has nothing. His only portion — so far as Israel and the earth were concerned — was the cross, the vinegar, the spear, the borrowed grave.

Messiah was rejected, cut off, and had nothing. What then? God signified His sense of this act, by suspending for a time His dispensational dealings with Israel. The course of time is interrupted. There is a great gap. Four hundred and eighty-three years are fulfilled; seven yet remain — a cancelled week, and all the time since the death of the Messiah has been an unnoticed interval — a break or parenthesis, during which Christ has been hidden in the heavens, and the Holy Ghost has been working on earth in forming the body of Christ, the Church, the heavenly bride. When the last member shall have been incorporated into this body, the Lord Himself shall come and receive His people to Himself, to conduct them back to the Father's house, there to be with Him in the ineffable communion of that blessed home, while God will, by His governmental dealings, prepare Israel and the earth for the introduction of the First-begotten into the world.

Now as to this interval and all that was to occur therein, Gabriel maintains a profound reserve. Whether he understood aught of it is not the question. It is clear he was not commissioned to speak of it, inasmuch as the time was not come for so doing. He passes, with marvellous and mysterious abruptness, over ages and generations — steps from headland to headland of the prophetic chart, and dismisses in a short sentence or

two, a lengthened period of nearly two thousand years. The siege of Jerusalem by the Romans is thus briefly noticed, “The people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary.” Then, a period which has already lasted for eighteen centuries is thus disposed of, “And the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined.”

Then, with intense rapidity, we are conducted on to the time of the end, when the last of the seventy weeks, the last seven of the four hundred and ninety years, shall be accomplished. “And he [the Prince] shall confirm the covenant with many [of the Jews] for one week [seven years]; and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolator” (margin).

Here then we reach the end of the four hundred and ninety years which were determined or portioned out upon Daniel's people. To attempt to interpret this period without seeing the break and the long unnoticed interval, must of necessity plunge the mind in utter confusion. It cannot possibly be done. Numberless theories have been started; endless calculations and speculations have been attempted; but in vain. The four hundred and ninety years are not accomplished yet; nor will they have their accomplishment until the Church has left this scene altogether, and gone to be with her Lord in her bright heavenly home. Revelation 4 and 5 show us the place which the heavenly saints shall occupy during the last of Daniel's seventy weeks; while from Revelation 6-18 we have the various actings of God

in government, preparing Israel and the earth for the bringing in of the First-begotten in the world.*

{*It is, we are aware, a question among the expositors, whether the events detailed in Revelation 6-18 will occupy a whole week or only a half. We do not here attempt to offer an opinion. Some consider that the public ministry of John the Baptist and that of our Lord occupied a week, or seven years, and that in consequence of Israel's rejection of both, the week is cancelled, and remains yet to be fulfilled. It is an interesting question; but it in no wise affects the great principles which have been before us, or the interpretation of the book of Revelation. We may add that the expressions “forty and two months” — “twelve hundred and sixty days” — “time, times, and the dividing of time,” indicate the period of half a week, or three years and a half.}

We are very anxious to make these matters clear to the reader. It has greatly helped us in the understanding of prophecy, and cleared away many difficulties. We feel thoroughly persuaded that no one can understand the book of Daniel, or indeed the general scope of prophecy, who does not see that the last of the seventy weeks remains to be fulfilled. Not one jot or tittle of God's Word can ever pass away, and seeing He has declared that “seventy weeks were portioned out upon Daniel's people,” and that at the close of that period they should be brought into blessing, it is plain that this period is not yet expired. But unless we see the break, and the dropping of time, consequent upon the rejection of the Messiah, we cannot possibly make out the fulfilment of Daniel's seventy weeks, or four hundred and ninety years.

Another important fact for the reader to seize is this, the Church forms no part of the ways of God with Israel and the earth. The Church does not belong to time, but to eternity. She is not earthly, but heavenly. She is called into existence during an unnoticed interval — a break or parenthesis consequent upon the cutting off of the Messiah. To speak after the manner of men, if Israel had received the Messiah, then the seventy weeks or four hundred and ninety years would have been fulfilled; but Israel rejected her King, and God has retired to His place until they acknowledge their iniquity. He has suspended His public dealings with Israel and the earth, though most surely controlling all things by His providence, and keeping His eye upon the seed of Abraham, ever beloved for the father's sake.

Meanwhile He is calling out from Jews and Gentiles that body called the Church, to be the companion of His Son in heavenly glory — to be thoroughly identified with Him in His present rejection from this earth, and to wait in holy patience for His glorious advent.

All this marks off the Christian's position in the most definite manner possible. His portion and his prospects, too, are thus defined with equal clearness. It is vain to look into the prophetic page in order to find the Church's position, her calling, or her hope. They are not there. It is entirely out of place for the Christian to be occupied with dates and historic events, as though he were in anywise involved therein. No doubt, all these things have their proper place and their value, and their interest, as connected with God's dealings with Israel and with the earth. But the Christian must never lose sight of the fact that he belongs to Heaven, that he is inseparably linked with an earth-rejected, heaven-

accepted Christ — that his life is hid with Christ in God — that it is his holy privilege to be looking out, daily and hourly, for the coming of his Lord. There is nothing to hinder the realization of that blissful hope at any moment. There is but one thing that causes the delay, and that is, “the longsuffering of our Lord, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” — precious words these for a lost and guilty world! The salvation is ready to be revealed; and God is ready to judge. There is nothing now to wait for but the gathering in of the last elect one, and then — oh! most blessed thought — our own dear and loving Saviour will come and receive us to Himself to be with Him where He is, and to go no more out forever.

Then when the Church has gone to be with her Lord in the heavenly home, God will resume His public actings with Israel. They will be brought into great tribulation, during the week already referred to. But at the close of that period of unexampled pressure and trial, their long-rejected Messiah will appear for their relief and deliverance. He will come forth as the rider on the white horse, accompanied by the heavenly saints. He will execute summary judgment upon His enemies, and take to Himself His great power and reign. The kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ. Satan shall be bound for a thousand years; and the whole universe shall repose beneath the blissful and benignant rule of the Prince of peace.

Finally, at the close of the thousand years, Satan shall be loosed, and permitted to make one more desperate effort — an effort issuing in his eternal defeat and consignment to the lake of fire, there to be tormented

with the beast and the false prophet throughout the everlasting ages.

Then follows the resurrection and judgment of the wicked dead, and their consignment to the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone — tremendous and appalling thought! No heart can conceive — no tongue can tell — the horrors of that lake of fire.

But hardly is there a moment to dwell upon the dark and awful picture, ere the unutterable glories of the new heavens and the new earth burst upon the vision of the soul; the holy city is seen descending from Heaven, and these seraphic sounds fall upon the ear, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away. And He that sat upon the throne, said, Behold I make all things new.”

O beloved christian reader, what scenes are before us! What grand realities! What brilliant moral glories! May we live in the light and power of these things! May we cherish that blessed hope of seeing the One who loved us and gave Himself for us — who would not enjoy His glory alone, but endured the wrath of God in order that He might link us with Himself, and share with us all His love and glory for ever. Oh! to live for Christ and wait for His appearing!

High in the Father's house above

My mansion is prepared;

There is the home, the rest I love,
And there my bright reward.
With Him I love, in spotless white,
In glory I shall shine;
His blissful presence my delight,
His love and glory mine.
All taint of sin shall be removed,
All evil done away;
And I shall dwell with God's Beloved,
Through God's eternal day.

Pre-Millennial Doctrine or Waiting for the Son?

Pre-Millennial Doctrine or Waiting for the Son?

Revelation 1: 5-7.

C. H. Mackintosh.

In a day like the present, when knowledge on every question is so widely diffused, it is most needful to press upon the conscience of the Christian reader the vast distinction between merely holding the doctrine of the Lord's second coming and actually waiting for His appearing (1 Thess. 1: 10). Many, alas! hold and, it may be, eloquently preach, the doctrine of a second advent who really do not know the Person whose advent they profess to believe and preach. This evil must be faithfully pointed out and dealt with. The present is an age of knowledge — of religious knowledge; but oh! knowledge is not life, knowledge is not power — knowledge will not deliver from sin or Satan, from the world, from death, from hell. Knowledge, I mean, short of the knowledge of God in Christ. One may know a great deal of Scripture, a great deal of prophecy, a great deal of doctrine, and, all the while, be dead in trespasses and sins.

There is, however, one kind of knowledge which necessarily involves eternal life, and that is the knowledge of God, as He is revealed in the face of Jesus Christ. "This is life eternal, to know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent" (John 17: 3). Now, it is impossible to be living in the daily and hourly expectation of "the coming of the Son of Man," if

the Son of Man be not experimentally known. I may take up the prophetic record, and by mere study, and the exercise of my intellectual faculties, discover the doctrine of the Lord's second coming, and yet be totally ignorant of Christ, and living a life of entire alienation of heart from Him.

How often has this been the case! How many have astonished us with their vast fund of prophetic knowledge — a fund acquired, it may be, by years of laborious research, and yet, in the end, proved themselves to have been displaying unhallowed light — light not acquired by prayerful waiting upon God! Surely the thought of this should deeply affect our hearts and solemnise our minds and lead us to inquire whether or not we know the blessed Person who, again and again, announces Himself as about to "come quickly"; else, if we know Him not, we may find ourselves of the number of those addressed by the prophet in the following startling words: "Woe unto you that desire the day of the Lord! to what end is it for you? The day of the Lord is darkness, and not light. As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall and a serpent bit him. Shall not the day of the Lord be darkness and not light? even very dark and no brightness in it?" (Amos 5: 18-20)

Matthew 2 furnishes us with a very striking illustration of the difference between mere prophetic knowledge of Christ-between the exercise of the intellect on the letter of Scripture, and the drawings of the Father to the Person of Christ. The wise men, manifestly led by the finger of God, were in true and earnest search of Christ, and they found Him. As to scriptural knowledge, they could not, for a moment have competed with the chief

priests and scribes; yet what did the scriptural knowledge of the latter do for them? Why, it rendered them efficient instruments for Herod, who called them together for the purpose of making use of their Biblical knowledge in his deadly opposition to God's Anointed. They were able to give him chapter and verse, as we say. But, while they were assisting Herod by their knowledge, the wise men were, by the drawings of the Father, making their way to Jesus. Blessed contrast! How much happier to be a worshipper at the feet of Jesus, though with slender knowledge, than to be a learned scribe, and a heart cold, dead, and distant from that blessed One! How much better to have the heart full of lively affection for Christ than to have the intellect stored with the most accurate knowledge of the letter of Scripture!

What is the melancholy characteristic of the present time? A wide diffusion of scriptural knowledge with little love for Christ, and little devotedness to His work; abundant readiness to quote Scripture, like the scribes and chief priests, but little purpose of heart, like the wise men, to open the treasures and present to Christ the willing offerings of a heart filled by the sense of what He is. What we want is personal devotedness, and not the mere empty display of knowledge. It is not that we would undervalue scriptural knowledge; God forbid, if that knowledge be found in connection with genuine discipleship. But if it be not, I ask, of what value is it? None whatever. The most extensive range of knowledge, if Christ be not its centre, will avail just nothing; yea, it will, in all probability, render us more efficient instruments in Satan's hand for the furthering of his purposes of hostility to Christ. An ignorant man can do

but little mischief; but a learned man, without Christ, can do a great deal.

The verses which stand at the head of this paper present to us the divine basis on which to found all scriptural knowledge, more especially prophetic knowledge. Before any one can utter his hearty amen to the announcement, "Behold He cometh with clouds," he must, without any question, be able to join in the blessed burst of praise, "To Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood." The believer knows the One who is coming, because He has loved him, and washed him from his sins. The believer expects the everlasting Lover of his soul. The meek and lowly One who served, suffered, and was emptied down here, will speedily come in the clouds of Heaven, with power and great glory, and all who know Him will welcome Him with glad hosannahs — they will be able to say, "This is the Lord, we have waited for Him, we will rejoice and be glad in His salvation." But, alas! there are, it is to be feared, very many who hold and argue about the Lord's coming who are not waiting for Him at all, who are living for themselves in the world, and "mind earthly things." How terrible to be found talking about the Lord's coming, and yet, when He does come, to be left behind! Oh! think of this; and if you are really conscious that you know not the Lord, then let me entreat of you to behold Him shedding His precious blood to wash you from your sins, and learn to confide in Him, to lean upon Him, to rejoice in Him and in Him alone.

But if you can look up to Heaven, and say, "Thank God, I do know Him, and I am waiting for Him," then let me remind you of what the Apostle John says, as to the practical result of this blessed hope. "Every man that

hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as He is pure." Yes, this must ever be the result of waiting for the Son from Heaven; but not at all so of the mere prophetic doctrine. Many of the most impure, profane and ungodly characters, that have made their appearance in the world, have held, in theory, the second advent of Christ; but they were not waiting for the Son, and therefore they did not, and could not purify themselves. It is impossible that any one can be waiting for Christ's appearing, and not make efforts after increased holiness, separation, and devotedness of heart: "Behold, I come quickly; blessed is he that watcheth." Those who know the Lord Jesus Christ, and love His appearing, will daily seek to shake off everything contrary to their Master's mind; they will seek to become more and more conformed to Him in all things. Men may hold the doctrine of the Lord's coming, and yet grasp the world and the things thereof with great eagerness; but the true hearted servant will ever keep his eye steadily fixed on his Master's return, remembering His blessed words, "I will come again and receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14: 3).

What a day will that be when the Saviour appears!

How welcome to those who have shared in His present rejection.

A crown incorruptible then will be theirs —

A rich compensation for suffering and loss.

Simon Peter - His life and its lessons

Simon Peter — His life and its lessons.

C. H. Mackintosh.

Part 1

We propose, in dependence upon the Spirit's guidance, to write a few papers on the life and ministry of the blessed servant of Christ whose name stands at the head of this paper. We shall trace him through the Gospels, through the Acts, and through the Epistles, for he appears in all the three grand divisions of the New Testament. We shall meditate upon his call, upon his conversion, his confession, his fall, his restoration; in a word, we shall glance at all the scenes and circumstances of his remarkable history, in which we shall find, if we mistake not, many valuable lessons which we may well ponder. May the Lord the Spirit be our Guide and Teacher!

For the earliest notice of Simon Peter, we must turn to the first chapter of the Gospel of John. Here we find, at the very outset, a scene full of interest and instruction. Amongst those who had been gathered by the powerful ministry of John the Baptist there were two men who heard him deliver his glowing testimony to the Lamb of God. We must quote the words: "Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; and looking upon Jesus as He walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God."

There words fell with peculiar power upon the hearts of two of John's disciples. Not that the words were specially addressed to them; at least, we are not told so. But they were words of life, freshness, and power —

words welling up from the depths of a heart that had found an object in the Person of Christ. On the preceding day, John had spoken of the work of Christ. "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." And again, "The same is He which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost."

But let the reader note particularly John's testimony to the person of the Lamb of God. "John stood," riveted, no doubt, by the object which filled the vision of his soul. "And looking upon Jesus, as He walked, he said, Behold the Lamb of God." It was this that went right to the very heart of the two disciples who stood beside him, and so affected them that they left their master to follow this new and infinitely more glorious Object that had been presented to their notice.

There is always immense moral power in the testimony that emanates from an absorbed heart. There is nothing formal, official, or mechanical, in such testimony. It is the pure fruit of heart communion; and there is nothing like it. It is not the mere statement of true things about Christ. It is the heart occupied and satisfied with Christ. It is the eye riveted, the heart fixed, the whole moral being centred and absorbed in that one commanding object that fills all Heaven with His glory.

This is the kind of testimony we so much want both in our private life and in our public reunions. It is this that tells, with such marvellous power, on others. We never can speak effectively for Christ, unless our hearts are filled with Him. And so it is also, in reference to our meetings. When Christ is the one absorbing object of every heart, there will be a tone and an atmosphere which must tell in some way or other on all who enter

the place. There may not be much gift, not much teaching — very little charm in the singing, for persons of musical taste; but oh! there is heart-enjoyment of Christ. His name is as ointment poured forth. Every eye is fixed on Him; every heart is centred in Him; He is the commanding object — the satisfying portion. The unanimous voice of the assembly seems to say, "Behold the Lamb of God," and this must produce its own powerful effect, either in attracting souls to Him, or in convincing them that the people in that assembly have gotten something of which they know nothing at all.

But let us note particularly the effect produced on the two disciples of John. "They heard him speak and they followed Jesus. Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto Him, Rabbi — which is to say, being interpreted, Master — where dwellest Thou? He said unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where He dwelt, and abode with Him that day; for it was about the tenth hour." Thus the blessed testimony of the Baptist led them to follow Jesus, and as they followed on, fresh light was poured upon their path, and they found themselves at length, in the very abode of that One of whom they had heard their master speak.

Nor was this all, though it was much — with their own hearts' deepest longings satisfied. There was now that delightful going out after others which must, in every instance, be the result of close personal acquaintance and occupation with the Person of Christ. "One of the two which heard John, and followed Jesus, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias,

which is, being interpreted, the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus."

Here is something which we may well ponder. See how the circle of blessing widens! See the result of a single sentence uttered in truth and reality! It might seem to a carnal observer as though John had lost by his testimony. Far from it. That honoured servant found his joy in pointing souls to Jesus. He did not want to link them on to himself, or to gather a party round himself. "John bare witness of Him, and cried saying, This was He of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me." And again, "This is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou? And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ. And they ask him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No. Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself? He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias. And they which were sent were of the Pharisees." What a fine moral lesson for Pharisees to be set down to! "And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet? John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth One among you, whom ye know not. He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose."

It is not very likely that the man who could give such answers, and bear such a testimony, would be, in the smallest degree, affected by the loss of a few disciples.

But, in good truth it was not losing them when they followed Jesus and found their abode with Him. Of this we have the very finest evidence that could be furnished, from John's own lips, in reply to those who evidently thought that their master might possibly feel at being left in the shade. "They came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, He that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all come to Him. John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven. Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before Him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3: 26-30).

Noble words! It was the joy of this most illustrious servant — this greatest of woman born, to hide himself behind his Master, and find all his personal springs in Him. As to himself, he was but a voice. As to his work, he was only baptising with water, he was not worthy to loose the latchet of his Master's shoe.

Such was John. Such the man whose glowing testimony led the brother of Simon Peter to the feet of the Son of God. The testimony was clear and distinct, and the work deep and real in the souls of those who received it.

It does the heart good to note the simple, earnest, forcible words of Simon's brother, Andrew. He is able to say, without reserve or hesitation, "We have found the Messias." It was this that led him to look after his brother. He lost no time. Saved and blessed himself, he

would, at once, begin to lead his brother into the same blessing.

How simple! How morally lovely! How divinely natural! No sooner had he found the Messias, than he went in search of his brother to tell him of his joy. It must ever be thus. We cannot doubt for a moment, that the actual finding Christ for ourselves is the true secret of looking after others. There is no uncertainty in Andrew's testimony — no wavering — no doubting or fearing. He does not even say, "I hope I have found." No; all is clear and distinct; and, we may say, with all possible assurance, it would not have done Simon Peter much good had it been anything else. An uncertain sound is not much use to any one.

It is a grand point to be able to say, "I have found Christ." Reader, can you say it? Doubtless, you have heard of Him. It may be you have heard from the lips of some ardent lover of Jesus, "Behold the Lamb of God." But have you followed that blessed One? If so, you will long to find some one to whom you can speak of your newly found treasure, and bring him to Jesus. Begin at home, Get hold of your brother or your sister, or your companion, your fellow-student, your fellow-shopman, your fellow-workman, your fellow-servant, and whisper lovingly, but clearly and decidedly, into his ear, "I have found Jesus. Do come, taste and see how gracious He is. Come! oh do come to Jesus." Remember this was the way that the great Apostle Peter was first called. He first heard of Jesus from the lips of his own brother Andrew. This mighty workman — this great preacher who was blessed, on one occasion, to three thousand souls — who opened the kingdom of Heaven to the Jew in Acts 3 and to the Gentile in Acts 10 — this blessed servant was

brought to Christ by the hand of his own brother in the flesh.

Part 2

The notice which we have of our apostle, in John 1, is very brief indeed, though, doubtless, there is much wrapped up in it. "Andrew first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, He said, Thou art Simon, the son of Jonas: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone."

Now, we have no record here of any deep spiritual work in the soul of Simon. We are told his name in the old creation, and his name in the new; but there is no allusion whatever to those deep exercises of soul of which we know he was the subject. For these we must ask the reader to turn for a few moments to Luke 5, where we have a marvellous piece of divine workmanship.

"And it came to pass that, as the people pressed upon Him to hear the word of God, He stood by the lake of Gennesaret, and saw two ships standing by the lake; but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets. And He entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And He sat down, and taught the people out of the ship."

Mark especially the moral grace that shines here. "He prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land." Though Lord of all creation — Possessor of Heaven and earth — He nevertheless, as the lowly, gracious Man, courteously owns Simon's proprietorship,

and asks, as a favour, that he would thrust out a little from the shore. This was morally lovely, and we may rest assured it produced its own effect upon the heart of Simon.

"Now when He had left speaking, He said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught." Simon was about to be well paid for the loan of his boat. "And Simon, answering, said unto Him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing; nevertheless, at Thy word, I will let down the net." There was power, as well as grace, in that word! "And when they had this done, they enclosed a great multitude of fishes; and their net brake. And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink." Neither their nets nor their ships were able to sustain the fruit of divine power and goodness. "When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

Here, then, we have the great practical effect produced in Peter's soul by the combined action of grace and power. He is brought to see himself in the light of the divine presence, where alone self can be truly seen and judged. Simon had heard the word of Jesus addressed to the multitude on the shore. He had felt the sweet grace and moral beauty of His way towards himself. He had marked the display of divine power in the astonishing draught of fish. All told powerfully upon his heart and conscience, and brought him on his face before the Lord.

Now this is what we may call a genuine work of conviction. Simon is in the place of true self-judgement — a very blessed place indeed — a place from which all must start if they are to be much used in the Lord's work, or if, indeed, they are ever to exhibit much depth or stability in the divine life. We need never look for any real power or progress unless there is a deep and solid work of the Spirit of God in the conscience. Persons who pass rapidly into what they call peace, are apt to pass as rapidly out of it again. It is a very serious thing indeed to be brought to see ourselves in the light of God's presence, to have our eyes opened to the truth of our past history, our present condition, and our future destiny. Simon Peter found it so in his day, and so have all those who have been brought to a saving knowledge of Christ. Hearken to Isaiah's words, when he saw himself in the powerful light of the divine glory. "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." So also in the case of the patriarch, Job. "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth Thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

These glowing utterances reveal a deep and genuine work in both the patriarch and the prophet. And surely our apostle occupied the same moral ground when he exclaimed, from the very depths of a broken heart, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." If Simon is to be called Cephas, he must be thoroughly broken up, and brought to the end of himself. If he is to be used to catch men, he must learn, in a divine way, man's true condition. If he is to teach others that "all

flesh is as grass," he must learn the application of this great truth to his own heart.

Thus it is in every case. Look at Saul of Tarsus. What mean those three days of blindness, during which he neither did eat nor drink? May we not confidently affirm that they were serious days, perhaps the most serious in the entire history of that remarkable man? They were, doubtless, days in the which he was led down to the most profound depths of his moral being, the deepest roots of his history, his nature, his character, his conduct, his religion. He was led to see that his whole life had been a terrible mistake, an awful lie; that his very career as a religious man had been one of mad rebellion against the Christ of God. All this, we may feel assured, passed in solemn and soul-subduing review before the soul of this deeply, because divinely, convicted man. His repentance was no superficial work; it was deep and thorough; it left its impress upon the whole of his after course, character, and ministry. He, too, like Simon, was brought to the end of himself, and there he found an Object that not only met his deepest need, but also perfectly satisfied all the cravings and aspirations of his renewed being.

Now, we must confess we delight in contemplating a spiritual work of this kind. It is truly refreshing to dwell upon conversions of this type. We greatly fear that in much of the work of our time there is a sad lack of depth and spiritual power, and, as a consequence, a lack of stability in the Christian character, of depth and permanency in the Christian course. It may be that those of us who are engaged in the work of evangelisation are feeble and shallow in the divine life ourselves, that we are not near enough to Christ to

understand how to deal with souls; that we do not know how to present the truth from God's side of it; that we are more desirous of showing out how the sinners need is met, than how the glory of God is secured and maintained. We do not, perhaps, sufficiently press the claims of truth and holiness upon the consciences of our hearers. There is a want of fullness in the presentation of the truth of God, too much harping upon one string; there is a barrenness and dreary monotony in the preaching, arising from lack of abiding near the fountain head, and drinking into our own souls from the inexhaustible springs of grace and truth in the Person and work of Christ. Perhaps, too, we are more occupied with ourselves and our preaching than with Christ and His glory; more anxious to be able to parade the results of our work, than to be a sweet savour of Christ to Godward.

We cannot but feel the weight and seriousness of these considerations for all who take part in the work of the gospel. We certainly do need to be more in the presence of God in reference to our service, for we cannot, by any possibility, hide from ourselves the fact, in reference to the preaching of this our day, that the fruit is small in quantity, and poor in quality. We desire to bless God for any display of His grace and power in souls; though we are by no means able to accredit as genuine much that is boastfully paraded in the way of conversion. What we long for is a deep, genuine unmistakable work of the Holy Ghost; a work which will prove itself, beyond all contradiction, by its permanent results in the life and character. It is one thing to reckon up and publish a number of cases of conversion, and quite another to see these cases made good in actual fact. The Holy Ghost

can, and does tell us at times in the page of inspiration the number of souls converted. He tells us of three thousand on one occasion. He can do so, because He knows perfectly all about it. He can read the heart. He can distinguish between the spurious and the genuine. But when men undertake to count up and publish the number of their converts, we must receive their statement with considerable reserve and caution.

Not that we would be suspicious. God forbid; yea, we would earnestly cultivate a hopeful temper of soul. Still, we cannot but feel that it is better, in every case, to let the work speak for itself. All that is really divine is sure to be found, even though it be after many days; whereas, on the other hand, there is immense danger, both for the workman and his work, in an eager and hasty reckoning up and publishing of results.

But we must return to the lake of Gennesaret, and dwell for a moment on the lovely grace that shines forth in our Lord's dealing with Simon Peter. The work of conviction was deep and real. There could be no mistaking it. The arrow had entered the heart, and gone right to its very centre. Peter felt and owned that he was a man full of sin. He felt he had no right to be near such an one as Jesus; and yet we may truly say he would not for worlds have been anywhere else. He was perfectly sincere in saying, "Depart from me," though we cannot but believe he had an inward conviction that the blessed One would do nothing of the kind. And if he had, he was right. Jesus could never depart from a poor broken-hearted sinner — no, never. It was His richest, deepest, joy to pour the healing balm of His love and grace into a wounded soul. it was His delight to heal the broken heart. He was

anointed for that work, and it was His meat and His drink to do it, blessed forever be His holy name!

"And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men." Here was the divine response to the cry of a contrite heart. The wound was deep, but the grace was deeper still. The soothing hand of a Saviour-God applied the precious balm. Simon was not only convicted, but converted. He saw himself to be a man full of sin, but he saw the Saviour full of grace; nor was it possible that his sin could be beyond the reach of that grace. Oh, no, there is grace in the heart of Jesus, as there is power in His blood, to meet the very chief of sinners. "Fear not, from henceforth thou shalt catch men. And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all and followed Him."

This was real work. It was a bona fide case, as to which there could be no question; a case of conviction, conversion, and consecration.

Part 3

We closed our last paper with these suggestive words, "They forsook all and followed Him" — words expressive, at once, of thorough separation from the things of time and of nature, and of wholehearted consecration to Christ and His interests.

Both these we see in Simon Peter. There was a deep and blessed work wrought in his soul at the lake of Gennesaret. He was given to see himself, in the light of the divine presence, where alone self can be really seen and judged. We have no reason to suppose that, viewed from a human standpoint, Simon was worse than his neighbours. On the contrary, it is more than probable, that so far as his outward life was concerned, it was

more blameless than that of many around him. He was not, like the great apostle of the Gentiles, arrested at the very height of a mad career of rebellion against Christ and His cause. He is introduced to us, by the inspired historian, in the pursuit of his quiet and honest calling as a fisherman.

But then Scripture expressly informs us that, "There is no difference, for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3). And it repeats this statement, in chap. 10 of the same Epistle, basing it upon another footing, "There is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him."

See that you really understand this most important doctrine. It is not that there are not broad lines of distinction, in a moral and social point of view, between men. Most assuredly there are such. There is, for example, a vast difference between the wretched drunkard who comes home, or is carried home, night after night, worse than a beast, to his poor broken-hearted wife and squalid, starving children, and a sober, industrious man, who realises his responsibility as a husband and a father, and seeks to fulfil the duties attaching to such relationships.

Now, we judge it would be a very great mistake indeed to ignore such a distinction as this. We believe that God, in His moral government of the world, recognises it. Contrast, for a moment, the drunkard's home with that of the sober man. Yea, contrast their whole career, their social position, their course and character. Who can fail to recognize the amazing difference between the two? There is a certain way of presenting what is called, "the

no-difference doctrine" which, to say the least of it, is far from judicious. It does not allow the margin which, as we believe, Scripture suggests, wherein to insert great social and moral distinctions between men and men — distinctions which only blindness itself can refuse to see. If we look at the present government of God, we cannot but see that there is a very serious difference indeed between one man and another. Men reap as they sow. The drunken spendthrift reaps as he sows; and the sober, industrious, honest man reaps as he sows. The enactments of God's moral government are such as to render it impossible for men to escape, even in this life, the consequences of their ways.

Nor is this all. Not only does God's present government take cognisance of the conduct of men, causing them to reap, even here, the due reward of their deeds, but when Scripture opens to our view, as it does in manifold places, the awful judgement to come, it speaks of "books being opened." It tells us that men "shall be judged every man according to their works." In short, we have close and accurate discrimination, and not a promiscuous muddling of men and things.

And further, be it remembered, that the Word of God speaks of degrees of punishment. It speaks of "few stripes" and "many stripes." It uses such words as "more tolerable" for one than another.

What mean such words, if there be not varied grounds of judgement, varied characters of responsibility, varied measures of guilt, varied degrees of punishment? Men may reason; but "the Judge of all the earth will do right." It is of no possible use for people to argue and discuss. Every man will be judged and punished according to his

deeds. This is the teaching of Holy Scripture; and it would be much better and safer and wiser for men to submit to it than to reason against it, for they may rest fully assured of it that the judgement-seat of Christ will make very short work of their reasonings. Impenitent sinners will be judged and punished according to their works: and, although men may affect to believe that it is inconsistent with the idea of a God of love that any of His creatures should be condemned to endure eternal punishment in hell, still sin must be punished; and those who reason against its punishment have only a one-sided view of God's nature and character. They have invented a god of their own who will connive at sin. But it will not do. The God of the Bible, the God whom we see at the cross, the God of Christianity will beyond all question, execute judgement upon all who reject His Son; that judgement will be according to every man's works; and the result of that judgement will, inevitably, be "The lake that burneth with fire and brimstone," forever and forever.

We deem it of the utmost importance to press on all whom it may concern the line of truth on which we have been dwelling. It leaves wholly untouched the real truth of the no-difference doctrine; but, at the same time, it qualifies and adjusts the mode of presenting the truth. It is always well to avoid an ultra one-sided way of stating things. It damages truth and stumbles souls. It perplexes the anxious, and gives a plea to the caviller. The full truth of God should always be unfolded, and thus all will be right. Truth puts men and things in their right places, and maintains a holy moral balance which is absolutely priceless.

Is it then asserted that there is a difference? Not as regards the question of righteousness before God. On this ground there is not a shadow of difference, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Looked at in the light of that glory, all human distinctions vanish. All are lost, guilty and condemned. From the very lowest strata of society — its deepest dregs, up to the loftiest heights of moral refinement, men are seen, in the light of the divine glory, to be utterly and hopelessly lost. They all stand on one common ground, are all involved in the one common ruin. And not only so, but those who plume themselves on their morality, refinement, orthodoxy, and religiousness, are further from the kingdom of God than the vilest of the sons and daughters of men, as our Lord said to the chief priests and elders, "Verily I say unto you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you" (Matt. 21).

This is very humbling to human pride and pretension. It is a doctrine to which none will ever submit until they see themselves as Simon Peter saw himself in the immediate presence of God. All who have ever been there will fully understand those self condemning words, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." These were accents flowing from the depths of a truly penitent and contrite soul. There is what we may venture to call a lovely inconsistency in them. Simon had no such thought as that Jesus would depart from him. He had, we may feel assured, an instinctive sense that that blessed One who had spoken such words to him, and shown such grace, could not turn away from a poor broken-hearted sinner. And he judged rightly. Jesus had not come down from Heaven to turn His back upon any one who needed

Him. "He came to seek and to save that which is lost." "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." "Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out." A Saviour-God had come down into this world, not, surely, to turn away from a lost sinner, but to save him and bless him, and make him a blessing. "Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men."

Such was the grace that shone upon the soul of Simon Peter. It removed his guilt, hushed his fears, and filled him with joy and peace in believing. Thus it is in every case. Divine pardon follows human confession — follows it with marvellous rapidity. "I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord: and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." God delights to pardon. It is the joy of His loving heart to cancel our guilt, and fill our souls with His own blessed peace, and to make us the messengers of His grace to others.

Not that we are called in the same way, or to the same work, as our apostle; but surely we are called to follow the Lord, and cleave to Him, with purpose of heart. This is the blessed privilege and sacred duty of every saved soul on the face of the earth; we are imperatively called upon to break with the world, and follow Christ.

It is not a question of abandoning our proper calling in life, as in Simon's case. Few indeed and far between are the cases in which such a course of action is fitting. Many, alas! have assayed to do this, and have entirely broken down, simply because they were not called of God to it, or sustained of God in it. We are convinced that, as a rule, it is better for every man to work with his hands or his brains at some bread-winning calling, and

preach and teach as well, if gifted to do so. There are exceptions, no doubt, to the rule. There are some who are so manifestly called, fitted, used, and sustained of God, that there can be no possible mistake as to their course. Their hands are so full of work, their every moment so engrossed with ministry in speaking or writing, teaching publicly and from house to house, that it would be a simple impossibility for them to take up what is termed a secular calling — though we like not the phrase. All such have to go on with God, looking only to Him, and He will infallibly maintain them unto the end.

Still, admitting, as we are bound to do fully, the exceptions to the rule, we are nevertheless convinced that, as a rule, it is better in every way for men to be able to preach and teach without being chargeable to any. It gives moral weight, and it furnishes a fine testimony against the wretched hirelingism of Christendom so demoralising to souls, and so damaging, in every way, to the cause of Christ.

But Christian reader, we have to distinguish between abandoning our lawful calling and breaking with the world. The former may be quite wrong; the latter is our bounden duty. We are called to rise up, in the spirit of the mind and in the firm purpose of the heart, out of all merely worldly influences, to break every worldly link, and lay aside every weight, in order to follow our blessed Lord and Master. We are to be absolutely and completely for Him in this world, as He is for us in the presence of God. When this is really the case with us, it matters not whether we are sweeping a crossing or evangelising a continent. All is done to Him. This is the one grand point. If Christ has His due place in our

hearts, all will be right. If He has not, nothing will be right. If there is any undercurrent in the soul, any secondary object, any worldly motive, any selfish aim or end, there can be no progress. We must make Christ and His cause our absorbing object.

Part 4

The more deeply we ponder the history of professing Christians, whether as furnished by the pen of inspiration, or as coming within the range of personal observation, the more fully we must see the vast importance of a complete break with the world, at the outset. If there be not this, it is vain to look for inward peace, or outward progress. There may be a measure of clearness as to the doctrines of grace, the plan of salvation, as it is called, justification by faith, and the like. But unless there is the thorough judgement of self, and the complete surrender of this present evil world, peace and progress must be out of the question. How can there be peace where self, in some one or other of its thousand shapes, is fostered? And how can there be progress where the heart is hankering after the world, halting between two opinions, and vacillating between Christ and present things? Impossible. As well might a racer expect to get on in the race while still lingering about the starting post, and encumbering himself with heavy weights.

Is it then, that peace is to be found by denying self and giving up the world? Most certainly not. But neither can peace ever be found while self is indulged and the world retained. True peace is found only in Christ — peace of conscience in His finished work — peace of heart in His blessed Person. All this is clear enough. But how comes

it to pass that hundreds of people who know, or profess to know, these things have no settled peace, and never seem to take a single step in advance? You meet them, week after week, month after month, year after year, and there they are in the same position, in the same state, and with the same old story, chronic cases of self-occupation, stereotyped world-borderers, "ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." They seem to delight in hearing the gospel clearly preached, and truth fully unfolded. In fact, they cannot endure anything else. But, for all that, they are never clear, bright, or happy. How can they be? They are halting between two opinions; they have never broken with the world; they have never surrendered a whole heart to Christ.

Here, we are persuaded, lies the real secret of the whole matter as regards that class of persons now before us. "A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways." A man who tries to keep one eye on the world, and the other on Christ, will be found to have no eye for Christ, but both eyes for the world. It must be so: Christ must be all or nothing; and hence it is the very height of absurdity to talk of peace or progress where Christ is not the absorbing object of the soul. Where He is, there will never be any lack of settled peace; and there will be progress. The Holy Ghost is jealous for the glory of Christ, and He can never minister comfort, consolation, or strength to a heart divided between Him and the world. It could not be. He is grieved by such unfaithfulness; and instead of being the minister of comfort, He must be the stern reprover of indulged selfishness, worldliness, and vacillation.

Let us look at the case of our apostle. How refreshing it is to contemplate his thoroughgoing style! His starting was of the right sort. "He forsook all and followed Christ." There was no halting here, at all events; no vacillating between Christ and present things. Boats, nets, fish, natural ties, all are unhesitatingly and unreservedly surrendered, not as a matter of cold duty or legal service, but as the grand and necessary result of having seen the glory and heard the voice of the Son of God.

Thus it was with Simon Peter, at the opening of his remarkable career. All was clear and unequivocal, whole-hearted and decided, so far as the starting was concerned; and we must bear this in mind, as we pursue his after history. No doubt, we shall find mistakes and stumblings, failure, ignorance, and sin; but, underneath, and in spite of all this, we shall find a heart true to Jesus — a heart divinely taught to appreciate the Christ of God.

This is a grand point. Blunders may well be borne with, when the heart beats true to Christ. Some one has remarked that, "The blunderers do all the work." If this be so, the reason is that those blunderers have real affection for their Lord; and that is precisely what we all want. A man may make a great many mistakes, but if he can say when challenged by his Lord, "Thou knowest that I love Thee," he is sure to come right in the end; and not only so, but, even in the very midst of his mistakes, our hearts are much more drawn to him than to the cold, correct, sleek professor, who thinks of himself, and seeks to make the best of both worlds.

Simon Peter was a true lover of Christ. He had a divinely given sense of His preciousness, of the glory of His Person, and the heavenly character of His mission. All this comes out, with much force and freshness, in his varied confessions of Christ, even before the day of Pentecost. We shall glance at one or two of these, not with any view to chronological order, but simply to illustrate and prove the lovely devotedness of this true-hearted servant of Christ.

Let us turn to Matt. 16, "When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked His disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?" Weighty question! Upon the answer to this question hangs the whole moral condition and future destiny of every human being under the sun All really depends upon the heart's estimate of Christ. This it is, which like a great moral indicator, reveals a man's true state, character, bent and object, in all things. It is not merely a question of his outward life, or of his profession of faith. The former may be blameless, and the latter orthodox; but, if underneath all this blameless morality and orthodox profession, there be not one true pulsation of the heart for Christ, no divinely wrought sense of what, and who, and whence He is, then verily all the morality and the orthodoxy are but the trappings with which a guilty, hell- deserving sinner adorns himself in the eyes of his fellows, or with which he deceives himself as to the awful eternity which lies before him. "What think ye of Christ?" is the all-deciding question; for God the Holy Ghost has emphatically declared that, "If any man" — no matter who or what he be — "love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha" (1 Cor. 16: 22).

How awful is this! And how remarkable to find it at the close of such an Epistle as the first to the Corinthians! How forcibly it declares to all who will only bend their ears to listen, that love to Christ is the basis of all sound doctrine, the motive spring of all true morality! If that blessed One be not enthroned at the very centre of the heart's affections, an orthodox creed is an empty delusion; and an unblemished reputation is but dust cast in a man's eyes to prevent him seeing his true condition in the sight of God. The Christians at Corinth had fallen into many doctrinal errors and moral evils, all needing rebuke and correction; but when the inspiring Spirit pronounces His awful anathema, it is levelled, not at the introducers of any one special error, or moral pravity, but at "any man who loves not the Lord Jesus Christ."

This is peculiarly solemn at all times; but specially so for the day in which our lot is cast, when the Person and glory of Christ are so little thought of or cared for. A man may actually blaspheme Christ, deny His deity or His eternal Sonship, and yet be received into professing Christian circles, and allowed to preside at so-called religious meetings Surely all this must be dreadful in the sight of God, whose purpose it is "that all men should honour the Son even as they honour the Father"; and that every knee should bow, and every tongue confess to Jesus as Lord of all. God is jealous for the honour of His Son; and the man that neglects, rejects, and blasphemes that blessed One will yet have to learn and own the eternal justice of that most solemn decree, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha."

How momentous, therefore, the question put by our Lord Christ to His disciples, "Whom do men say that I,

the Son of man, am?" Alas, "men" knew nothing, cared nothing about Him. They knew neither who He was, what He was, nor whence He was. "Some say that thou art John the Baptist; some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets." In a word, there was endless speculation, because there was utter indifference and thorough heartlessness. The human heart has not so much as a single true thought about Christ, not one atom of affection for Him. Such is the awful condition of the very best of men until renewed by divine grace. They know not, they love not, they care not for the Son of God — the Beloved of the Father's heart — the Man on the throne of Heaven's majesty. Such is their moral condition, and hence their every thought, word, and act is contrary to God. They have not a single feeling in common with God, for the most distinct of all reasons, that the One who is everything to Him is nothing to them. Christ is God's standard, and every one and everything must be measured by Him. The heart that does not love Christ has not a single pulsation in unison with the heart of God; and the life that does not spring from love to Christ however blameless, respectable, or splendid in the eyes of men, is a worthless, objectless, misspent life in the judgement of God.

But how truly delightful to turn from all the heartlessness and indifference of "men" and harken to the testimony of one who was taught of God to know and own who the Son of man was! "Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Here was the true answer. There was no vain speculation here, no uncertainty, no may be this, or may be that. It was divine testimony flowing from divinely given knowledge. It was not yea and nay, but yea and

amen to the glory of God. We may rest fully assured that these glowing words of Simon Peter went up, like fragrant incense, to the throne of God, and refreshed the heart of the One who sat there. There is nothing in all the world so precious to God as a heart that, in any measure, appreciates Christ. Let us never forget this!

"And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter; and upon this Rock I will build My Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

Here we have the very first direct allusion to the Church, or assembly of Christ; and the reader will note that our Lord speaks of it as yet future. He says, "I will build My church." He was the Rock, the divine foundation; but ere a single stone could be built on Him, He must die.

This is a grand cardinal truth of Christianity — a truth which our apostle had yet to learn, notwithstanding his brilliant and beautiful confession. Simon Peter was not yet prepared for the profound mystery of the cross. He loved Christ, and he had been taught of God to own Him in a very full and blessed manner; but he had yet much to learn ere he could take in the soul-subduing truth that this blessed Son of the living God must die, ere even he, as a living stone, could be built upon Him. "From that time forth began Jesus to show unto His disciples, how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day."

Here the solemn truth begins to break through the clouds. But Simon Peter is not prepared for it. It withered up all his Jewish hopes and earthly expectations. What! The Son of the living God must die! How could it be? The glorious Messiah be nailed to a cross! "Then Peter took Him, and began to rebuke Him, saying, Be it far from Thee, (or pity Thyself) Lord, this shall not be unto Thee."

Such is man! Such was even Simon Peter! He would fain turn the blessed Lord away from the cross! He would, in his ignorance, frustrate the eternal counsels of God, and play into the hands of the devil! Poor Peter! What a rock he would be for the Church to be built upon! "The Lord turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind Me, Satan, thou art an offence unto Me; for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men."

Withering words? Who would have thought that "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona," should so speedily be followed by, "Get thee behind Me, Satan"?

Part 5

We must still linger a little over the deeply interesting and instructive scene in the sixteenth chapter of Matthew. It brings before us two great subjects, namely, "the Church," and "the kingdom of Heaven." These things must never be confounded. As to the first, it is only to be found in the New Testament. Indeed, as has often been remarked, verse 18 of our chapter contains the very first direct allusion in the volume of God to the subject of the Church, or assembly, of Christ.

This, though familiar to many of our readers, may present a difficulty to others. Many Christians and Christian teachers strongly maintain that the doctrine of

the Church is distinctly unfolded in Old Testament Scripture. They consider that the saints of the Old Testament belonged to the Church; in fact, that there is no difference whatever; all form one body; all stand on one common ground; and that to represent the Lord's people in New Testament times as in a higher position, or endowed with higher privileges than Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, is a delusion. It seems strange to such to assert that Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and Moses did not belong to the Church — were not members of the body of Christ — were not endowed with the selfsame privileges as believers now. Trained from their earliest days to believe that all God's people, from the beginning to the end of time, stand on the same ground, and form one common body, they find it impossible to admit of any difference. It seems to them presumption on the part of Christians to assert that they are in any A respect different from God's beloved people of old — those blessed worthies of whom we read in Hebrews 11, who lived a life of faith and personal devotedness, and who are now in Heaven with their Lord.

But the all-important question is, "What saith the Scripture?" It can be of no possible use to set up our own thoughts, our own reasonings, our own conclusions, in opposition to the Word of God. It is a very easy matter for men to reason, with great apparent force, point, and cleverness, about the absurdity and presumption of the notion that Christians are in a better and higher place, and more privileged, than God's people of old.

But this is not the proper way in which to approach this great subject. It is not a question of the difference personally between the Lord's people at different periods. Were it so, where should we find, amongst the

ranks of Christian professors, any one to compare with an Abraham, a Joseph, a Moses, or a Daniel? Were it a question of simple faith, where could we find in the entire history of the Church a finer example than the father of the faithful? Were it a question of personal holiness, where could we find a brighter illustration than Joseph? For intimacy with God, and acquaintance with His ways and mind, who could go beyond Moses? For unswerving devotedness to God and His truth, could we find a brighter example than the man who went down into the lions' den rather than not pray toward Jerusalem?

However, let it be distinctly understood that it is not by any means a personal question, or a comparison of people, but of dispensational position. If this be clearly seen, it will, we doubt not, remove out of the way a great deal of the difficulty which many pious people seem to feel in reference to the truth of the Church.

But above and beyond all this stands the question, What does Scripture teach on the subject? If any one had spoken to Abraham about being a member of the body of Christ, would he have understood it? Could that honoured and beloved saint of God have had the most remote idea of being linked by an indwelling Spirit to a living Head in Heaven? Utterly impossible. How could he be a member of a body which had no existence? And how could there be a body without a Head? And when do we first hear of the Head? When the Man Christ Jesus, having passed through death and the grave, ascended into the heavens, and took His seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high. Then, and not until then, did the Holy Ghost come down to form the body, and link it by His presence to the glorified Head above.

This, however, is rather anticipating a line of argument which is yet to come before us. Let us here put another question to the reader. If any one had spoken to Moses about a body composed of Jews and Gentiles — a body whose constituent parts had been drawn from among the seed of Abraham and the cursed race of the Canaanites — what would he have said? May we not safely assert that his whole moral being would have shrunk with horror from the thought? What! Jews and Canaanites — the seed of Abraham and uncircumcised Gentiles — united in one body? Impossible for the lawgiver to take in such an idea. The fact is, if there was one feature which more strongly than another marked the Jewish economy, it was the rigid separation by divine appointment of Jew and Gentile. "Ye know," says Simon Peter, "how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or to come unto one of another nation."

Such was the order of things under the Mosaic economy. It would have been a flagrant transgression on the part of a Jew to climb over that middle wall of partition which separated him from all the nations around; and hence the thought of a union between Jew and Gentile could not possibly have entered into any human mind; and the more faithful a man was to the existing order of things under the law, the more opposed he must have been to any such thought.

Now, in the face of all this, how can any one seek to maintain that the truth of the Church was known in Old Testament times, and that there is no difference whatever between the position of a Christian and that of an Old Testament believer? The fact is that even Simon Peter himself found it extremely difficult to take in the

idea of admitting the Gentiles into the kingdom of Heaven. Though he was entrusted with the keys of that kingdom, he was very reluctant indeed to use them for the admission of the Gentiles. He had to be expressly taught by a heavenly vision, ere he was prepared to fulfil the commission with which he was charged by his Lord in Matthew 16.

No, reader, it is of no possible use to stand against the plain testimony of Scripture. The truth of the Church was not — could not — be known in Old Testament times. It was, as the inspired apostle tells us, "hid in God" — hid in His eternal counsels — "not made known to the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit,* that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel" (Eph. 3).

{*The "prophets," in this passage, are those of the New Testament. This is evident from the expression, "Now revealed," He could not speak of a thing being "now revealed" to men who had been dead for hundreds of years Besides, had the apostle meant Old Testament prophets, the order would assuredly have been "Prophets and apostles." We have a similar expression in Eph. 2: 20 ''Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets." He does not say, "prophets and apostles." The truth is that the apostles and prophets formed the first layer of the foundation of the Church of which Jesus Christ is the chief Corner-stone, and this is an additional proof that the Church had no existence save in the secret counsels of God until our Lord Christ. having accomplished the work of redemption, ascended into the heavens, and sent down the Holy Ghost to baptize

believers — Jews and Gentiles — into one body. The reader may also refer with real profit and interest to Rom. 16: 25, 26: Now to Him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and he preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the he mystery which was kept secret since the world began but now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets [literally, by the prophetic writings, that is, of the New Testament] according to the commandment of the everlasting God. made known to all nations for the obedience of faith."}

We can only reach the great mystery of the Church by walking over the broken-down middle wall of partition. "Wherefore remembers that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world. 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, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, the law of commandments in ordinances, for to make in Himself of twain one new man, making peace; and that He might 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" (Eph. 2: 11-18).

Thus, from all that has passed before us, the reader will, we trust, fully see why it is that our Lord in His word to

Simon Peter speaks of the Church as a future thing. "Upon this rock I will build My Church." He does not say, "I have been," or, "I am, building My Church." Nothing of the kind. It could not be. It was still "hid in God." The Messiah had to be cut off and have nothing — nothing, for the present, as regards Israel and the earth. He must be rejected, crucified, and slain, in order to lay the foundation of the Church. It was utterly impossible that a single stone could be laid in this new, this wondrous building until "the chief Corner-stone" had passed through death and taken His place in the Heavens. It was not in incarnation, but in resurrection, that our Lord Christ became Head of a body.

Now our apostle was not in the least prepared for this. He did not understand one jot or tittle of it. That Messiah should set up a kingdom in power and glory — that He should restore Israel to their destined pre-eminence in the earth — all this he could understand and appreciate — he was looking for it. But a suffering Messiah — a rejected and crucified Christ — of this he could not hear just then. "Be it far from Thee, Lord; this shall not be unto Thee." These were the words which drew forth that withering rebuke with which we closed our last paper, "Get thee behind Me, Satan; thou art an offence unto Me; for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men."

We may gather the gravity of his error from the severity of the rebuke. Peter had much to learn, much to go through, ere he could grasp the great truth which His Lord was putting before him. But he did grasp it, by the grace of God, and confess it, and teach it with power. He was led to see not only that Christ was the Son of the living God, but that He was a rejected Stone, disallowed

of men, but chosen of God and precious; and that all who through grace come to Him must share His rejection on earth as well as His acceptance in Heaven. They are perfectly identified with Him.

Part 6

At the close of John 6 we have a very clear and beautiful confession of Christ from the lips of our apostle — a confession rendered all the more touching and forcible by the circumstances under which it was delivered.

Our blessed Lord, in His teachings in the synagogue at Capernaum, had unfolded truth which puts the poor human heart to the test, and withers up all the pretensions of man in a very remarkable manner. We cannot here attempt to enter upon the subject of our Lord's discourse, but the effect of it is thus recorded: "From that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him." They were not prepared for the reception of such heavenly doctrine. They were offended by it, and they turned their backs upon that blessed One who alone was worthy of all the affections of the heart, and of the homage and devotion of the whole moral being. "They went back, and walked no more with Him."

Now we are not told what became of these deserters, or whether they were saved or not. No such question is raised. We are simply told that they abandoned Christ, and ceased to be any longer publicly identified with His name and His cause. How many, alas! have since followed their sad example! It is one thing to profess to be the disciples of Christ, and another thing altogether to stand with firm purpose of heart on the ground of public testimony for His name, in thorough identification

with a rejected Lord. It is one thing for people to flock to Christ because of the benefits which He bestows, and it is quite another to cleave to Him in the face of the world's scorn and contempt. The application of the doctrine of the cross very speedily thins the ranks of professors. In the chapter before us we see at one moment multitudes thronging enthusiastically around the Man who could so marvellously supply their need, and the next moment abandoning Him, when His teaching offended their pride.

Thus it has been, thus it is, and thus it will be until that day in the which the despised Stranger of Nazareth shall reign from pole to pole, and from the river to the ends of the earth. We are ready enough to avail ourselves of the benefits and blessings which a loving Saviour can bestow upon us, but when it becomes a question of following a rejected Lord along that rough and lonely path which He has trodden for us in this sinful world, we are disposed, like those of old, to go back, and walk no more with Him.

This is very sad and very humiliating. It proves how little we know of His heart, or of what that heart desires from us. Jesus longs for fellowship. He does not want patronage. It does not meet the desire of His heart to be followed, or admired, or gazed at, because of what He can do or give. He delights in a heart taught of God to appreciate His Person, for this glorifies and gratifies the Father. He retired from the gaze of an excited and tumultuous throng who would fain make Him a king, because they had eaten of the loaves and were filled; but He could turn, with touching earnestness, to the little band of followers who still remained, and challenge their hearts with the question, "Will ye also go away?"

How deeply affecting! How it must have touched the hearts of all, save that one who had no heart for aught but money — who was "a thief" and "a devil"! Alas! a moment was approaching when all were to forsake Him and fly — when He was to be left absolutely alone, forsaken of men, forsaken of God — utterly and awfully deserted.

But that moment was yet future; and it is peculiarly refreshing to harken to the fine confession of our beloved apostle, in reply to the deeply affecting inquiry of his Lord. "Then Simon Peter answered Him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God."

Well indeed might he say, "To whom shall we go?" There was not another throughout the wide universe of God to whom the heart could turn. He alone could meet their every need, satisfy their every right desire, fill up every chamber of the heart. Simon Peter felt this, and hence, with all his mistakes, his failures, and his infirmities, his loving and devoted heart turned with earnest affection to his beloved Lord. He would not abandon Him, though little able to rise to the height of His heavenly teaching. There was a link binding him to Jesus Christ which nothing could snap. "Lord, to whom shall we go?" — whither shall we betake ourselves? — on whom could we reckon beside? True, there may be trial and difficulty in the path of true discipleship. It may prove a rough and a lonely path. The heart may be tried and tested in every possible way. There may be deep and varied sorrow — deep waters, dark shadows; but in the face of all we can say, "To whom shall we go?"

And mark the singular fullness of Peter's confession. "Thou hast the words of eternal life;" and then, "Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God." We have the two things, namely, what He has, and what He is. Blessed be His name, Christ has all we can possibly want for time and eternity. Words of eternal life flow from His lips into our hearts. He causes those who follow Him to "inherit substance." He bestows upon them "durable riches and righteousness." We may truly say that, in comparison of what Christ has to give, all the riches, honours, dignities, and pleasures of this world are but dross. They all pass away as the vapours of the morning, and leave only an aching void behind. Nothing that this world has to offer can possibly satisfy the cravings of the human soul. "All is vanity and vexation of spirit." And not only so — it must be given up. If one had all the wealth of Solomon, it lasts but a moment in comparison with that boundless eternity which lies before every one of us. When death approaches, all the riches of the universe could not purchase one moment's respite. The last great enemy gives no quarter. He ruthlessly snaps the link that connects man with all that his poor heart prizes and loves upon earth, and hurries him away into eternity.

And what then? Yes, this is the question. Who can answer it? Who can attempt to picture the future of a soul that passes into eternity without God, without Christ, without hope? Who can describe the horrors of one who, all in a moment, opens his eyes to the fact — the tremendous fact — that he is lost, lost forever — hopelessly, eternally, lost? It is positively too dreadful to dwell upon it. And yet it must be looked at; and if the reader is still of the world, still unconverted, careless,

thoughtless, unbelieving, we would earnestly entreat of him now, just now, to give his earnest attention to the weighty and all-important question of his soul's salvation - a question, in comparison with which all other questions dwindle into utter insignificance. "What shall it profit a man, if he should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul'?" It is, beyond all question, the most egregious folly that any one can be guilty of to put off the grand business of his soul's salvation. And if any one inquire what he has to do in this business, the answer is Nothing — "nothing, either great or small." Jesus has the words of eternal life. He it is who says, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into judgement, but is passed from death unto life."

Here is the hinge on which the whole matter shoves. Harken to the words of Christ. Believe in Him that sent His blessed Son. Put your trust in God, and you shall be saved; you shall have eternal life, and never come into judgement.

Nor is this all. Simon Peter, in his lovely confession, does not confine himself to what Christ has to give, precious and blessed as that is, but he also speaks of what He is. "Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God." This is full of deepest interest for the heart. Christ not only gives us eternal life, but He also becomes the object of our heart's affections — our satisfying portion, our unfailing resource, our infallible Guide and Counsellor, our constant reference, in all our need, in all our pressure, in all our sorrows and difficulties. We need never go to any one else for succour, sympathy, or

guidance. We have all we want in Him. He is the eternal delight of the heart of God, and He may well be the delight of our hearts here and hereafter, now and forever.

Part 7

The close of Matt. 14 presents a scene in the life of our apostle on which we may dwell with profit for a few moments. It furnishes a very fine illustration of his own touching inquiry, "Lord, to whom shall we go?"

Our Lord having fed the multitude, and sent His disciples across the sea, retired into a mountain, to be alone in prayer. In this we have a striking foreshadowing of the present time. Jesus has gone on high. Israel is for the present set aside, but not forgotten. Days of trouble will come — rough seas and stormy skies will fall to the lot of the remnant; but their Messiah will return, and deliver them out of all their troubles. He will bring them to their desired haven, and all will be peace and joy for the Israel of God.

All this is fully unfolded on the page of prophecy, and is of the deepest interest to every lover of God and His Word; but for the present we can merely dwell upon the inspired record concerning Simon Peter, and seek to learn the lesson which that record so forcibly teaches. "And straightway Jesus constrained His disciples to get into a ship, and to go before Him unto the other side, while He sent the multitudes away. And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up into a mountain apart to pray; and when the evening was come, He was there alone. But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves, for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them,

walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. And Peter answered Him, and said, Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee on the water. And He said! Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth His hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"

This brief passage presents to our view in a very forcible way some of the leading features of Simon Peter's character. his zeal, his energy, his real devotedness of heart, no one can for a moment call in question; but these very qualities — beautiful as they surely are — led him not infrequently into a position of such prominence as to render his weak points all the more conspicuous. A man of less zeal, less energy, would have remained on board the ship, and thus avoided Peter's failure and breakdown. Perhaps, too, men of cooler temperament would condemn as unwarrantable rashness Peter's act in leaving the ship, or pronounce it a piece of forwardness which justly deserved a humiliating rebuff.

All this may be so; but we are free to confess that the zeal, energy and devoted self-considering spirit which, in order to avoid the shame and humiliation of a defeat, refuses to take a bold and decided step for Christ. True it is that Peter in the interesting scene now before us completely broke down. But why did he? Was it because he left the ship? No; but because he ceased to look in

simple faith to Jesus. Here lay the root of his failure. Had he only kept his eye on the Master, he could have walked on the water though ever so rough. Faith can walk on rough water as easily as on smooth. Nature cannot walk on either. It is not a question of the state of the water, but the state of the heart. Circumstances have nothing to do with faith, except, indeed, that when difficult and trying, they develop its power and brightness. There was no reason whatever, in the judgement of faith, why Peter should have failed in his walk on the water. Faith looks not at the things that are seen and temporal, but at the things which are unseen and eternal. It endures as seeing Him who is invisible. "Faith is the evidence of things not seen." It lifts the heart above the winds and waves of this rough world, and keeps it in perfect peace, to the praise of Him who is the Giver of faith, as of "every good and perfect gift."

But our beloved apostle utterly failed in faith on the occasion now before us. He, as we, alas! so often do, took his eye off the Lord and fixed it on his surroundings, and as a consequence he immediately began to sink. It must ever be so. We cannot get on for a single moment save as we have the living God as a covering for our eyes. The grand motto for the life of faith is, "Looking off unto Jesus." It is this alone which enables us to "run the race set before us," be the way rough or smooth. When Peter came down out of the ship, it was either Christ or drowning. He might well say at such a moment, "Lord, to whom shall I go?" Whither could he turn? When on board the ship, he had its timbers between him and death, but when on the water he had nothing but Jesus.

And was not He enough? Yes, verily, if only Peter could have trusted Him. This is the point. All things are possible to him that believeth. Storms are hushed into a perfect calm, rough seas become like glass, lofty mountains are levelled, when faith brings the power of God to bear. The greater the difficulties, the brighter the triumphs of faith. It is in the furnace that the real preciousness of faith is displayed. Faith has to do with God, and not with men or things. If we cease to lean on God, we have nothing but a wild, watery waste — a perfect chaos — around us, where nature's resources must hopelessly fail.

All this was proved by Simon Peter when he came down out of the ship to walk on the water; and every child of God and every servant of Christ must prove it in his measure, for Peter's history is full of great practical lessons for us all. If we want to walk above the circumstances of the scene through which we are passing — if we would rise superior to its influences — if we would be able to give an answer, clear, distinct, and decided, to the scepticism, the rationalism and infidelity of the day in which we live — then, assuredly, we must keep the eye of faith firmly fixed on "the Author and Perfecter of faith." It is not by logical skill or intellectual power we shall ever meet the arguments of the infidel, but by an abiding sense, a living and soul-satisfying apprehension, of the all-sufficiency of Christ — Himself - His work — His Word — to meet our every need, our every exigency.

But it may be the reader feels disposed to condemn Peter for leaving the ship. He may think there was no need for his taking such a step. Why not abide with his brethren on board the vessel? Was it not possible to be

quite as devoted to Christ in the ship as on the water? And, further, did not the sequel prove that it would have been far better, and safer, and wiser, for Peter to remain where he was, than to venture forth on a course which he was not able to pursue?

To all this we reply that our apostle was evidently governed by an earnest desire to be nearer to his Lord. And this was right. He saw Jesus walking on the water, and he longed to be with Him. And, further, he had the direct authority of his Lord for leaving the ship. We fully and freely grant that without this it would have been a fatal mistake to leave his position; but the moment that word "Come" fell on his ear he had a divine warrant for going forth upon the water — yea, to have remained would have been to miss great blessing.

Thus it is in every case. We must have authority before we can act in anything. Without this, the greater our zeal, energy, and apparent devotedness, the more fatal will be our mistake, and the more mischief we shall do to ourselves, to others, and to the cause of Christ. It is of the very last possible importance in every case, but especially where there is a measure of zeal, earnestness, and energy, that there should be sober subjection to the authority of the Word. If there be not this, there is no calculating the amount of mischief which may be done. If our devotedness flow not in the channel of simple obedience, if it rush over the embankments formed by the Word of God, the consequences must be most disastrous.

But there is another thing which stands next in importance to the authority of the divine Word, and that is the abiding realization of the divine presence. These

two things must never be separated if we want to walk on the water. We may be quite clear and settled in our own minds, having distinct authority for any given line of action; but if we have not with equal distinctness the sense of the Lord's presence with us — if our eyes are not continually on the living God — we shall most assuredly break down.

This is very serious, and demands the gravest consideration of the Christian reader. It was precisely here that Peter failed. He did not fail in obedience, but in realized dependence. He acted on the word of Jesus in leaving the ship, but he failed to lean on the arm of Jesus in walking on the water; hence his terror and confusion. Mere authority is not enough; we want power. To act without authority is wrong. To act without power is impossible. The authority for starting is the Word. The power to proceed is the divine presence. The combination of the two must ever yield a successful career. It matters not in the smallest degree what the difficulties are if we have the stable authority of Holy Scripture for our course, and the blessed support of the presence of God in pursuing it. When God speaks, we must obey; but in order to do so, we must lean on His arm. "Have not I commanded you?" "Lo, I am with you.

Here are the two things so absolutely essential to every child of God and every servant of Christ. Without these, we can do nothing; with them, we can do all things. If we have not a "Thus saith the Lord," or "It is written we cannot enter upon a path of devotedness, and if we have not His realized presence, we cannot pursue it. It is quite possible to be right in setting out, and yet to fail in going on.

It was so in the case of Simon Peter, and it has been so in the case of thousands since. It is one thing to make a good start, and another thing to make good progress. It is one thing to leave the ship, and another thing to walk on the water. Peter did the former but he failed in the latter. This beloved servant of Christ broke down in his course; but where did he find himself? In the arms of a loving Saviour. "Lord, save me!" How touching! How deeply affecting! He casts himself upon a well-known love — a love which was yet to meet him in far more humiliating circumstances. Nor was he disappointed. Ah, no! Blessed be God, no poor failing creature can ever appeal to that love in vain. "And immediately Jesus stretched forth His hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" Exquisite grace! If Peter failed to reach his Lord, his Lord did not fail to reach him. If Peter failed in faith, Jesus could not fail in grace. Impossible. The grace of our Lord Jesus is exceeding abundant. He takes occasion from our very failures to display His rich and precious love. Oh, how blessed to have to do with such a tender, patient, loving Lord! Who would not trust Him and praise Him, love Him and serve Him?

Part 8

We have now to follow our beloved apostle into the darkest and most humbling scene in his entire history — a scene which we could hardly understand or account for if we did not know something of the infinite depths of divine grace on the one hand, and, on the other hand, of the terrible depths into which even a saint of God or an apostle of Christ is capable of plunging if not kept by divine power.

It seems very wonderful to find on the page of inspiration the record of the fall of such an eminent servant of Christ as Simon Peter. We, in our wisdom, would judge it best to draw the curtain of silence over such an event. Not so the Holy Ghost. He has seen fit to tell us plainly of the errors, and failures, and sins, of such men as Abraham, Moses, David, Peter, and Paul, in order that we may learn holy records from such records — lessons of human frailty, lessons of divine grace, lessons full of solemn warning, and yet of most precious consolation and encouragement. We learn what we are, and we learn what God is. We learn that we cannot trust ourselves for a single moment; for, if not kept by grace, there is no depth of sin into which we are not capable of falling; but we learn to trust the eternal stability of that grace which has dealt with the erring ones and sinning ones of other days, and to lean with ever-growing confidence on the One who is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever."

Not one of the four evangelists omits the fall of Peter. Let us open at Matt. 26; "And when they had sung a hymn they went out into the mount of Olives. Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of Me this night: for it written, I will smite the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. But after I am risen again I will go before you into Galilee. Peter answered and said unto Him, Though all shall be offended because of Thee, yet will I never be offended."

In these few words Peter lets out the real root of the whole matter. That root was self-confidence — alas! alas! no uncommon root amongst us. We do not in the least question Peter's sincerity. We feel perfectly sure he meant all he said; and, further, that he had not the most

remote idea of what he was about to do. He was ignorant of himself, and we generally find that ignorance and self confidence go together. Self-knowledge destroys self-confidence. The more fully self is known, the more it must be distrusted. If Peter had known himself, known his tendencies and capabilities, he never would have uttered the words which we have just penned. But so full was he of self-confidence, that when his Lord told him expressly what he was about to do, he replied, "Though I should die with Thee, yet will I not deny Thee."

This is peculiarly solemn. It is full of instruction for us all. We are all so ignorant of our own hearts that we deem ourselves incapable of falling into certain gross sins. But we should, every one of us, bear in mind that if not kept each moment by the grace of God, we are capable of anything. We have materials in us for any amount or character of evil; and whenever we hear any one saying, "Well, I certainly am a poor, failing, stumbling creature, but I am not capable of doing the like of that," we may feel assured he does not know his own heart; and not only so, but he is in imminent danger of falling into some grievous sin. It is well to walk humbly before our God, distrusting self, and leaning on Him. This is the true secret of moral safety at all times. Had Peter realized this, it would have saved him his terrible downfall.

But Peter was self-confident, and, as a consequence, he failed to watch and pray. This was another stage in his downward journey. Had he only felt his utter weakness, he would have sought for strength divine. He would have cast himself on God for grace to help in time of need. Look at the blessed Master! He, though God over all, blessed forever, yet being a Man, having taken the

place of the creature, and fully entering into His position, was agonising in prayer while Peter was fast asleep. Yes, Peter slept in the garden of Gethsemane while his Lord was passing through the deepest anguish He had yet tasted, though deeper still lay before Him. "Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. And He took with Him Peter and the sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith He unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death; tarry ye here, and watch with Me. And He went a little further, and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt. And He cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What! could ye not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

What tender grace! What readiness to make allowance! What moral elevation! And yet He felt the sad want of sympathy, the cold indifference to His sore agony. "I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none." How much is involved in these words! He looked for comforters. That perfect human heart craved sympathy; but, alas! there was none for Him. Even Peter, who declared himself ready to die with Him, fell asleep in view of the agonies of Gethsemane.

Such is man — yea, the very best of men! Self-confident, when he ought to be self-distrusting — sleeping, when he ought to be watching; and, we may add, fighting, when he ought to be submitting. "Then Simon Peter,

having a sword, drew it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus." How incongruous, how utterly out of place, was a sword in company with the meek and lowly Sufferer! "Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?" Peter was entirely out of the current of his Master's spirit. He had not a thought in common with Him in reference to His path of suffering. He would fain defend Him with carnal weapons, forgetting that His kingdom was not of this world.

All this is peculiarly solemn. To find a dear and honoured servant of Christ failing so grievously is surely sufficient to teach us to walk very softly. But, alas! we have not yet reached the lowest point in Peter's downward course. Having used his sword in defence of his Master, we next find him “following afar off." "Then took they Jesus, and led Him, and brought Him to the high priest's house. And Peter followed afar off. And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them."

What company for an apostle of Christ! "Can a man touch pitch, and not be defiled by it? Can one walk on burning coals, and his feet not be burned?" It is terribly dangerous for the Christian to sit down among the enemies of Christ. The very fact of his doing so proves that decline has set in, and made serious progress. In Peter's case the stages of decline are strongly marked. First, boasting in his own strength; secondly, sleeping when he ought to have been praying; thirdly, drawing his sword when he ought to have been meekly bowing his head; fourthly, following afar off; fifthly, making

himself comfortable in the midst of the open enemies of Christ.

Then comes the last sad scene in this terrible drama. "And as Peter was beneath in the palace, there cometh one of the maids of the high priest; and when she saw Peter warming himself, she looked upon him, and said, And thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth. But he denied, saying, I know not, neither understand I, what thou sayest. And he went out into the porch; and the cock crew. And a maid saw him again, and began to say to them that stood by, This is one of them. And he denied it again. And a little after, they that stood by said again to Peter, Surely thou art one of them, for thou art a Galilean, and thy speech agreeth thereto. But he began to curse and to swear, I know not this man of whom ye speak. And the second time the cock crew. And Peter called to mind the word that Jesus said unto him, Before the cock crow twice thou shalt deny Me thrice. And when he thought thereon, he wept" (Mark 14: 66-72).

Luke adds a most touching clause: "And the Lord turned and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny Me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly."

How deeply affecting is all this! Only think of a saint of God, and an apostle of Christ, cursing and swearing that he did not know his Lord! Does the reader feel disposed to question the fact that Peter was, spite of all this, a genuine saint of God? Some do question it, but their questioning is a gross mistake. They find it hard to conceive such a thing as a true child of God falling so terribly. It is because they have not yet thoroughly learnt

what flesh is. Peter was as really a saint of God in the palace of the high priest as he was on the mount of transfiguration. But he had to learn himself, and that, too, by as humiliating and painful a process as any soul could well be called to pass through. Doubtless, if any one had told Peter, a few days before, that he would ere long curse and swear that he did not know his Lord, he would have shrunk with horror from the thought. He might have said, like one of old, "Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?" Yet so it was. We know not what we may do until we are in the circumstances. The great thing for us all is to walk humbly with our God day by day, deeply sensible of our own utter weakness, and clinging to Him who is able to keep us from falling. We are safe only in the shelter of His presence. Left to ourselves, we are capable of anything, as our apostle found to his deep sorrow.

But the Lord was watching over His poor erring servant. He never lost sight of him for a single moment, He had His eye upon the whole process. The devil would have smashed the vessel in hopeless fragments if he could. But he could not. He was but an instrument in the divine hand to do a work for Peter which Peter had failed to do for himself. "Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not; and when thou art converted (or restored), strengthen thy brethren."

Here we are permitted to see the root of the matter. Peter needed to be sifted, and Satan was employed to do the work — just as in the case of Job, and the man in 1 Cor. 5. It seems very wonderful, very mysterious, very solemn, that Satan should be so used. Yet so it is. God uses him "for the destruction of the flesh." He cannot

touch the spirit. That is eternally safe. But it is terrible work to get into Satan's sieve. Peter found it so, and so did Job, and so did that erring Corinthian.

But oh, the grace of those words! "I have prayed for thee" — not that he might not fall, but, having fallen, that his faith might not fail, his confidence might not give way. Nothing can surpass the grace that shines out here. The blessed One knew all that was to happen — the shameful denial — the cursing and swearing; and yet, "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not" — that thy confidence in the eternal stability of My grace may not give way.

Perfectly marvellous! And then, the power of that look! "The Lord turned, and looked upon Peter." It was this that broke Peter's heart, and drew forth a flood of bitter, penitential tears.

Part 9

We are now called to consider the intensely interesting subject of Simon Peter's restoration, in which we. shall find some points of the utmost practical importance. If in his fall we learn the frailty and folly of man, in his restoration we learn the grace, wisdom, and faithfulness of our Lord Jesus Christ. The fall was, indeed, deep, terrible, and humiliating. The restoration was complete and marvellous. We may rest assured that Simon Peter will never forget either the one or the other; nay, he will remember them with wonder, love, and praise, throughout the countless ages of eternity. The grace that shines in Peter's restoration is the same which is displayed in his conversion. Let us glance at some of the salient points. It can be but the merest glance, as our

space is limited. And first let us look at the procuring cause.

This we have given us with peculiar force by the pen of the inspired evangelist Luke. "And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have thee, that he may sift thee as wheat." If Satan had been suffered to have his way, poor Simon would have been hopelessly ruined. But no; he was merely employed as an instrument, as he had been in Job's case, to do a needed work, and, when that work was done, he had to retire. He dare go one hair's breadth beyond his appointed sphere. It is well to remember this. Satan is but a creature — crafty, wily, powerful, no doubt, but a creature who can only go as far as he is permitted by God. Had Peter walked softly, had he humbly and earnestly looked for divine help, had he been judging himself in secret, there would have been no need of Satan's sifting. Thanks be to God, Satan has no power whatever with a soul that walks humbly with God. There is perfect shelter, perfect safety, in the divine presence; and there is not an arrow in the enemy's quiver that can reach one who leans in simple confidence upon the arm of the living God. Here our apostle failed, and hence he had to pass through a very severe process indeed, in order that he might learn himself. But, oh, the power and preciousness of those words, "I have prayed for thee!" Here assuredly lay the secret — here was the procuring cause of Simon's restoration. The prayer of Jesus sustained the soul of His erring servant in that terrible hour when the enemy would fain have crushed him to powder. What could Satan do in opposition to the all-powerful intercession of Christ? Nothing. That

wonderful prayer was the ground of Peter's safety, when, to human view, all seemed hopelessly gone.

And for what did our Lord pray? Was it that Peter might not commit the awful sin of denying Him? Was it that he might not curse and swear? Clearly no. What then? I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not."

Can aught exceed the grace that shines here? That gracious, loving, faithful Lord, in view of Peter's terrible sin — knowing all he was about to do, all the sad forgetfulness — could actually plead for him that, spite of all, his confidence might not give way — that he might not lose the sense of the eternal stability of that grace which had taken him up from the depth of his ruin and guilt.

Matchless grace! Nothing can surpass it in brightness and blessedness. Had it not been for this prayer, Peter's confidence must have given way. He never could have survived the awful struggle through which his soul passed when thinking of his dreadful sin. When he came to himself, when he reflected upon the whole scene, his expressions of devotedness, "Though all should deny Thee, yet will I never deny Thee" — "Though I should die with Thee, yet will I not deny Thee" — "I am ready to go with Thee to prison and to death" — to think of all these words, and yet that he should deny his beloved Lord with cursing and swearing, was overpowering.

It is a dreadful moment in the soul's history when one wakes up to the consciousness of having committed sin — sin against light, knowledge, and privilege — sin against divine grace and goodness. Satan is sure to be specially busy at such a crisis. He casts in the most terrible suggestions — raises all manner of questions —

fills the heart with legal reasonings, doubts, and fears — causes the soul to totter on the foundation.

But, thanks and praise to our God, the enemy cannot prevail. "Hitherto shalt thou come, and no further." The all-prevailing intercession of our divine Advocate sustains the faith so sorely tried, carries the soul through the deep and dark waters, restores the broken link of communion, heals the spiritual wounds, lifts up the fallen one, brings back the wanderer, and fills the heart with praise and thanksgiving. "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not; and when thou art restored, strengthen thy brethren." Here we have set before us in the most touching way the procuring cause of Simon Peter's restoration. We shall now look for a moment at the producing means.

For this, too, we are indebted to the evangelist Luke. Indeed it is through him the inspiring Spirit has given us so much of what is exquisitely human — so much of what goes straight to our very hearts, in subduing power — so much of God coming out in loveliest human form.

We have already noticed Peter's gradual descent — his sad progress, from one stage to another, in moral distance and culpable decline — forgetting to watch and pray — following afar off — warming himself at the enemy's fire — the cowardly denial — the cursing and swearing. All this was down! down! down! shamefully and awfully down. But when the erring, straying, sinning one had reached the very lowest point, then comes out, with heavenly lustre, the grace that shines in the procuring cause and the producing means of his restoration. The former we have in Christ's prayer; the latter in Christ's look. "The Lord turned, and looked

upon Peter. And Peter remembered the Word of the Lord, how He had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny Me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly."

Yes, here it is; "The Lord looked" "Peter remembered" — Peter wept — "wept bitterly." What a look! What a remembrance! What a weeping! What human heart can conceive, what tongue express, what pen portray, all that is wrapped up in that one look? We can well believe that it went right home to the very centre of Peter's soul. He will never forget that marvellous look, so full of mighty moral power — so penetrating — so melting — so soul-subduing.

"Peter went out, and wept bitterly." This was the turning point. Up to this all was darkly downward. Here divine light breaks in upon the deep moral gloom. Christ's most precious prayer is having its answer, His powerful look is doing its work. The fountain of the heart is broken up, and penitential tears flow copiously forth, demonstrating the depth, reality, and intensity of the work within.

Thus it must ever be, and thus it will ever be when the Spirit of God works in the soul. If we have sinned, we must be made to feel, to judge, and to confess our sin — to feel it deeply, judge it thoroughly, and confess it fully. It will not do merely to say, in levity, flippancy, or mere formality, "I have sinned." There must be reality, uprightness, and sincerity. God desires truth in the inward parts. There was nothing light, flippant, or formal about our beloved apostle in the hour of his fall and repentance. No, all was intensely real. It could not but be so with such a procuring cause, and such a

producing means. The prayer and look of Peter's Lord displayed their precious results in Peter's restoration.

Now the reader will do well to notice that the prayer and look of our Lord Jesus Christ set forth, in a very striking and beautiful manner, the two grand aspects of Christ's present ministry as our Advocate with the Father. We have the value and prevalency of His intercession, and the power and efficacy of His Word in the hands of the Holy Ghost, that "other Advocate." Christ's prayer for Peter answers to His intercession for us. His look upon Peter answers to His Word brought home to us in the power of the Holy Ghost. When we sin — as, alas! we do in thought and deed — our blessed and adorable Advocate speaks to God on our behalf. This is the procuring cause of our repentance and restoration. But He speaks to us on God's behalf. This is the producing means.

We shall not dwell upon the great subject of the advocacy here, having recently sought to unfold it in our papers on "The All-sufficiency of Christ.'' We shall close this paper with a brief reference to two or three of the moral features of Peter's restoration — features which, be it well remembered, must be looked for in every case of true restoration. In the first place there is the state of the conscience.

Now, as to the full and complete restoration of Peter's conscience after his terrible fall, we have the most unquestionable evidence afforded in his after history. Take the touching scene at the sea of Tiberias, as given in John 21.* Look at that dear, earnest, thorough man, girding his fisher's coat around him, and plunging into the sea, in order to get to the feet of his risen Lord! He

waits neither for the ship nor for his companions, but in all the lovely freshness and liberty of a divinely restored conscience, he rushes to his Saviour's feet. There is no tormenting fear, no legal bondage, no doubt, darkness, or distance. His conscience is perfectly at rest. The prayer and the look — the two grand departments of the work of advocacy — had proved effectual. Peter's conscience was all right, sound, and good; and hence he could find his home in the presence of his Lord — his holy, happy home.

{*We have no record of Peter's first meeting with his Lord, after the resurrection.}

Take another striking and beautiful evidence of a restored conscience. Look at Peter in Acts 3. There he stands in the presence of assembled thousands of Jews, and boldly charges them with having "denied the Holy One and the Just" — the very thing which he himself had done though under circumstances very different. How could Peter do this? How could he have the face to speak so? Why not leave it to James or John to prefer this heavy charge? The answer is blessedly simple. Peter's conscience was so thoroughly restored, so perfectly at rest, because perfectly purged, that he could fearlessly charge the house of Israel with the awful sin of denying the Holy One of God. Was this the fruit of moral insensibility? Nay, it was the fruit of divine restoration. Had any one of the congregation gathered in Solomon's porch undertaken to challenge our apostle as to his own shameful denial of his Lord, we can easily conceive his answer. The man who had "wept bitterly" over his sin would, we feel assured, know how to answer such a challenge. Not that his bitter weeping was the meritorious ground of his restoration; nothing of the

kind, it only proved the reality of the work of repentance in his soul. Moral insensibility is one thing, and a restored conscience, resting on the blood and advocacy of Christ, is quite another.

But there is another thing involved in a true work of restoration, and that is the state of the heart.

This is of the very utmost importance in every instance. No restoration can be considered divinely complete which does not reach the very depths of the heart. And hence, when we turn back to the scenes on the shore of the sea of Tiberias, we find the Lord dealing very closely and very powerfully with the state of Peter's heart. We cannot attempt to expatiate, much as we should like to do so, on one of the most affecting interviews in the entire volume of God. We can do little more than quote the inspired record, but that is quite enough.

It is deeply interesting to notice that there is no allusion — not the most remote — to past scenes, during that wonderful dinner, provided, cooked, and dispensed by the risen Lord! But "when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me more than these?" Here Simon is recalled by the words of his faithful Lord to his self-confident profession. He had said, "Though all shall be offended, yet will not I." Then the searching question, three times repeated, evidently calls back the threefold denial.

Peter's heart is touched — the moral root of the whole matter is reached. This was absolutely necessary in Peter's case, and it is absolutely necessary in every case. The work of restoration can never be thorough unless the roots of things are reached and judged. Mere surface work will never do. It is of no use to crop the

sprouts; we must get down to the depths, the hidden springs, the moral sources, and judge them in the very light of the divine presence.

This is the true secret of all genuine restoration. Let us ponder it deeply. We may rest assured it demands our most solemn consideration. We are all too apt to rest satisfied with cropping off the sprouts that appear above the surface of our practical daily life, without getting at the roots; and the sad consequence is that the sprouts quickly appear again, to our sorrow and shame, and the dishonour of our Lord's name. The work of self-judgement must be more profound if we would really make progress. We are terribly shallow, light, and flippant. We greatly lack depth, seriousness, and moral gravity. We want more of that heart-work which was wrought in Simon the son of Jonas on the shore of the sea of Tiberias. "Peter was grieved because He said unto him the third time, Lovest thou Me?" The knife of the divine Operator had reached the root of the moral disease, and that was enough. It was needful, but it was enough; and the grieved and self-judged Simon Peter has only to fall back upon the great fact that his Lord knew all things. "Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee." It is as though he had said, "Lord, it demands the eye of Omniscience itself to discern in the heart of the poor erring one a single spark of affection for Thee."

This truly is real work. We have before us a thoroughly restored soul — restored in conscience, restored in heart. And if it be asked, "What remains?" the answer is, We see a servant restored to his work.

Some would tell us that if a man falls, he can never recover his position; and no doubt, under government, we must reap as we sow. But grace is another thing altogether. Government drove Adam out of Eden, and never replaced him there, but grace announced the victorious Seed of the woman. Government kept Moses out of Canaan, but grace conducted him to Pisgah's top. Government sent a perpetual sword upon David's house, but grace made the son of Bathsheba the wisest and wealthiest of Israel's kings.

This distinction must never be lost sight of. To confound grace and government is to commit a very grave mistake indeed. We cannot attempt to enter upon this weighty subject here, having done so in one of our earlier volumes. But let the reader seek to understand it, and bear it ever in mind.

As to Simon Peter, we not only see him restored to the work to which he was called at the first, but to something even higher. "Feed My lambs — shepherd My sheep" — is the new commission given to the man who had denied his Lord with an oath. Is not this something beyond "catching men"? "When thou art restored, strengthen thy brethren." Can anything in the way of service be more elevated than shepherding sheep, feeding lambs, and strengthening brethren? There is nothing in all this world nearer or dearer to the heart of Christ than His sheep, His lambs, His brethren: and hence He could not have given Simon Peter a more affecting proof of His confidence than by committing to his care the dearest objects of His deep and tender love.

And then mark the closing words, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, when thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself,

and walkedst whither thou wouldest; but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake He, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He saith unto him, Follow Me."

What weighty words are these! Who can tell their depth, power, and significance? What a contrast between Simon, "young," restless, forward, blundering, boastful, self-confident; and Peter, "old," subdued, mellowed, passive, crucified! What a difference between a man walking whither he would, and a man following a rejected Lord along the dark and narrow pathway of the cross, home to glory!

Conclusion

We could not close this series of papers without glancing, however cursorily, at the way in which our apostle discharged his various commissions. We see him "catching men"; opening the kingdom of Heaven to the Jew and to the Gentile; and, finally, feeding and shepherding the lambs and sheep of the flock of Christ.

Elevated services these, for any poor mortal to be called to, and more especially for one who had fallen so deeply as Simon Peter. But the remarkable power with which he was enabled to fulfil his blessed service proved beyond all question the reality and completeness of his restoration. If, at the close of the Gospels, we see Peter restored in heart and conscience, in the Acts and in his Epistles we can see him restored to his work.

We cannot attempt to go into details; but a point or two must be briefly noticed. There is something uncommonly fine in Peter's address in the third chapter of Acts. We

can only quote a sentence or two: "The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified His Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied Him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go. But ye denied the Holy One and the Just."

What a splendid evidence we have here of Peter's complete restoration! It would have been utterly impossible for him to charge his audience with having denied the Holy One if his own soul had not been fully and blessedly restored. Alas! he, too, had denied his Lord; but he had repented, and wept bitterly. He had been down in the depths of self-judgement, just where he desired to see every one of his hearers. He had been face to face with his Lord, just where he longed to see them. He had been given to taste the sweetness, the freeness, the fullness, of the pardoning love of God, to prove the divine efficacy of the atonement and the prevalency of the advocacy of Christ. He was pardoned, healed, restored; and as such he stood in their presence a living and striking monument of that grace which he was unfolding to them, and which was amply sufficient for them as it had proved for him. "Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out."

Who could more distinctly and emphatically utter such precious words than the erring, restored and forgiven Peter? If any one of his audience had ventured to remind the preacher of his own history, what would he have said in reply? Doubtless he would have had little to say about himself, but much, very much, to say about that rich and precious grace which had triumphed — over all his sin and failure — much, very much, about that precious blood which had cancelled forever all his guilt, and

given perfect peace to his conscience — much, very much, about that all-prevailing advocacy to which he owed his full and perfect restoration.

Peter was just the man to unfold to others those glorious themes in which he had so thoroughly learnt to find his strength, his comfort, and his joy. He had proved in no ordinary way the reality and stability of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. It was no mere empty theory, no mere doctrine or opinion, with him. It was all intensely real to him. His very life and salvation were bound up in it. He knew the heart of Christ in a very intimate way. He knew its infinite tenderness and compassion, its unswerving devotedness in the face of many stumbles, shortcomings, and sins; and hence he could bear the most distinct and powerful testimony to the whole house of Israel to the power of the name of Jesus, the efficacy of His blood, and the deep and infinite love of His heart. "His name, through faith in His name, hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know; yea, the faith which is by Him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all."

What power in these words! How refreshing is the testimony to the peerless name of Jesus! It is perfectly delightful at all times, but specially so in this infidel day in which our lot is cast — a day so marked by the determined and persistent effort of the enemy to exclude the name of Jesus from every department.

Look where you will, whether it be in the domain of science, of religion, of philanthropy, or moral reform, and you see the same sedulous and diligently pursued purpose to banish the name of Jesus. It is not said so in plain terms, but it is so nevertheless. Scientific men, the

professors and lecturers in our universities, talk and write about "the forces of nature" and the facts of science in such a way as practically to exclude the Christ of God from the whole field of nature. Scripture tells us, blessed be God, that by the Son of His love "All things were created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions, or principalities or powers: all things were created by Him and for Him: and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist. "And again, speaking of the Son, the inspiring Spirit says, "Who being the brightness of God's glory, and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Col. 1, Heb. 1).

These splendid passages lead us to the divine root of the matter. They speak not of "the forces of nature," but of the glory of Christ, the power of His hand, the virtue of His Word. Infidelity would rob us of Christ, and give us, instead, "the forces of nature." We vastly prefer our own beloved Lord. We delight to see His name bound up, indissolubly, with creation in all its vast and marvellous fields. We vastly prefer the eternal record of the Holy Ghost to all the finely-spun theories of infidel professors. We rejoice to see the name of Jesus bound up in every department of religion and philanthropy. We shrink with ever-increasing horror from every system, every club, every order, every association, that dares to shut out the glorious name of Jesus from its schemes of religion and moral reform. We do solemnly declare that the religion, the philanthropy, the moral reform, which does not make the name of Jesus its Alpha and its Omega, is the

religion, the philanthropy and the moral reform of hell. This may seem strong, severe, ultra, and narrow-minded, but it is our deep and thorough conviction, and we utter it fearlessly, in the presence of all the infidelity and superstition of the day.

But we must return to our apostle's discourse, which has wakened up those glowing sentiments in the very depths of the soul.

Having charged home their terrible sin upon the consciences of his hearers, he proceeds to apply the healing, soothing balm of the gospel, in words of marvellous power and sweetness: "And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. But those things which God before had showed by the mouth of all His prophets that Christ should suffer, He hath so fulfilled. " Nothing can exceed the grace of this. It recalls the words of Joseph to his troubled brethren: "It was not you that sent me hither, but God." Such is the exquisite grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, such the infinite love and goodness of our God.

"Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the time of refreshing shall come from (or by) the presence of the Lord; and He shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you; whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God had spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began. For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A Prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; Him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever He shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass that every soul which will not hear that Prophet shall be

destroyed from among the people. Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel, and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days. Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities."

Thus did this dear and honoured apostle, in the power of the Holy Ghost, throw wide open the kingdom of Heaven to the Jews, in pursuance of his high commission as recorded in Matthew 16. It is what we may well call a splendid testimony, from first to last. Most gladly would we linger over it; but our limited space forbids. We can only commend it to the earnest study of the reader, and pass on, for a few moments, to Acts 10 which records the opening of the kingdom to the Gentile.

We assume that the reader understands the truth in reference to the keys of the kingdom of Heaven being committed to Peter. We shall not therefore occupy his time or our own in combating the ignorant superstition which attributes to our apostle what we may rest assured he would have rejected with intense and holy horror, namely, the power to let souls into Heaven. Detestable folly! which, while it obstinately refuses Christ, who is God's only way to Heaven, will blindly build upon some poor sinful mortal like ourselves who himself was a debtor to the sovereign grace of God and the precious blood of Christ for his entrance into the Church on earth and into Heaven above.

But enough of this. All intelligent Christians understand that the apostle Peter was commissioned, by his Lord and ours, to open the kingdom of Heaven to both Jew and Gentile. To him were committed the keys, not of the Church, nor yet of Heaven, but of "the kingdom of heaven"; and we find him using them in Acts 3 and Acts 10.

But he was by no means so alert in taking up the latter as he was in taking up the former. Prejudice — that sad hindrance then, now, and always — stood in the way. He needed to have his mind enlarged to take in the divine purpose in respect to the Gentiles. To one trained amid the influences of the Jewish system, it seemed one thing to admit Jews into the kingdom, and quite another to admit Gentiles. Our apostle had to get further instruction in the school of Christ ere his mind could take in the "no difference" doctrine. "Ye know," he said to Cornelius, "how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company or come unto one of another nation." Thus had it been in days gone by; but now all was changed. The middle wall was broken down — the barriers were swept away; "God hath showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean." He had seen, in a vessel which came from Heaven, and returned thither, all manner of four footed beasts," and a voice from Heaven had commanded him to slay and eat. This was something new to Simon Peter. It was a wonderful lesson he was called to learn on the housetop of Simon the tanner. He was there, for the first time, taught that "God is no respecter of persons," and that what God hath cleansed no man may call common.

All this was good and healthful for the soul of our apostle. It was well to have his heart enlarged to take in

the precious thoughts of God — to see the old barriers swept away before the magnificent tide of grace flowing from the heart of God over a lost world — to learn that the question of "clean" or "unclean" was no longer to be decided by an examination of hoofs and habits (Lev. 11) — that the same precious blood of Christ which could cleanse a Jew could cleanse a Gentile also; and, moreover, that the former needed it just as much as the latter.

This, we repeat, was most valuable instruction for the heart and understanding of Simon Peter; and if the reader wants to know how far he took it in and appreciated it, he has but to turn to Acts 15 and read the apostle's own commentary upon the matter. The Church had reached a solemn crisis. Judaizing teachers had begun their terrible work. They would fain bring the Gentile converts under the law. The occasion was intensely interesting and deeply important — yea, solemnly momentous. The very foundations were at stake. If the enemy could but succeed in bringing the Gentile believers under the law, all was gone.

But, all praise to our ever-gracious God, He did not abandon His Church to the power or wiles of the adversary. When the enemy came in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord raised up a standard against him. A great meeting was convened — not in some obscure corner, but at Jerusalem, the very centre and source of all the religious influence of the moment — the very place, too, from whence the evil had emanated. God took care that the great question should not be decided at Antioch by Paul and Barnabas, but at Jerusalem itself, by the unanimous voice of the apostles, elders, and the

whole Church, governed, guided and taught by God the Holy Ghost.

At this great meeting our apostle delivered himself in a style that stirs the very deepest springs of our spiritual life. Hear his words: "And when there had been much disputing" — Alas! how soon the miserable disputing began — "Peter rose up and said unto them, Men, brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost even as He did unto us, and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now, therefore, why tempt ye God to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved even as they."

This is uncommonly fine, indeed it is morally grand. He does not say, "They shall be saved even as we." No; but "We shall be saved even as they" — on the same ground, after the same model, in the same way. The Jew comes down from his lofty dispensational position, only too thankful to be saved, just like the poor Gentile, by the precious grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

How those words of the apostle of the circumcision must have refreshed and delighted the heart of Paul as he sat at this never-to-be-forgotten meeting! Not that Paul sought in any way the countenance, the support, or authority of man. He had received his gospel and his commission, not from Peter, but from Peter's Lord; and from Him, too, not as the Messiah on earth, but as the

risen and glorified Son of God in Heaven. Still, we cannot doubt that the testimony of his beloved fellow-labourer was deeply interesting and cordially welcome to the apostle of the Gentiles. We can only say, Alas! that there should have been aught in the after-course of that fellow-labourer in the smallest degree inconsistent with his splendid testimony at the conference. Alas! that Peter's conduct at Antioch should vary so much from his words at Jerusalem. See Gal. 2.

But such is man, even the best of men, if left to himself. And the higher the man is, the more mischief he is sure to do if he makes a stumble. We shall not, however, dwell on the sad and painful scene at Antioch, between those two most excellent servants. They are both now in Heaven, in the presence of their beloved Lord, where the remembrance of past failure and sin only enhances the value of that blood which cleanseth from all sin, and of that grace which reigns, through righteousness, unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord. The Holy Ghost has thought proper to record the fact that our apostle failed in frankness and integrity at Antioch; and further, that the blessed apostle of the Gentiles had to withstand him to the face; but we are not going to expatiate upon it. We would profit by it, as well we may, for it is full of deep instruction and solemn warning. If such a one as the apostle Peter, after all his experience, his fall and restoration, his long course of service, his intimate acquaintance with the heart of Christ, all the instruction he had received, all his gifts and knowledge, all his powerful preaching and teaching — if such a one as this could, after all, dissemble through fear of man, or to hold a place in man's esteem, what shall we say for ourselves? Simply this:

O Lamb of God, still keep me close to Thy pierced side;

Tis only there in safety and peace I can abide.

When foes and snares surround me, when lusts and fears within, The grace that sought and found me, alone can keep me clean.

May the Lord greatly bless to our souls our meditation on the history of Simon Peter! May his life and its lessons be used of the Holy Ghost to deepen in our souls the sense of our own utter weakness and of the matchless grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.