

CHRISTIAN FRIEND VOLUME 3

by Unknown

A collection of articles and writings from Christian Friend Volume 3, covering various biblical topics and Christian teaching.

47 Chapters

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Christian Friend Volume 3

Paul's Voyage

It is very comforting to consider the nature of our title to the Scriptures. It is something far beyond clearness and certainty. It is, I may say, perfect and wonderful. From Genesis to Malachi, the Spirit of God was surveying a period of nearly four thousand years. He had therefore materials for hundreds of volumes, had He pleased to use them. But He has not done so. Nay, His method, generally, would appear to be strange. For He passes by what might be thought to have been the weightier matter of the history, and gives some small domestic scene, and that, too, in much detail at times.

And why is this? Why within the compass of a verse or two will He, as He does, contract the record of nations for centuries, and spend chapters on the family occurrences of a few years?

God tells us, "They are written for our admonition" (1 Cor. 10:11). And again, "Whatsoever was written afore-time was written for our learning" (Rom. 15:4). And again, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable" (2 Tim. 3:16).

These passages tell us by what rule the Holy Ghost conducted His divine labor in the Scriptures, and why it was He adopted this peculiar method. He was consulting for us. In the mind of the Father and the Son, the Holy Ghost was serving the children of God in this work. That principle is the life or breath of every part. And the histories of men good or bad, of family scenes, and national revolutions, are all preserved and recorded by the Spirit with respect to our comfort and admonition.

Thus we get, as I said, nothing less than a wondrous title to the divine Word. Let us be reading what part of it we may, still have we title to say, "This was written for me; my good was consulted in this."

May I not, therefore, say, Is not this a wondrous and a perfect right the Lord gives me to His Scriptures? He wrote them for us.

And so I might take occasion to say of the gifts of the Spirit. They were measured out into different vessels under the same prescription, that the profit of the saints might be advanced (See 1 Cor. 12:7; 14: 1-3, 19). The manifestation of the Spirit was given to profit withal, imparted under consultations of our edification and blessing. Just as the Scriptures were inspired and delivered with this same intent likewise. Our profit was before the mind of the Holy Ghost when He wrote the standard volume, and when He filled the living vessels with His manifestations.

What higher title then, I ask again, can we want, than such as this? and what higher could we get, if we wanted it? This is a wondrous title; and a perfect right we have to the full use and enjoyment of these precious, unspeakably, immeasurably precious fruits of the breathing of the Holy Ghost.

The same method is observed, the same rule and purpose guides and decides all that is made known to us in the writings of the New Testament as well as the Old. We are still thought of. There were materials, such as the world could not have contained the books that would have recorded

them. But they are not given, but “these things are written,” says one passage, “that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name.”

The chapter we now propose to look at for a little (Acts 27) illustrates what I have been saying. It is a very long chapter, but occupies itself about a matter which, in human calculation, we might have said and thought could have well afforded to give place to other things in Paul's testimony. But “wisdom is justified.” The ways and methods of wisdom, as well as her judgments and councils, are all “justified of her children.”

This chapter, together with a part of the following one, gives us an account of the apostle's voyage from Syria to Italy, and his short journey onward from the seashore to Rome. The simple fact that great space is given to this in the history of the Acts of the Apostles, alone might lead us to judge that the Spirit has a mind or purpose in it, beyond the merely acquainting of us with a fact; and so we shall find it.

It is true, that the whole chapter is morally valuable, in this sense; that it gives us a strong view and impression of Christianity being to be found in all the ordinary circumstances and casualties of life; that the palpable, tangible world, in which we find our present life and exercise, is the very scene in which the Spirit had His witnesses.

But we may expect to find in this chapter even more than these things—more than either one fact in Paul's history, or this moral instruction to which I have referred.

The crew and company had been removed from the ship in which they had sailed from the coast of Syria, into another that was bound direct for Italy (vs. 6). But shortly after, dangers began to threaten, and Paul gets an intimation that the voyage would be with damage and hazard (vs. 10).

This he had, I judge, by the Spirit. He does not gather it from the winds and waves. It was only the authority of the Holy Ghost that could have warranted a stranger, a landsman, a prisoner too, to speak on such a subject with authority, opposing the judgment of “the owner,” and “the master,” and “the more part.” The rest, on the contrary, were directed by providence, so called. The south wind blew softly, and they supposed that they had obtained their purpose (vs. 13). And so they sailed on. But a Euroclydon quickly followed the soft southern breeze, unexpected by those who looked around, but confirming the witness of him who learned his lesson from the Spirit (vs. 14).

But the Euroclydon seems only to drive the apostle into his harbor more closely. He learns the mind of God, and comes forth laden with the glorious harvest that he had gathered (vs. 21). He rebukes them for not having heeded his former word; but, in the abounding grace of Him whom he served, and for whom he now witnessed, he pledges the safety of all who sailed with him in the ship (vss. 22-26).

The prisoner is thus the savior. He who was on his way to appear before the power of this world, and in chains, is the vessel for bearing the truth, the grace, and the power of Him that is above the world. This is after the pattern of the crucified one, being the life of the world. This is weakness made strong. This is praise perfected in the mouth of babes and sucklings. This is the mystery of God's salvation in a world that has destroyed itself. Paul the prisoner is the savior. The lives of all are given to him who was in chains. The most despised one is the one whom the Lord of life, and

light, and glory owns. And such an one gets all God's secrets. "Howbeit," says he, "we must be cast upon a certain island." He knew the detail, as well as the mere fact of safety. And he believed, in spite of all appearances, and with confidence pledged the truth of the divine promise and grace.

Here indeed was God and His saint. Here indeed was a sample of the divine mystery. Paul, after this, allows much to be done in the vessel. There was a sounding, a casting of anchors out from the stern, and a lightening the ship (vss. 28-29). And he gives great encouragement and cheer of heart (vss. 33-38). But he will have nothing to be trusted but the promise (vs. 31). If the boat be resorted to, confidence is at once placed in other resources, in provisions of safety independent of God, and then the promise will be rejected, and death must follow. The waters will swallow all who are not in the ark of the promise. But according to the same promise, the ship goes to pieces. It is worth nothing, never to be used again. But the lives are spared. Not a hair of the head of any perishes. Some swim, some float on planks, but all get their life, according to the promise that they who were in company with Rome's prisoner, but God's witness and treasurer, should be safe. "And so it came to pass, that they all escaped to land."

And in all this, farther notices of the divine mystery show themselves. There is a voice in it all, which may be heard. We have already noticed the prisoner as the savior—the despised and bound one in the scene, being the only vessel of all the true glory and blessing that was there. How sensibly, how visibly, how audibly, all that meets the eye, and the ear, and the heart of him that is taught of God. It needs no interpreter. It is full of God's way, as I have already observed. But here we have even more than that. The vessel goes to pieces. The lives of all are preserved. But it was not the vessel, but the promise that preserved the travelers. They had been committed to the ship; but the ship breaks asunder, and the promise is their ark in the waters again. All stewardships fail, and prove unfaithful. The church, as the witness or candlestick, is broken and removed; but that which is of God Himself—His truth, His love, His promise—survives as fresh and perfect as ever; and none who trust in Him, and in Him alone, shall ever be confounded. The voyage may end in complete wreck. The dispensation may end in apostasy; but all who hang on the promise, all who trust the word of man's Prisoner, God's Messenger, survive. Some swim, others float on planks. Some may be strong, and work their way more in the solitary strength of the Spirit, others weaker may hang about fragments that float around on the surface here and there, inviting the timid and the unskilled; but whether they swim or rest on the planks, all, strong and weak together, reach the shore; they cannot perish, for the God of the promise has them in His hand, and no wind or wave can dash them thence.

Is there not then, I ask, a parable or mystery in all this? This is not Paul's voyage only, but ours. It is the safety of wrecked mariners, the safety of all believers who trust in the promise, the God of the promise, the covenant sealed and made sure, the purchased, as well as promised, blessing and security of a poor ruined, helpless, and tossed soul, who has by faith found his way, and taken refuge in the sanctuary of peace, though all props and stays here fail him. Cisterns may be broken, but the fountain is as fresh and full as ever. Chorazin and Bethsaida may disappoint Jesus, but the Father does not. Hymenaeus and Philetus may disappoint Paul, but God's foundations do not. "All men forsook me," says he on a great occasion, "but the Lord stood by me." And the Psalmist in triumph exclaims, "If the foundations be destroyed, what shall the righteous do? The Lord is in His holy temple!" Yes; the way to magnify our security, is to see it in the midst of perils and alarms. The very depth of the waters around honored the strength and sufficiency of the ark to Noah; the

ruthlessness of the sword in passing through Egypt, glorified the blood that was sheltering the first-born of Israel; and the solemn terrors of the coming day of the Lord will but enhance the safety and the joy of the ransomed, whether with Jesus in the heavens, or as the remnant in their “chambers” in the land.

The Work of the House of God and the Workmen Therein

The books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, and Zechariah hang together. In Ezra, we get the temple built and worship restored; in Nehemiah, the restoration of the city; Haggai opens out the secret of the hindrances to the work; in Zechariah we have truth presented by which God strengthened the hearts of the remnant.

Truth meets persons in our days in external things; it is common to see Christians opening the Scriptures and being struck with the fact of how unlike the things there presented are to what they see around them. Man would set to work to put things in order. God's remedy is to meet practical departure in oneself, to begin with self. We have "the Word of the Lord." Are we bringing our consciences to it, not asking for increase of light, increase of power, but more honest, holy obedience to what we know, just doing that, in all our weakness, which God teaches us to be right? I read (Phil. 2:13), "It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure;" if I am waiting for more power, before I work out that which it is His will I should do, I am denying that He is working in me to accomplish it by His power, to will and to do.

We are to walk, step by step, as God gives the light. Some will say, "Yes, when the door is opened, as it was for the Jews—when power is put forth, as it was for the Jews, then we will go forth, not seeing that, when the Jews walked disobediently, God raised up enemies from without, standing by to sanction their captivity." The Jew could say, "We must be in bondage until the years of the captivity be ended." Not so the Christian. God has set him free from all captivity, in Christ. If he get into bondage, through the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, or the pride of life, the moment God gives him light to see where he is, that moment the word to him is, "Cease to do evil, learn to do well." The question at the Reformation (and so now) was, "Is the Word of God to be obeyed or not? The Lord hath spoken, and shall not we obey?" It is for God to see in us obedience to His Word, so far as we know it, and more knowledge will be given? "To him that hath shall more be given."

But here it is necessary for us to see that conduct may go beyond faith. If it does, it will break down. Right conduct on a wrong motive must fail. In Ezra 3 we have the Jews working for God, and that from the written Word; for what Moses commanded, they observed (vs. 2), and what David did, they set themselves to do. (vs. 10) But they failed. The adversaries of Judah came and stopped the work. (Chapter 4) Looking at the outward form, we should have said, "Now here is obedience." But God's eye saw through it all. Self-complacency was there; the corrupt heart was there. Haggai furnishes the key. The heart was unpurged. These adversaries, what were they? The remnant had escaped, had got into the land, had begun to build; and why did they not go on? God was using the adversaries of Judah, as the occasion to show the cause of their failure. Circumstances bring out the cause of failure; but occasion and cause are constantly confounded. The cause of failure was not in the adversaries of Judah, but in the hearts of the people, which were set upon their own things, and not upon the things of God—upon their own coiled houses, and not upon the house of the Lord. And so we find through the whole of the Word of God, the

occasion one thing, the cause another. That which is not done to the Lord, is not done in faith.

Have we a purpose? Jesus had a purpose to which He ever turned. Oh how little purpose of soul have we for God! The Jews had plenty of thoughts; but when difficulties sprang up, they had no purpose. God, therefore, had to teach them purpose, to teach them whether it was His energy or their own they were walking in, to teach them to trust in Himself. Action, in the time of difficulty, is what God expects from us, as knowing and acting in the strength we have in Him to go forward in the purpose of God, as the channels for His energy to flow in, to show that there is strength and energy in Him, far beyond all the hindering circumstances which may come to try our purpose.

Divine energy will never lose its purpose for God. Human energy will say, "The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built" (Hag. 1:2), and will be amusing itself with its vineyards, and fields, and houses; squandering the time, instead of carrying on with untiring energy the settled purpose of the soul, amidst all the difficulties and dangers which may threaten or oppose.

In Haggai I find God acting; and there I get a lesson for myself; for I have to do with God. I see the hypocrisy of man doing a right thing; but not doing it to God, doing it from a wrong motive. Whatever is not done in faith to God will fail. As soon as there is confession, when the people "did fear before the Lord," there is the gracious answer, "I am with you, saith the Lord."

Thus we have three great points brought out:

1st. Are we walking in what we know, up to the light we have?

2nd. The course of conduct the light brings into will not do for the flesh to walk in, but the energy of faith alone.

3rd. Whatever connection the circumstances of Providence may have with the things of God, they are not of power in the work of God. The providence of God may open the prison door, lead the people out, raise up Cyrus or Zerubbabel; but when they want power for action, we find the Spirit of prophecy opening their eyes to see their departure from God, telling them what was in their own hearts, and then telling of the grace in God's heart towards them, and the glory that awaited them. (See Ezra 5:1-2)

By the mercy of God, the government of this country is favorable; the quietness we enjoy, the privilege of meeting together without fear of interruption or violence, has been the boon (under God) of the government. This, to us, is a great responsibility. But there is nothing of real power in service, but a "thus saith the Lord." There is no power in the floating topics of religion; it must be the truth of God in our own souls—knowing the truth of God as God's truth, and then our action, action for God. Are we searching the Word of God to find God there? What is the value of seeing all the scenes pointed out in Scripture, things past, or things to come, and not seeing God in them? There are two marks of spiritual experience in Scripture—1st: Having studied such a portion, have you seen God as presented in those circumstances? have you met God there? If so, you have been bowed down and humbled; and if humbled, have got rest. 2nd: A spiritual reception of Scripture will ever produce corresponding action, a going forth, a "Here am I." If one say, I cannot understand, when the Spirit is teaching, He takes us to what we can understand. Power for service is learned in the presence of God, and there alone; for in the presence of God we get

humbled, and rest in His grace.

Is my study of Scripture a drawing out of God's Word of what I am, and of what God is?

Gideon, God's Mighty Man of Valor

The history of Gideon is of much practical importance. It is the history of one of those revivals in Judges so peculiarly applicable to the present circumstances and need of the church.

Every now and again (as we learn in the previous chapters of this book, which will be seen at once to be occupied throughout with the failure of Israel, when placed in the land into which Joshua had brought them in blessing) Israel had been sold into the hands of their enemies. Groaning under the consequences of their sin, they had cried unto the Lord; and the Lord, ever faithful, had raised up some one as a deliverer out of the hands of those that spoiled them. He was grieved with the afflictions of His people. He judged their sin and evil; yet, at the same time, pitied and saved. But then the persons by whom He wrought were always in themselves insignificant. We do not find revivals beginning from the head. Very generally, when there has been anything of a recovery from, the doctrines and traditions of men, it has taken place through the instrumentality of some obscure individual, raised up in the energy of the Spirit. Such a "savior" was Gideon.

"The children of Israel," we read, "did evil in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years" (Chapter 6:1).

The Midianites knew not that it was the Lord who had delivered Israel into their hands, yet in reality they were but the rod with which it pleased Him to punish His people. As with the Assyrian: "O Assyrian, the rod of Mine anger, and the staff in their hand is Mine indignation." When He has done with His rod, He can break it, or burn it. "Shall the ax boast itself against him that heweth therewith? or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it as if the rod should shake itself against them that lift it up, or as if the staff should lift up itself, as if it were no wood." Satan himself is very often the rod used by God for the discipline of His children.

"And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel." Nothing could have prevailed against them, had they been faithful to the Lord. "And because of the Midianites the children of Israel made them the dens which are in the mountains, and caves, and strong holds. And so it was, when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east, even they came up against them; and they encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth, till thou come unto Gaza, and left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass. For they came up with their cattle and their tents, and they came as grasshoppers for multitude; for both they and their cattle were without number: and they entered into the land to destroy it. And Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites" (vss. 2-6).

They were in a sad condition. "And the children of Israel cried unto the Lord."

This is always the first symptom of anything like a revival. When the people of God, instead of saying that they are rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing, feel how really poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked they are, and that they can only receive that which God is pleased to give, He is about to interfere and raise them up.

The sin of the church has brought it into desolation. Yet little real cry has gone up to the Lord! and wherefore We are not aware of how far we have departed from our original standing. We have got so much of the world's dignity, and influence, and riches! These things, though they hide us not from God, or from Satan, are hiding from ourselves our real poverty. Did we but know our destitution, did we but cry unto the Lord, He, "when He saw that there was none shut up or left," would deliver and raise up. Whether as to Israel, or an individual, or the church, the lesson needed to be learned is the same, that of its impoverishment and destitution. No matter how poor we are, if sensible of our poverty; for there is all fullness in Christ.

"And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried unto the Lord because of the Midianites, that the Lord sent a prophet unto the children of Israel, which said unto them, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I brought you out of Egypt, and brought you forth out of the house of bondage; and I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all that oppressed you, and drave them out from before you, and gave you their land; and I said unto you, I am the Lord your God; fear not the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but ye have not obeyed My voice." (vss. 7-10)

He first of all shows them their sin, as He did when they could not take Ai. There the secret of their impoverishment is found out. 'You are crying unto me now,' (He in effect says,) 'because you feel your impoverishment; but the real cause of your impoverishment is this, you have sinned against me.' They had none to blame but themselves. So with the churches in the Apocalypse. And, therefore, the word to them, "Repent."

God had been faithful to Israel, but Israel had not been faithful to God. This was the point of the prophet's testimony. He ever vindicates His own conduct. "If we believe not, yet He abideth faithful: He cannot deny Himself." Were we walking as He would have us, neither the world, nor the flesh, nor the devil, could prevail against us. Whenever we find ourselves under the power of our enemies, we must be sure to charge the fault on ourselves, and not on God.

Does Joshua lie on his face, because the people have turned their backs before the men of Ai, the Lord says to him, "Get thee up; wherefore liest thou on thy face? Israel hath sinned." Joshua ought to have known that sin in Israel, not any changeableness in God, was the cause of their being smitten. The Lord would not be amongst them any more, until they had put away the accursed thing. Could He go out to bless iniquity? Nothing can weaken our hands but sin; "greater is He that is in us, than he that is in the world."

Whether in the restoration of an individual soul, or of a body of saints, God will have it acknowledged that there is no failure in Him, but that we have suffered because of our own sin and folly.

Having testified of their sin, the Lord next raises up for them the instrument of their deliverance.

"And there came an angel of the Lord, and sat under an oak which was in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abi-ezrite; and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites" (vs. 11).

Not anything could have been more abject than the condition of Gideon, as described here—stealthily threshing wheat (for fear of the Midianites) to feed his family! But here is one

whom the Spirit of God delights to make mention of; whose name, unrecorded of man, is thought worthy to be recorded by Him. The Spirit of God writes to magnify the grace of God, not to exalt man. He would have us bear in mind such little incidents as that noticed here, in the history of the soldiers of faith, in order that we may see by what weak and insignificant instruments God works. His mightiest victories have ever been won by such, and not by those who had resources in themselves.

“And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him, and said unto him, The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor” (vs. 12).

What a remarkable salutation! Stealthily threshing wheat to hide it from the enemy looked not like valor! To the human eye there was everything that betrayed depression of spirit. But God’s “mighty men” have ever been such as were arrant cowards in themselves, men distrustful of their own strength and wisdom in coping with the enemy— “out of weakness made strong.” None are “mighty men of valor” but those to whom it has been said, “The Lord is with thee.” When God calls a person by a name, He makes that person what the name imports; but He takes the most abject man of an abject tribe to make him His “mighty man of valor.” “Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called” (1 Cor. 1:25-29). God works not ordinarily by such; the credit would then be given to our wisdom, our influence, and the like; and it is written, “No flesh shall glory in His presence.” He takes “the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things of the world to confound the mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, yea, and things which are not, to bring to naught things that are.” Is Timothy exhorted to “fight the good fight of faith,” it is as one “strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.” To every Christian it may be said, as Paul writes to those at Corinth, “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.” But again we are told to be “strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might.”

“And Gideon said unto him, Oh my Lord, if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all His miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt? but now the Lord hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.” (vs. 13)

His heart has been touched, and prepared of the Lord, for the work to which he is called. He has a deep sense of the condition of Israel upon his soul, though he is without the power to help them; and he has been comparing that condition with the title and power of the Lord. This is the way of faith. It is not for us to be comparing ourselves among ourselves; we should compare our condition with the title and will of the Lord to bless. Is not something of this sort the language of many a saint now? Can it be possible that the Holy Ghost is in the church, whilst, at the same time, the church is so worldly, so divided? Is it at all like what it was in the apostles’ days? The answer of the Lord to the cry of Israel discloses the secret of our condition. We have sinned; we have not obeyed His voice. And, if awakened to the sense of what we have lost, oftentimes there has not been the acknowledgment of our sin in departing from God, and it has therefore only led to fretfulness and impatience, or to wrong pretensions. Gideon sees the Lord’s hand to be upon His people, and that because of sin. But he identifies himself with the people. He might have said, “Israel has sinned,” or “Satan has driven us here;” and then there would have been no hope. He cannot understand the Lord’s presence, without making his people happy; and he at once loses sight of himself in his

interest in and thoughts about the people of God, as God's people, and says, "If the Lord be with us, why has all this evil befallen us?... the Lord has delivered us."

"And the Lord looked upon Gideon, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel out of the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?" (vs. 14)

The Lord looked upon him. That is the first thing. The man who is really strong and mighty is he who has thus got into the secret of Israel's impoverishment. The Lord has looked upon him. The Lord has identified Himself with him, and shown His heart to be towards him. There is no limit to His might.

But does Gideon feel himself to be a strong man? No! never before had he so known his own weakness and insignificance; never had he so felt the poverty of his father's house as now.

"And he said unto Him, Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house." (vs. 15)

Thus it is always with the soldiers of faith. They have never felt their own weakness, so as they feel it when called to be God's mighty men of valor. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." People often say, 'I want to feel that I am strong.' What we need is, to feel that we are weak; that brings in Omnipotence. We shall have a life of feeling by-and-by, in the glory, now we are called upon to lead a life of faith. What saint but knows, from the experience of the deceitfulness of his own heart, that had we power in ourselves, instead of in Christ, we should be something? This is what God does not intend.

"Wherewith shall I save Israel?" His threshing instrument would have been a poor thing indeed to look to, as that "wherewith" to go against the host of Midian. Never, we repeat, had he felt the poverty of his father's house as now. When God is about to use a man, He makes that man feel most consciously nothing in himself. If He delivers by Gideon's hand, He must have the glory, not Gideon; His must be the strength, not Gideon's. It is always as it should be, when we drop down into our nothingness. Strong in the Lord, we are weakest in ourselves. Can we not, almost invariably, trace our failures to self-confidence? When a believer thinks that he is going to do a feat, his failure often becomes ridiculous. God must abase that which is proud and lifted up.

"And the Lord said unto him, Surely I will be with thee."

As with David, in another fight of faith, there was no sword in the hand of Gideon; not anything "wherewith" to go against the Midianites. But what matter of that? "If God be for us, who can be against us?" He goes not forth unarmed. "Surely I will be with thee, and (as a consequence of that) thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man."

Here then is the mighty man of valor, and here is his armor.

Gideon asks a sign: "And he said unto Him, If now I have found grace in Thy sight, then show me a sign that Thou talkest with me. Depart not hence, I pray Thee, until I come unto Thee, and bring forth my present, and set it before Thee."

There is feebleness, doubtless, here; he ought to have had simple confidence, and not have needed a sign; still, all he really cares for is having the Lord with him.

“And He said, I will tarry until thou come again. And Gideon went in, and made ready a kid, and unleavened cakes of an ephah of flour: the flesh he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot, and brought it out unto him under the oak, and presented it. And the angel of God said unto him, Take the flesh and the unleavened cakes, and lay them upon this rock, and pour out the broth. And he did so. Then the angel of the Lord departed out of his sight.

“And when Gideon perceived that he was an angel of the Lord, Gideon said, Alas, O Lord God! for because I have seen an angel of the Lord face to face.”

Another mark of feebleness (we do not see this fear in Abraham, under similar circumstances). But the Lord will give Gideon confidence to stand before Him.

“And the Lord said unto him, Peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die” (vss. 17-23).

Is there not most important instruction for ourselves in all this? Faith has that to present to God which He can accept. Whatever our own failure, still Jesus is the same, the value of His work is unchanged. There has been of late an awakening to a good deal of busy activity in service; but God never says to a soul, ‘Peace be unto thee, fear not,’ because of service. We are in danger of putting service in the place of the burnt-offering. Where this is done, the soul gets weighed down, not being able to find satisfaction in the service, instead of going on in happy liberty of spirit.

Gideon’s heart reassured, he builds an altar there unto the Lord, and calls it JEHOVAH-SHALOM (vs. 24).

And now he is prepared for service. He has been under God’s tutorage. He has learned where his strength is; he no longer says, “Wherewith shall I save Israel?” And the Lord has given him confidence to stand before Him. But where does He set him to work? with the Midianites? No, not in the least. He has to begin the Lord’s work at home, with that which is nearest to himself.

“And it came to pass the same night, that the Lord said unto him, Take thy father’s youngest bullock, even the second bullock of seven years old, and throw down the altar of Baal that thy father hath, and cut down the grove that is by it: and build an altar unto the Lord thy God upon the top of the rock, in the ordered place, and take the second bullock, and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the grove which thou shalt cut down” (vss. 25, 26).

There judgment commences. We must “cease to do evil” before we “learn to do well.” The Lord comes to us as “the God of peace;” still it is, “Down with the idols in your father’s house.” We may have been restless in service; but, in the midst of much doing, how little have we done this, or ever practically attempted to set up God’s altar “in the ordered place.” Man’s will has not been invaded. It is of the essence of willfulness to say, I have a right to worship God how I like. Obedience to God is the saint’s rule and liberty. Not all the powers in the world have a title to interfere with this. And, moreover, if God says, Pull down the altar of Baal, He will give strength to do it.

How does Gideon act? His conduct is that of simple faith and obedience.

“Then Gideon took ten men of his servants, and did as the Lord had said unto him: and so it was, because he feared his father’s household, and the men of the city, that he could not do it by day, that he did it by night” (vs. 27).

He acts unhesitatingly. And what is the consequence? Immediate opposition.

“When the men of the city arose early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal was cut down, and the grove was cut down that was by it” (the grove might add beauty to the altar of Baal, but God’s altar must be set up in its native simplicity), “and the second bullock was offered upon the altar that was built. And they said one to another, Who hath done this? And when they inquired and asked, they said, Gideon the son of Joash hath done this thing. Then the men of the city said unto Joash, Bring out thy son, that he may die: because he hath cast down the altar of Baal, and because he hath cut down the grove that was by it” (vss. 28-30).

The action of faith always excites the flesh. Israel knew not where their strength was, they thought it in Baal. Gideon had learned it to be in God. These are sifting times. In the Lord’s day everything was in beautiful order apparently; but because He was setting aside men’s traditions, all were against Him. So now. How many suppose the strength of Christians to consist in the things they see around them. The soul taught of God knows it is only in Jehovah Jesus.

“And Joash said unto all that stood against him, Will ye plead for Baal? will ye save him? he that will plead for him, let him be put to death whilst it is yet morning: if he be a god, let him plead for himself, because one hath cast down his altar. Therefore on that day he called him Jerubbaal, saying, Let Baal plead against him, because he has thrown down his altar” (vss. 31, 32).

It was of no use to argue the case, except to show the people the folly of pleading for Baal. If the things set aside were Baal’s, and Baal was a god, surely he would arise and take their part. It was of no use to debate. And do not let us suppose that all the arguments of all the good men in the world can make that which is evil good. It is melancholy, indeed, to see the arguments that are devised by the wit of men in vindication of evil. The bounden duty of the saint is to separate from evil, however sanctioned by antiquity, or anything else.

The name “Jerubbaal” was no defense. On the contrary, it brought up the question whether there was power in Satan now that faith was in exercise.

When mixed up with the world, Satan has no occasion to disturb us. Let him be alarmed, and up come Midianites and Amalekites, “Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the children of the east were gathered together, and went over, and pitched in the valley of Jezreel” (vs. 33).

Here is Gideon with his own people against him, and the enemies of Israel gathered together and pitching in Jezreel. But he has peace with God, and the Lord is (so to speak) bound to appear on his side. How does he act? The Spirit of the Lord comes upon him, and he blows the trumpet; and Abiezer is gathered after him. (vs. 34) Had Gideon been serving Baal, he could not have blown the trumpet thus. But Baal is down, and the altar of God is set up in the ordered place. He sends messengers throughout all Manasseh, who also are gathered unto him, and to Ashur, Zebulun, and Naphtali; and these all are gathered around the man who is least in his father’s house, the poorest of the tribe of Manasseh, but to whom the Lord has said, “Go in this thy might.”

There seems still to have been a measure of distrust in Gideon’s mind. (vss. 36-40) He asks a fresh and double sign that the Lord will save by his hand, as He had said, proving by the fleece, both wet and dry. The Lord grants his desire; and he is sent forth with the confirmed assurance of his divine call and mission, to “turn to flight the armies of the aliens.”

Again let us remark, faithfulness begins not with the Midianites, it begins at home. This is a great, principle, (whether as to an individual soul, or as to the church of God). Gideon must attack the evil inside his father's house, and in the midst of Israel, before he is used of the Lord to save Israel out of the hands of the Midianites.

The moment there is a thorough sense of grace, the word is, "Go in this thy might."

He is set up as captain of a large army; and now he stands forth to confront the enemies of Israel, and of the Lord.

"Then Jerubbaal, who is Gideon, and all the people that were with him, rose up early, and pitched beside the well of Herod: so that the host of the Midianites were on the north side of them, by the hill of Morah, in the valley" (Chapter 7:1).

This is God's way of acting. He never honors us when we are thinking that we are anything. Great blessing has often been preceded by our deep humbling, by humbling even sometimes in the eyes of others. We were brought low, and the Lord lifted us up.

But Gideon has a still further lesson to learn (one painfully our own). He has known the acceptance of his offering. The youngest of an idolatrous household, he has built an altar to the Lord, and begun to destroy idolatry. But he has yet to be taught that there is not a bit more courage or prowess really in the men that had gathered after him than in himself.

"And the Lord said unto Gideon, The people that are with thee are too many for Me to deliver the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against Me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me." (vs. 2)

At once he has to get rid of a great number of them.

This is done, first of all, by means of an ancient ordinance of Moses. The Lord tells him, "Now therefore go to, proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, Whosoever is fearful and faint-hearted, let him return and depart early from mount Gilead" (Compare Deut. 20:8). God's great design in His dealings, was to teach Israel to trust in Himself. He wants to find in His people a true heart. A true heart makes a strong hand. Having confidence in the Captain of our salvation, and not in ourselves, we faint not at the sight of our enemies, but reckon with true-hearted Caleb, that "we are well able to overcome them."

"And there returned of the people twenty and two thousand; and there remained ten thousand." (vs. 3)

Do we not know what this means? We know that the Lord Jesus sent forth the proclamation, 'Let those who will follow Me count the cost.' "Foxes have holes," (told He one who had said unto Him, "Lord I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest,") "and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head." And then there was fearfulness and faint-heartedness. When there was nothing but Christ, and everything else was against them, many turned back, and walked no more with Him. Confidence in the flesh must be renounced; God will not use the flesh.

The present is an age when people are coveting to know a little about everything. Were God to employ the learning of learned men, the influence of men of rank, and the like, the church would say, "We have saved ourselves." Those who have had what are called "the advantages of a good education," find that He says, "Set your learning, your wisdom, your influence aside, I cannot save by these" (1 Cor. 2:4). The use to be made of these things is to say of them with Paul, "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ." Often are these much-coveted things found hindrances in the way of those who possess them, and the great thing to be done, in conflict, is to keep them under. God will not allow human learning, influence, moral character, or aught else, to come in as an item in our deliverance. He is very jealous of all man's substitutes for, and imitations of, the power of the Holy Ghost. In stripping ourselves of such things, we may seem to others to be throwing away our influence and our usefulness. But what is usefulness? what is "doing good"? The doing of God's will. And God is faith's sufficiency. To all appearance, Gideon was weakening his own hands. At the first proclamation, twenty-two thousand left him; but, in reality, instead of losing strength, he was gainer by their departure. These fearful and faint-hearted ones would have discouraged the rest had they remained amongst them. "Let him go and return unto his house, lest his brother's heart faint as well as his heart." The flesh is very bold in word; but when it comes to the point of trial, with Peter, it curses and swears that it knows not Jesus. There is a great deal of "philosophy and vain deceit" going about now. "Beware lest any man spoil you," says the apostle. Were all the trappings of the flesh laid aside, we should discern how little real spiritual energy there is amongst us. Do you ask, "What shall I study?" Study well these four words: "The flesh profiteth nothing."

"And the Lord said unto Gideon, The people are yet too many; bring them down unto the water, and I will try them for thee there: and it shall be, that of whom I say unto thee, This shall go with thee, the same shall go with thee; and of whomsoever I say unto thee, This shall not go with thee, the same shall not go." (vs. 4)

There is such a thing as the trial of our faith; and, whilst we very often should be quite unable to test one another, God knows the best way of doing this as to each.

"So he brought down the people unto the water: and the Lord said unto Gideon, Every one that lapped of the water with his tongue, as a dog lapped, him shalt thou set by himself; likewise every one that boweth down upon his knees to drink. And the number of them that lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, were THREE HUNDRED men: but all the rest of the people bowed down upon their knees to drink water. And the Lord said unto Gideon, By the THREE HUNDRED men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand: and let all the other people go every man unto his place. So the people took victuals in their hand, and their trumpets: and he sent all the rest of Israel every man unto his tent, and retained those THREE HUNDRED men. And the host of Midian was beneath him in the valley" (vss. 5-8).

God's ways are strange to sense. The infidel scoffs at them. These people were really not afraid (as those who departed before) to go to the battle; they were all of them soldiers girded for war. The test was this, whether in that thirsty day they would lap the water, putting the hand to the mouth, or bow down and drink at their ease. The THREE HUNDRED chosen ones (those by whom the Lord was about to work) had not time for halting, their hearts were 'in the work, and they merely took a draft as they went on their way.

The apostle speaks of being “entangled with the affairs of this life” (2 Tim. 2:4); all that we can safely take, would we “please Him who has chosen us to be soldiers,” is just a draft by the way. There is a very great difference between being in the circumstances of this life, and being entangled with them. When tested by the Lord, those who bowed down were not fit for His use, any more than (though they were not) the faint-hearted. They must go to their homes.

Glory is (for all who believe) God’s answer to the work of Christ; grace is followed by glory: “Whom He justified, them He also glorified.” Instead of its being this, the devil seeks to put it before the soul on the ground of our devotedness and zeal. At the same time, beloved, would not you and I that our place should have been with the THREE HUNDRED? Shall we let slip the opportunity of confessing Jesus because we are saved? In the experience of almost every believer there is a being brought down to the water—some turning-point, when he either goes onward in devotedness to the Lord, or otherwise sinks down into a mere commonplace Christian. Not one of us is too obscure to be tried whether he will seek God’s honor or present things first.

Gideon (instructed that the battle is the Lord’s, and that he must get rid of all encumbrances) is next shown his enemies.

“And it came to pass the same night, that the Lord said unto him, Arise, get thee down unto the host; for I have delivered it into thine hand” (vs. 9).

It is a blessed thing to be shown our enemies, and to be told with Gideon that the Lord has delivered them into our hands. Our old man is “crucified” (Rom. 6:6), the world “overcome,” and its prince “judged” (John 16:11,33). If we are walking by faith, as risen with Christ, Satan, the world, and the flesh are under our feet.

And mark, further, how graciously the Lord anticipates the need of His servant, in adding: “But if thou fear to go down, go thou with Phurah thy servant down to the host: and thou shalt hear what they say; and afterward shall thine hands be strengthened to go down unto the host.” (vss. 10, 11)

Nothing could be more alarming than to see the fearful odds that are against the people of faith—the world, the flesh, and the unceasing hostility of Satan! Who would not be faint-hearted if we saw but this? God is pleased to let Gideon hear what is in the Midianites’ hearts. So, too, is He pleased to let us know very often what is in the hearts of our enemies. “Art thou come hither to torment us before the time?” lets out the secret. And as to the men of the world, there is not one in a hundred of them but that has the fullest conviction that Christians are right; yet, because they have numbers on their side, they try to persuade themselves to the contrary. Almost everything he hears bids the intelligent Christian “be strong.”

Let us follow Gideon.

“Then went he down with Phurah his servant unto the outside of the armed men that were in the host. And the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the children of the east lay along in the valley like grasshoppers for multitude; their camels were without number, as the sand by the seaside for multitude. And when Gideon was come, behold, there was a man that told a dream unto his fellow, and said, Behold, I dreamed a dream, and, lo, a cake of barley bread tumbled into the host of Midian, and came unto a tent, and smote it that it fell, and overturned it, that the tent lay along. And his fellow answered and said, This is nothing else save the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a

man of Israel: for into his hand hath God delivered Midian, and all the host" (vss. 12-14).

Divine encouragement is never to the puffing up of the flesh. Anything of pride and self-importance must have been sorely wounded. When God will show His favored servant the things that are coming to pass, and that he shall smite the Midianites as one man, He makes him feel that (in himself) he is but as a "cake of barley bread."

And is there not instruction for ourselves in this? Were Christians stripped of their worldliness, more really like the "cake of barley bread" (the most homely thing possible), the world would stand more in fear of them. We have clothed ourselves with its trappings, and desired its respectability, so that it thinks we are obliged to go to it for help. There is an unhealthy kind of zeal, often found amongst us, which makes a person ask himself, How shall I give a testimony? rather let each saint seek to show forth "the mind that was in Christ Jesus." A man, always anxious to prove himself an honest man, we should begin to suspect; and if a person is always so very anxious to prove that he is a Christian, it is doubtful whether he yet knows much of the mind of Christ. Let us quietly subside into simple, God-fearing, God-acknowledging Christianity; and, though outwardly as a cake of barley bread, the world would feel about us, as the Midianite speaks of Gideon to his fellow.

"And it was so, when Gideon heard the telling of the dream, and the interpretation thereof, that he worshipped."

Before he goes to battle, he worships in the full confidence of victory. The worship of faith is always the worship of confidence. Were we more really, in our own eyes, the "cake of barley bread," there would be more abounding praise.

"He worshipped, and returned into the host of Israel, and said, Arise; for the Lord hath delivered into your hand the host of the Midianites" (vs. 15).

What is this "host of Israel"? THREE HUNDRED men! The Midianites are "as grasshoppers for multitude;" the Lord's "host" but a handful of men! It is most important to see the dignity attached to the THREE HUNDRED. God (as we have before remarked in the history of this mighty man of valor) reckons not according to what we are in ourselves, but according to that which He makes us.

And had He actually delivered the Midianites into the hand of Israel? No. Neither, as yet, is Satan actually under our feet, though faith counts him to be. Had Gideon said, "I will not believe before I get the spoil," that would have been unbelief.

And now comes the conflict.

"And he divided the THREE HUNDRED men into three companies, and put a trumpet in every man's hand, with empty pitchers, and lamps within the pitchers. And he said unto them, Look on me, and do likewise: and, behold, when I come to the outside of the camp, it shall be that, as I do, so shall ye do. When I blow with a trumpet, I and all that are with me, then blow ye the trumpets also on every side of all the camp, and say, The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon" (vss. 16-18).

The weapons of their warfare were the most foolish things imaginable—trumpets, pitchers, and lamps in the pitchers! Faith's weapons must be mighty through God alone.

“So Gideon, and the hundred men that were with him, came unto the outside of the camp, in the beginning of the middle watch; and they had but newly set the watch: and they blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers that were in their hands. And the three companies blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers, and held the lamps in their left hands, and the trumpets in their right hands to blow withal: and they cried, The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon. And they stood every man in his place round about the camp: and all the host ran, and cried, and fled. And the THREE HUNDRED blew the trumpets, and the Lord set every man’s sword against his fellow, even throughout all the host: and the host fled to Beth-shittah in Zererath, and to the border of Abel-meholah, unto Tabbath. And the men of Israel gathered themselves together out of Naphtali, and out of Asher, and out of all Manasseh, and pursued after the Midianites” (vss. 19-23).

These things shall yet be acted over again. Now, the weapons wherewith we have to fight are testimony by word of mouth and our own insignificance. Our power is in giving testimony to Jesus, and never getting out of the place of being but “earthen vessels.” We must remember that the vessel only contains the light, let us not pretend that it is the light. The excellency of the power must be of God, and not of us.

“And Gideon sent messengers throughout all mount Ephraim...”

Impotent in ourselves for blessing (and having found this out), but having proved the blessedness of simple dependence, upon God, we can, with Gideon, call upon others to have fellowship with us. (vss. 24, 25) But let us not be setting up ourselves. Everything depends upon the presence of the Holy Ghost, ungrieved, unhindered. Let this be told, and let us hide ourselves.

The men of Ephraim are seen at the close of chapter 7 slaying Oreb and Zeeb. (They are allowed to come in for blessing in result) Now they turn and chide with Gideon for not having called them at the first.

“And the men of Ephraim said unto him, Why hast thou served us thus, that thou calledst us not, when thou wentest to fight with the Midianites? And they did chide with him sharply.” (Chapter 8:1)

This is just what the half-hearted Christian does. He is very angry at not being associated with those who are wholehearted. But whose is the fault? Whenever there is any energy of the Spirit of God working in the church, the language of the men of Ephraim is the language of such— “Why not have taken us with you?” Faith’s answer is very simple, “Because, then, we must have gone on your ground. What we have to do is to go wherever the Lord leads; we cannot stop to make compacts and agreements.” No one Christian has a right to stop on his way for another; he must go forward himself in individual faithfulness. The effort to drag others along with us is in reality but a device of Satan to keep ourselves back. Note the Lord’s word to Jeremiah “Let them return unto thee; but return not thou to them” (Jer. 15:19). Are any desirous of going forward, let them not stop to carry along with them “the men of Ephraim.” Far better is it to go on with but few to follow, than to get numbers with us who are only half-hearted.

“And Gideon said, What have I done now in comparison of you? Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abi-ezer? God hath delivered into your hands the princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb: and what was I to do in comparison of you?” (vss. 2, 3)

Let us mark this. Where the power of God is most working, there is always the deepest grace, and the consciousness that all that we are we are by the grace of God. What a manifestation have we here of the mind that was in Christ. How graciously did the Lord speak of His poor, failing, faithless disciples; “Ye are they,” said He, “that have continued with me in my temptations” (Luke 22:28). Gideon esteems others better than himself. Not anything so hinders blessing (individual or collective) as a feeling of superiority to others. The exercised soul will judge itself, whilst it sees that which is done by another in the light of grace. Gideon casts himself and his THREE HUNDRED in the shade, and brings into prominence the victory of the men of Ephraim. If honest in self-judgment, have we not at times detected in ourselves something of an inclination to overlook grace in other saints because they “followed not with us”? Grace is able to fasten on that in a brother that is pleasing to God, and seeks to bring it out, passing over, in so doing, there may be very much along with it of failure. Jesus knew, and perfectly, the weakness and failure of His disciples, though He addressed them as He did. It is a blessing when we can sink ourselves that others may come into prominence. “Let your light,” it is said, “so shine before men, that they may see your good works” (not you), “and glorify” (not you, but) “your Father which is in heaven.” If any chide with us, let us seek grace to go down and take the lowest place, and give them credit. “Then their anger was abated toward him, when he had said that” (See Prov. 15:1).

“And Gideon came to Jordan, and passed over, he, and the THREE HUNDRED men that were with him, faint, yet pursuing them” (vs. 4).

What three little words could be more blessedly descriptive of the Christian than these! not “faint, and sitting down;” “not faint, and giving up;” but, “faint, yet pursuing.” We have to do with Him who “giveth power to the faint.” (Isa. 40:29) “To them that have no might He increaseth strength.” It is a blessed use to make of our faintness and weariness, that of drawing out of the fullness of the supply of grace and strength in Christ. It is said, “Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might;” but to whom? To the one who has no strength in himself, who would give up his course if strength were not supplied to him. One victory achieved, the conflict goes on afresh. Do we find ourselves fainting in spirit? Still let us go on; for our God giveth strength to the weak. We like not this trial of faith. It is very painful, doubtless, to feel day after day our own weakness. We want to feel that the battle is over; but let us remember that now is our time of war. We are called on to fight “as good soldiers of Jesus Christ,” and that in a daily round of conflicts. Today there has been sufficient grace and sufficient evil, and to-morrow there will be sufficient grace and sufficient evil. What we need is to live day by day on God. He is faithful, and will supply strength according to the occasion and need. The church will not be at rest till the Lord comes. But weakness ought to be no hindrance to our going forward—“faint, yet pursuing.” It is a sad thing to be a spiritual sluggard—for a saint, like a door on its hinges, never to get off himself. The moment a person has learned to renounce himself, he goes forward. Were felt weakness a reason for standing still, who so weak as Gideon?

The next thing taught us in this history is, that the world is neither able nor willing to supply refreshment to the man of faith. The world never gives, it may concede something to us if we concede something to it, but it never gives. That which is required by it is generally the sacrifice of faithfulness.

“And he said unto the men of Succoth, Give, I pray you, loaves of bread unto the people that follow me; for they be faint, and I am pursuing after Zebah and Zalmunna, kings of Midian And the princes of Succoth said, Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine hand, that we should give bread unto thine army?” (vss. 5, 6)

If you profess to the world that you are “following after” resurrection glory, “pressing toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3), you will not meet with anything at its hands but some such taunt as this.

And Gideon said, Therefore when the Lord hath delivered Zebah and Zalmunna into mine hand, then I will tear your flesh with the thorns of the wilderness and with briers. And he went up thence to Penuel, and spake unto them likewise: and the men of Penuel answered him as the men of Succoth had answered him And he spake also unto the men of Penuel, saying, When I come again in peace, I will break down this tower” (vss. 7-9).

In the confidence of victory, Gideon was going forward (though consciously faint); and these princes of Succoth, and the men of Penuel, would not come to the help of the Lord against the mighty. To them, it seemed a foolish thing to be fighting with THREE HUNDRED men against such enemies. So we seem to be very fools when we speak of certain glory. We must make up our minds to this. There are no resources to be had from the world, to help us on in the conflict in which we are engaged. “You say you are kings and priests unto God, that you are to have glory,” is the taunt of unbelief, “but you cannot show us anything for it; when we see you in the glory, we will believe.”

We have not one thing to show, not anything of which the natural man can take notice. Our wisdom is foolishness. We must go on feeling our weakness, confident of victory. By-and-by the tables will be turned. The taunts and reproaches of the world will bring down judgment on their own heads. One special thing that the Lord is coming to judge is, we are told, “all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him” (Jude 15). There is not any present ridicule of His saints that will not be regarded as against Himself in that day.

“Now Zebah and Zalmunna were in Barkor, and their hosts with them, about fifteen thousand men, all that were left of all the hosts of the children of the east: for there fell an hundred and twenty thousand men that drew sword” (vs. 10).

“And Gideon went up by the way of them that dwelt in tents on the east of Nobah and Jogbehah, and smote the host; for the host was secure. And when Zebah and Zalmunna fled, he pursued after them, and took the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, and discomfited all the host” (vss. 11, 12).

“And Gideon the son of Joash returned from battle before the sun was up, and caught a young man of the men of Succoth, and inquired of him: and he described unto him the princes of Succoth, and the elders thereof, even threescore and seventeen men And he came unto the men of Succoth, and said, Behold Zebah and Zalmunna, with whom ye did upbraid me, saying, Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine hand, that we should give bread unto thy men that are weary? And he took the elders of the city, and thorns of the wilderness and briers, and with them he taught the men of Succoth. And he beat down the tower of Penuel, and slew the men of the city” (vss. 13-17).

“Then said he unto Zebah and Zalmunna, What manner of men were they whom ye slew at Tabor? And they answered, As thou art, so were they; each one resembled the children of a king. And he said, They were my brethren, even the sons of my mother: as the Lord liveth, if ye had saved them alive, I would not slay you. And he said unto Jether his first-born, Up, and slay them. But the youth drew not his sword: for he feared, because he was yet a youth. Then Zebah and Zalmunna said, Rise thou, and fall upon us: for as the man is, so is his strength. And Gideon arose, and slew Zebah and Zalmunna, and took away the ornaments that were on their camels’ necks” (vss. 18-21).

“Then the men of Israel said unto Gideon, Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son’s son also: for thou hast delivered us from the hand of Midian. And Gideon said unto them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the Lord shall rule over you” (vss. 22, 23).

The Lord Jesus would not be made king by the people. (John 6:15) He came in His Father’s name (they would not receive Him thus), and He would not be received in His own name! It is a very different thing being received in our own names, from our being received the name of the Lord. Gideon retires; he will not take the place of rule that belongs only to the Lord. He knows that if the people’s minds are fixed upon Gideon, nothing but weakness and dishonor can result; but that if the Lord be acknowledged and leaned on, there will be strength and blessing. Do we not find this principle running all through the New Testament.

Paul hides himself. Though having had such revelations from the Lord, though possessing such a compass of knowledge, yet the moment he sees the spirit coming in of setting up Paul, he says, “Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase;” so again, “Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas,” (1 Cor. 3). Had he put himself forward, Christ would not have been seen. And this principle, true of Gideon, true of Paul, is true of every saint acting in faith.

One special mark of growth in grace is evidenced in our magnifying the name of the Lord Jesus, even though it be in the vilifying of our own names before the saints and before the world, in our taking all blame to ourselves, and our giving all praise to the Lord. “He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.”

Had the history of Gideon closed here, what a beautiful picture would it have presented.

There is none perfect but the Lord. He is the true Gideon, the true Sampson, the true David. At the close of the chapter, we see declension after revival—speedy declension, and that proceeding from Gideon himself.

“And Gideon said unto them, I would desire a request of you, that ye would give me every man the earrings of his prey,” (For they had golden earrings because they were Ishmaelites).

He wanted some monument to signalize his victory. These earrings were the spoils of triumph confessedly from the Lord.

“And they answered, We will willingly give them. And they spread a garment, and did cast therein every man the earrings of his prey. And the weight of the golden earrings that he requested was a thousand and seven hundred shekels of gold; besides ornaments, and collars, and purple raiment

that was on the kings of Midian, and beside chains that were about their camels' necks. And Gideon made an ephod thereof, and put it in his city, even in Ophrah: and all Israel went thither a whoring after it: which thing became a snare unto Gideon, and to his house" (vss. 24-27).

Man seeks something whereby to perpetuate present blessing. This has ever been one way of his perverseness. What security have you that it will last he asks, and faith answers, None whatever, but the presence of the Holy Ghost. If we attempt to secure it by other means, like Gideon, we make an ephod. We seek to perpetuate blessing, to secure it to others, and, in a very short time, keep up the form (having lost the power), and worship that instead of God, just as Gideon's ephod had divine honors paid to it. What is it to have a set of principles (however scriptural) without the power of the Spirit? The only thing to give perpetuity of blessing is the presence of the Holy Ghost. God has wrought in the way of revival, and men whose hearts bounded with love to God and to their fellow-men, have said, Oh, we will perpetuate the blessing, and nothing but evil has come of it. We cannot secure the truth of God by arrangements of our own. Such arrangements may spring from a feeling of piety, but they evidence a want of dependence upon God. There was the energy of the Spirit working in Gideon, but he it was who prepared the way for Israel's re-apostasy.

The restoration lasted not longer than there was individual energy of faith.

"Thus was Midian subdued before the children of Israel, so that they lifted up their heads no more. And the country was in quietness forty years in the days of Gideon. And Jerubbaal the son of Joash went and dwelt in his own house.... And Gideon the son of Joash died in a good old age, and was buried in the sepulcher of Joash his father, in Ophrah of the Abiezrites."

"And it came to pass, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israel turned again and went a whoring after Baalim, and made Baal-berith their god. And the children of Israel remembered not the Lord their God, who had delivered them out of the hands of all their enemies on every side: neither showed they kindness to the house of Jerubbaal, namely, Gideon, according to all the goodness which he had showed unto Israel." (vss. 28-35)

Of what use was the ephod now? It had entirely failed of effecting that which, doubtless, Gideon designed it should effect And have not the well-designed efforts of men of God, who have sought to provide for the pure truth, repeatedly ended in the same way? The great thing we have to look to is, not the holding in prominence of this or that particular doctrine, but the ungrieved presence of the Holy Ghost. Let us remember that He is the holy Spirit, repressive ever of the flesh. If I have set up something, that something becomes an object to me, instead of the Lord. His glory must be the prominent thing. How speedy was the departure of the church from God at the first, even in Paul's days, "all sought their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's" (Phil. 2:21).

2 Corinthians 6:14-18

Amongst the numerous hindrances to thorough consecration of heart to Christ, which I earnestly desire for myself and my reader, “the unequal yoke” will be found to occupy a very prominent place indeed. “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what partnership hath righteousness with unrighteousness [or rather lawlessness] and what communion hath light with darkness And what concord hath Christ with Behan or what part hath a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty” (2 Cor. 6:14-18).

Under the Mosaic economy, we learn the same moral principle. “Thou shalt not sow thy vineyard with divers seeds: lest the fruit of thy seed which thou hast sown, and the fruit of thy vineyard, be defiled. Thou shalt not plow with an ox and an ass together. Thou shalt not wear a garment of divers sorts, as of woolen and linen together” (Deut. 22:9-11; Lev. 19:19).

These scriptures will suffice to set forth the moral evil of an unequal yoke. It may with full confidence be asserted that no one can be an unshackled follower of Christ who is in any way “unequally yoked.” He may be a saved person—he may be a true child of God—a sincere believer, but he cannot be a thorough disciple; and not only so, but there is a positive hindrance to the full manifestation of that which he may really be notwithstanding his unequal yoke. “Come out... and I will receive you,... and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.” That is to say, “Get your neck out of the unequal yoke, and I will receive you, and there shall be the full public practical manifestation of your relationship with the Lord Almighty.” The idea here is evidently different from that set forth in James: “Of His own will begat He us by the word of truth.” And also in Peter: “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever.” And again in 1 John: “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on us, that we should be called the sons of God.” So also in John’s gospel: “But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” In all these passages the relationship of sons is founded upon the divine counsel and the divine operation, and is not set before us as the consequence of any acting of ours; whereas in 2 Corinthians 6 it is put as the result of our getting out of the unequal yoke. In other words, it is entirely a practical question.

Thus, in Matthew 5, we read: “But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; in order that [■πῶς] ye may be the sons of your Father which is in heaven: because He causeth His sun to rise upon the evil and the good, and sendeth rain upon the just and the unjust.” Here, too, it is the practical establishment and public declaration of the relationship, and its moral

influence. It becomes the sons of such a Father to act in such a way. In short, we have the abstract position or relationship of sons founded upon God's sovereign will and operation; and we have the moral character consequent upon and flowing out of this relationship, which affords just ground for God's public acknowledgment thereof. God cannot fully and publicly own those who are unequally yoked together with unbelievers, for were He to do so it would be an acknowledgment of the unequal yoke. He cannot acknowledge "darkness," "unrighteousness," "Belial," "idols," and "an infidel." How could He? Hence if I yoke myself with any of these I am morally and publicly identified with them, and not with God at all. I have put myself into a position which God cannot own, and as a consequence He cannot own me; but if I withdraw myself from that position—if I "come out and be separate"—if I take my neck out of the unequal yoke—then, but not until then, can I be publicly and fully received and owned as a "son or daughter of the Lord Almighty."

This is a solemn and searching principle for all who feel that they have unhappily gotten themselves into such a yoke. They are not walking as disciples, nor are they publicly or morally on the ground of sons. God cannot own them. Their secret relationship is not the point; but they have put themselves thoroughly off God's ground. They have foolishly thrust their neck into a yoke which, inasmuch as it is not Christ's yoke, must be Belial's yoke; and until they cast off that yoke, God cannot own them as His sons and daughters. God's grace, no doubt, is infinite, and can meet us in all our failure and weakness; but if our souls aspire after a higher order of discipleship, we must at once cast off the unequal yoke, cost what it may; that is, if it can be cast off; but, if it cannot, we must only bow our heads beneath the shame and sorrow thereof, looking to God for full deliverance.

Now, there are four distinct phases in which "the unequal yoke" may be contemplated; namely, the domestic, the commercial, the religious, and the philanthropic. Some may be disposed to confine 2 Corinthians 6:14 to the first of these; but the apostle does not so confine it. The words are, "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers." He does not specify the character or object of the yoke, and therefore we are warranted in giving the passage its widest application, by bringing its edge to bear directly upon every phase of the unequal yoke; and we shall see the importance of so doing, ere we close these remarks, if the Lord permit.

1. And first, then, let us consider the domestic or marriage yoke. What pen can portray the mental anguish, the moral misery, together with the ruinous consequences, as to spiritual life and testimony, flowing from a Christian's marriage with an unconverted person? I suppose nothing can be more deplorable than the condition of one who discovers, when it is too late, that he has linked himself for life with one who cannot have a single thought or feeling in common with him. One desires to serve Christ; the other can only serve the devil: one breathes after the things of God; the other sighs for the things of this present world: the one earnestly seeks to mortify the flesh, with all its affections and desires; the other only seeks to minister to and gratify these very things. Like a sheep and a goat linked together, the sheep longs to feed on the green pasture in the field, while, on the other hand, the goat craves the brambles which grow in the ditch. The sad consequence is, that both are starved. One will not feed on the pasture, and the other cannot feed upon the brambles, and thus neither gets what his nature craves, unless the goat, by superior strength, succeeds in forcing his unequally-yoked companion to remain amongst the brambles, there to languish and die.

The moral of this is plain enough; and, moreover, it is, alas! of but too common occurrence. The goat generally succeeds in gaining his end. The worldly partner carries his or her point, in almost every instance. It will be found, almost without exception, that in cases of the unequal marriage yoke, the poor Christian is the sufferer, as is evidenced by the bitter fruits of a bad conscience, a depressed heart, a gloomy spirit, and a desponding mind. A heavy price, surely, to pay for the gratification of some natural affection, or the attainment, it may be, of some paltry worldly advantage. In fact, a marriage of this kind is the death-knell of practical Christianity, and of progress in the divine life. It is morally impossible that any one can be an unfettered disciple of Christ with his neck in the marriage yoke with an unbeliever. As well might a racer in the Olympic or Isthmian games have expected to gain the crown of victory by attaching a heavy weight or a dead body to his person. It is enough, surely, to have one dead body to sustain, without attaching another. There never was a true Christian yet who did not find that he had abundant work to do in endeavoring to grapple with the evils of one heart, without going to burden himself with the evils of two; and, without doubt, the man who, foolishly and disobediently, marries an unconverted woman, or the woman who marries an unconverted man, is burdened with the combined evils of two hearts; and who is sufficient for these things? One can most fully count upon the grace of Christ for the subjugation of his own evil nature; but he certainly cannot count, in the same way, upon that grace in reference to the evil nature of his unequal yoke-fellow. If he have yoked himself ignorantly, the Lord will meet him personally, on the ground of full confession, with entire restoration of soul, but in the matter of his discipleship, he will never recover it. Paul could say, "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be disapproved of." (αδοκιμος) And he said this, too, in immediate connection with "striving for the mastery." "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one obtaineth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every one that striveth for the mastery is temperate [self-controlled—εγκρατευται] in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air," (1 Cor. 9:24-27).

Here, it is not a question of life or salvation, but simply one of "running in a race," and "so running that we obtain," not life, but "an incorruptible crown." The fact of being called to run assumes the possession of life; for no one would call upon dead men to run in a race. I have got life, evidently, before I begin to run at all, and hence, though I should fail in the race, I do not lose my life, but only the crown, for this and not that was the object proposed to be run for. We are not called to run for life, inasmuch as we get that, not by running, but "by faith of Jesus Christ," who by His death has purchased life for us, and implants it in us by the mighty energy of the Holy Ghost. Now this life, being the life of a risen Christ, is eternal, for He is the eternal Son; as He says Himself, in His address to the Father, in John 17, "Thou hast given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him." This life is not conditional. He does not give us life as sinners, and then set us to run for it as saints, with the gloomy foreboding that we may lose the precious boon by failing in the race. This would be to "run uncertainly," as many, alas! are trying to do, who profess to have entered upon the course, and yet know not whether they have life or not. Such persons are running for life, and not for a crown; but God does not set up life at the goal, as the reward of victory, but gives it at the starting-post, as the power by which we run. The power to run, and the object of running, are two very different things; yet they are constantly confounded by persons who are ignorant of the glorious gospel of the grace of God, in which Christ is set forth as

the life and righteousness of all who believe on His name; and all this, moreover, as the free gift of God, and not as the reward of our running.

Now, in considering the terribly evil consequences of the unequal marriage yoke, it is mainly as bearing upon our discipleship that we are looking at them. I say mainly, because our entire character and experience are deeply affected thereby. I very much question if anyone can give a more effectual blow to his prosperity in the divine life, than by assuming an unequal yoke. Indeed, the very fact of so doing proves that spiritual decline has already set in, with most alarming symptoms; but as to his discipleship—and testimony, the lamp thereof may be regarded as all but gone out; or if it does give an occasional faint glimmer, it only serves to make manifest the awful gloom of his unhappy position, and the appalling consequences of being “unequally yoked together with an unbeliever.”

Thus much as to the question of the unequal yoke, in its influence upon the life, the character, the testimony, and the discipleship of a child of God. I would now say a word as to its moral effect, as exhibited in the domestic circle. Here, too, the consequences are truly melancholy. Nor could they possibly be otherwise. Two persons have come together in the closest and most intimate relationship, with tastes, habits, feelings, desires, tendencies, and objects diametrically opposite. They have nothing in common; so that, in every movement, they can but grate one against the other. The unbeliever cannot, in reality, go with the believer; and if there should, through excessive amiability, or downright hypocrisy, be a show of acquiescence, what is it worth in the sight of the Lord, who judges the true state of the heart in reference to Himself? But little indeed; yea, it is worse than worthless. Then, again, if the believer should, unhappily, go in any measure with his unequal yoke-fellow, it can only be at the expense of his discipleship, and the consequence is, a condemning conscience in the sight of the Lord; and this again leads to heaviness of spirit, and, it may be, sourness of temper, in the domestic circle, so that the grace of the gospel is by no means commended, and the unbeliever is not attracted or won. Thus it is in every way most sorrowful. It is dishonoring to God, destructive of spiritual prosperity, utterly subversive of discipleship and testimony, and entirely hostile to domestic peace and blessing. It produces estrangement, coldness, distance, and misunderstanding; or, if it does not produce these, it will doubtless lead, on the part of the Christian, to a forfeiture of his discipleship and his good conscience, both of which he may be tempted to offer as a sacrifice upon the altar of domestic peace. Thus, whatever way we look at it, an unequal yoke must load to the most deplorable consequences.

Then, as to its effect upon children, it is equally sad. These are almost sure to flow in the current with the unconverted parent. “Their children spoke half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews’ language, but according to the language of each people.” There can be no union of heart in the training of the children; no joint and mutual confidence in reference to them. One desires to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; the other desires to bring them up in the principles of the world, the flesh, and the devil: and as all the sympathies of the children as they grow up are likely to be ranged on the side of the latter, it is easy to see how it will end. In short, it is an unseemly, unscriptural, and vain effort to plow with an “unequal yoke,” or to “sow the ground with mingled seed;” and all must end in sorrow and confusion.

I shall, ere turning from this branch of our subject, offer a remark as to the reasons which generally actuate Christians in the matter of entering into the unequal marriage yoke. We all know, alas! how

easily the poor heart persuades itself of the rightness of any step which it desires to take, and how the devil furnishes plausible arguments to convince us of its rightness—arguments which the moral condition of the soul causes us to regard as clear, forcible, and satisfactory. The very fact of our thinking of such a thing, proves our unfitness to weigh, with a well-balanced mind and spiritually-adjusted conscience, the solemn consequences of such a step.

If the eye were single (that is, if we were governed but by one object—namely, the glory and honor of the Lord Jesus Christ) we should never entertain the idea of putting our necks into an unequal yoke; and consequently we should have no difficulty or perplexity about the matter. A racer, whose eye was resting on the crown, would not be troubled with any perplexity as to whether he ought to stop and tie a hundred weight round his neck. Such a thought would never cross his mind; and not only so, but a thorough racer would have a distinct and almost intuitive perception of everything which would be likely to prove a hindrance to him in running the race; and of course with such a one, to perceive would be to reject with decision.

Now were it thus with Christians in the matter of unscriptural marriage, it would save them a world of sorrow and perplexity; but it is not thus. The heart gets out of communion, and is morally incompetent to “try the things that differ;” and when in this condition, the devil gains an easy conquest, and speedy success in his wicked effort to induce the believer to yoke himself with “Belial,” with “unrighteousness,” with “darkness,” with “an infidel” When the soul is in full communion with God, it is entirely subject to His Word; it sees things as He sees them, calls them what He calls them, and not what the devil or his own carnal heart would call them. In this way the believer escapes the ensnaring influence of a deception which is very frequently brought to bear upon him in this matter—namely, a false profession of religion on the part of the person whom he desires to marry. This is a very common case. It is easy to show symptoms of leaning towards the things of God; and the heart is treacherous and base enough to make a profession of religion in order to gain its end; and not only so, but the devil, who is “transformed into an angel of light,” will lead to this false profession, in order thereby the more effectually to entrap the feet of a child of God. Thus it comes to pass that Christians in this matter suffer themselves to be satisfied, or at least profess themselves satisfied, with evidence of conversion, which, under any other circumstances, they would regard as utterly lame and flimsy.

But, alas! experience soon opens the eyes to the reality. It is speedily discovered that the profession was all a vain show, that the heart is entirely in and of the world. Terrible discovery! Who can detail the bitter consequences of such a discovery—the anguish of heart—the bitter reproaches and cuttings of conscience—the shame and confusion—the loss of power and blessing—the forfeiture of spiritual peace and joy—the sacrifice of a life of usefulness? Who can describe all these things? The man awakes from his delusive dream, and opens his eyes upon the tremendous reality, that he is yoked for life with “Belial?” Yes, this is what the Spirit calls it. It is not an inference, or a deduction arrived at by a process of reasoning; but a plain and positive statement of Holy Scripture, that thus the matter stands in reference to one who, from whatever motive, or under the influence of whatever reasons, or deceived by whatever false pretenses, has entered into an unequal marriage-yoke.

Oh, my beloved Christian reader, if you are in danger of entering into such a yoke, let me earnestly, solemnly, and affectionately entreat of you to pause first, and weigh the matter in the

balances of the sanctuary, are you move forward a single hair's breadth on such a fatal path! You may rest assured that you will no sooner have taken the step, than your heart will be assailed by hopeless regrets, and your life embittered by unnumbered sorrows. LET NOTHING INDUCE YOU TO YOKE YOURSELF WITH AN UNBELIEVER. Are your affections engaged? Then remember, they cannot be the affections of your new man; they are, be assured of it, those of the old or carnal nature, which you are called upon to mortify and set aside. Wherefore you should cry to God for spiritual power to rise above the influence of such affections; yea, to sacrifice them to Him. Again, are your interests concerned? Then remember that they are only your interests; and if they are promoted, Christ's interests are sacrificed by your yoking yourself with "Belial." Furthermore, they are only your temporal, and not your eternal interests. In point of fact, the interests of the believer and those of Christ ought to be identical; and it is plain that His interests, His honor, His truth, His glory, must inevitably be sacrificed, if a member of His body is linked with "Belial." This is the true way to look at the question. What are a few hundreds, or a few thousands, to an heir of heaven? "God is able to give thee much more than this." Are you going to sacrifice the truth of God, as well as your own spiritual peace, prosperity, and happiness, for a paltry trifle of gold, which must perish in the using of it? Ah, no! God forbid Flee from it, as a bird from the snare, which it sees and knows. Stretch out the hand of genuine, well-braced, wholehearted discipleship, and take the knife and slay your affections and your interests on the altar of God; and then, even though there should not be an audible voice from heaven to approve your act, you will have the invaluable testimony of an approving conscience and an ungrieved Spirit—an ample reward surely for the most costly sacrifice which you can make. May the Spirit of God give power to resist Satan's temptations!

It is hardly needful to remark here, that in cases where conversion takes place after marriage, the complexion of the matter is very materially altered. There will then be no smitings of conscience, for example; and the whole thing is modified in a variety of particulars. Still there will be difficulty, trial, and sorrow, unquestionably. The only thing is, that one can far more happily bring the trial and sorrow into the Lord's presence when he has not deliberately and willfully plunged himself thereinto; and, blessed be God, we know how ready He is to forgive, restore, and cleanse from all unrighteousness the soul that makes full confession of its error and failure. This may comfort the heart of one who has been brought to the Lord after marriage. Moreover, to such an one the Spirit of God has given specific direction and blessed encouragement in the following passage: "If any brother have an unbelieving wife, and she think proper to dwell with him, let him not put her away. And if any woman have an unbelieving husband, and he think proper to dwell with her, let her not put him away. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy...For what knowest thou, O wife, if thou shalt save thy husband or what knowest thou, O husband, if thou shalt save thy wife?" (1 Cor. 7:12-16)

2. We shall now consider "the unequal yoke" in its commercial phase, as seen in cases of partnership in business. This, though not so serious an aspect of the yoke as that which we have just been considering, will, nevertheless, be found a very positive barrier to the believer's testimony. When a Christian yokes himself for business purposes with an unbeliever—whether that unbeliever be a relative or not—or when he becomes a member of a worldly firm, he virtually surrenders his individual responsibility. Henceforth the acts of the firm become his acts, and it is perfectly out of the question to think of getting a worldly firm to act on heavenly principles. They

would laugh at such a notion, inasmuch as it would be an effectual 'barrier to the success of their commercial schemes. They will feel perfectly free to adopt a number of expedients in carrying on their business, which would be quite opposed to the spirit and principles of the kingdom in which he is, and of the church of which he forms a part. Thus he will find himself constantly in a most trying position. He may use his influence to christianize the mode of conducting affairs; but they will compel him to do business as others do, and he has no remedy save to mourn in secret over his anomalous and difficult position, or else to go out at great pecuniary loss to himself and his family. Where the eye is single, there will be no hesitation as to which of these alternatives to adopt; but, alas! the very fact of getting into such a position proves the lack of a single eye; and the fact of being in it argues the lack of spiritual capacity to appreciate the value and power of the divine principles which would infallibly bring a man out of it. A man whose eye was single could not possibly yoke himself with an unbeliever for the purpose of making money. Such an one could only set, as an object before his mind, the direct glory of Christ; and this object could never be gained by a positive transgression of divine principle.

This makes it very simple. If it does not glorify Christ for a Christian to become a partner in a worldly firm, it must, without doubt, further the designs of the devil. There is no middle ground; but that it does not glorify Christ is manifest, for His Word says, "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers." Such is the principle, which cannot be infringed without damage to the testimony, and forfeiture of spiritual blessing. True, the conscience of a Christian, who transgresses in this matter, may seek relief in various ways—may have recourse to various subterfuges—may set forth various arguments to persuade itself that all is right. It will be said that, "We can be very devoted and very spiritual, so far as we are personally concerned, even though we are yoked for business purposes with an unbeliever." This will be found fallacious when brought to the test of the actual practice. A servant of Christ will find himself hampered in a hundred ways by his worldly partnership. If in matters of service to Christ he is not met with open hostility, he will have to encounter the enemy's secret and constant effort to damp his ardor, and throw cold water on all his schemes. He will be laughed at and despised—he will be continually reminded of the effect which his enthusiasm and fanaticism will produce in reference to the business prospects of the firm. If he uses his time, his talents, or his pecuniary resources in what he believes to be the Lord's service, he will be pronounced a fool or a madman, and reminded that the true, the proper way for a commercial man to serve the Lord is to "attend to business, and nothing but business;" and that it is the exclusive business of clergymen and ministers to attend to religious matters, inasmuch as they are set apart and paid for so doing.

Now, although the Christian's renewed mind may be thoroughly convinced of the fallacy of all this reasoning—although he may see that this worldly wisdom is but a flimsy, threadbare cloak, thrown over the heart's covetous practices—yet who can tell how far the heart may be influenced by such things? We get weary of constant resistance. The current becomes too strong for us, and we gradually yield ourselves to its action, and are carried along on its surface. Conscience may have some death-struggles; but the spiritual energies are paralyzed, and the sensibilities of the new nature are blunted, so that there is no response to the cries of conscience, and no effectual effort to withstand the enemy; the worldliness of the Christian's heart leagues itself with the opposing influences from without—the outworks are stormed, and the citadel of the soul's affections vigorously assaulted; and finally the man settles down in thorough worldliness, exemplifying in his

own person the prophet's touching lament, "Her Nazarites were purer than snow, they were whiter than milk, they were more ruddy in body than rubies, their polishing was of sapphire: their visage is blacker than a coal; they are not known in the streets: their skin cleaveth to their bones; it is withered, it is become like a stick" (Lam. 4:7,8). The man who was once known as a servant of Christ—a fellow-helper unto the kingdom of God—making use of his resources only to further the interests of the gospel of Christ, is now, alas! settled down upon his lees, only known as a plodding, keen, bargain-making man of business, of whom the apostle might well say, "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present age." (τοῦ νῦν αἰῶνα)

But perhaps nothing so operates on the hearts of Christians, in inducing them to yoke themselves commercially with unbelievers, as the habit of seeking to maintain the two characters of a Christian and a man of business. This is a grievous snare. In point of fact there can be no such thing. A man must be either the one or the other. If I am a Christian, my Christianity must show itself as a living reality in that in which I am; and if it cannot show itself there, I ought not to be there; for if I continue in a sphere or position in which the life of Christ cannot be manifested, I shall speedily possess naught of Christianity but the name, without the reality—the outward form without the inward power—the shell without the kernel. I should be the servant of Christ not merely on Sunday, but from Monday morning to Saturday night. I should not only be a servant of Christ in the public assembly, but also in my place of business, whatever it may happen to be. But I cannot be a proper servant of Christ with my neck in the yoke with an unbeliever; for how could the servants of two hostile masters work in the same yoke? It is utterly impossible; as well might one attempt to link the sun's meridian beams with the profound darkness of midnight. It cannot be done; and I do, therefore, most solemnly appeal to my reader's conscience, in the presence of Almighty God, who shall judge the secrets of men's hearts by Jesus Christ, as to this important matter. I would say to him, if he is thinking of getting into partnership with an unbeliever, FLEE FROM IT! yes, flee from it, though it promises you the gain of thousands. You will plunge yourself into a mass of trouble and sorrow. You are going to "plow" with one whose feelings, instincts, and tendencies are diametrically opposed to your own. "An ox and an ass" are not so unlike in every respect as a believer and an unbeliever. How will you ever get on? He wants to make money—to profit himself—to get on in the world; you want (at least you ought to want) to grow in grace and holiness—to advance the interests of Christ and His gospel on the earth, and to push onward to the everlasting kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. His object is money; yours, I trust, is Christ; he lives for this world; you for the world to come; he is engrossed with the things of time; you with those of eternity. How, then, can you ever take common ground with him? Your principles, your motives, your objects, your hopes, are all opposed. How is it possible you can get on? How can you have aught in common? Surely all this needs only to be looked at with a single eye in order to be seen in its true light. It is impossible that any one whose eye is filled, and whose heart is occupied with Christ, could ever yoke himself with a worldly partner for any object whatsoever. Wherefore, my beloved Christian reader, let me once more entreat you, ere you take such a tremendous step—a step fraught with such awful consequences—so pregnant with danger to your best interests, as well as to the testimony of Christ, with which you are honored—to take the whole matter with an honest heart into the sanctuary of God, and weigh it in His sacred balance. Ask Him what He thinks of it, and hearken with a subject will and a well-adjusted conscience to His reply. It is plain and powerful—yea, as plain and as powerful as though it fell from the open heavens—Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.

But if unhappily my reader is already in the yoke, I would say to him, Disentangle yourself as speedily as you can. I am much mistaken if you have not already found the yoke a burdensome one. To you it were superfluous to detail the sad consequences of being in such a position; you doubtless know them all. It is needless to print them on paper, or paint them on canvas, to one who has entered into all their reality. My beloved brother in Christ, lose not a moment in seeking to throw off the yoke. This must be done before the Lord, on His principles, and by His grace. It is easier to get into a wrong position than to get out of it. A partnership of ten or twenty years' standing cannot be dissolved in a moment. It must be done calmly, humbly, and prayerfully as in the sight of the Lord, and with entire reference to His glory. I may dishonor the Lord as much in my way of getting out of a wrong position, as by getting into it at the first. Hence if I find myself in partnership with an unbeliever, and my conscience tells me I am wrong, let me honestly and frankly state to my partner that I can no longer go on with him; and having done that, my place is to use every exertion to wind up the affairs of the firm in an upright, a straightforward, and business-like manner, so as to give no possible occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully, and that my good may not be evil spoken of. We must avoid rashness, headiness, and high-mindedness, when apparently acting for the Lord and in defense of His holy principles. If a man gets entangled in a net, or involved in a labyrinth, it is not by bold and violent plunging he will extricate himself. No; he must humble himself, confess his sins before the Lord, and then retrace his steps in patient dependence upon that grace which can not only pardon him for being in a wrong position, but lead him forth into a right one.

Moreover, as in the case of the marriage yoke, the matter is very much modified by the fact of the partnership having been entered into previous to conversion. Not that this would in the slightest degree justify a continuance in it. By no means; but it does away with much of the sorrow of heart and defilement of conscience connected with such a position, and will also very materially affect the mode of escape therefrom. Besides, the Lord is glorified by, and He assuredly accepts, the moral bent of the heart and conscience in the right direction. If I judge myself for being wrong, and that the moral bent of my heart and conscience is to get right, God will accept of that, and surely set me right. But if He sets me right, He will not suffer me to do violence to one truth while seeking to act in obedience to another. The same Word that says: "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers," says also, "Render therefore to all their due.... Owe no man anything;" "Provide things honest in the sight of all;" "Walk honestly toward them that are without." If I have wronged God by getting into partnership with an unbeliever, I must not wrong man in my way of getting out of it. Profound subjection to the Word of God, by the power of the Holy Ghost, will set all to rights, will lead us into straight paths, and enable us to avoid all dangerous extremes.

3. In glancing for a moment at the religious phase of the unequal yoke, I would assure my reader that it is by no means my desire to hurt the feelings of any one by canvassing the claims of the various denominations around me. Such is not my purpose. The subject of this paper is one of quite sufficient importance to prevent its being encumbered by the introduction of other matters. Moreover, it is too definite to warrant any such introduction. "The unequal yoke" is our theme, and to it we must confine our attention.

In looking through Scripture, we find almost numberless passages setting forth the intense spirit of separation which ought ever to characterize the people of God. Whether we direct our attention to the Old Testament, in which we have God's relationship and dealings with His earthly people,

Israel; or to the New Testament, in which we have His relationship and dealings with His heavenly people, the church; we find the same truth prominently set forth, namely, the entire separation of those who belong to God. Israel's position is thus stated in Balaam's parable, "Lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned amongst the nations." Their place was outside the range of all the nations of the earth; and they were responsible to maintain that separation. Throughout the entire Pentateuch they were instructed, warned, and admonished as to this; and throughout the Psalms and the prophets we have the record of their failure in the maintenance of this separation, which failure, as we know, has brought down upon them the heavy judgments of the hand of God. It would swell this little paper into a volume, were I to attempt a quotation of all the passages in which this point is put forward. I take it for granted that my reader is sufficiently acquainted with his Bible to render such quotation unnecessary. Should he not be so, however, a reference in his Concordance to the words "separate," "separated," and "separation" will suffice to lay before him at a glance the body of Scripture evidence on this subject. The passage just quoted from the book of Numbers is the expression of God's thoughts about His people Israel: "The people shall dwell ALONE."

The same is true, only upon a much higher ground, in reference to God's heavenly people, the church—the body of Christ—composed of all true believers. They too are a separated people.

We shall now proceed to examine the ground of this separation. There is a great difference between being separate on the ground of what we are, and of what God is. The former makes a man a Pharisee; the latter makes him a saint. If I say to a poor fellow-sinner, "Stand by thyself; I am holier than thou," I am a detestable Pharisee and a hypocrite; but if God, in His infinite condescension and perfect grace, says to me, "I have brought you into relationship with Myself in the person of My Son Jesus Christ, therefore be holy and separate from all evil; come out from among them and be separate; I am bound to obey, and my obedience is the practical manifestation of my character as a saint—a character which I have, not because of anything in myself, but simply because God has brought me near unto Himself through the precious blood of Christ.

It is well to be clear as to this. Pharisaism and divine sanctification are two very different things; and yet they are often confounded. Those who contend for the maintenance of that place of separation which belongs to the people of God, are constantly accused of setting themselves up above their fellow-men, and of laying claim to a higher degree of personal sanctity than is ordinarily possessed. This accusation arises from not attending to the distinction just referred to. When God calls upon men to be separate, it is on the ground of what He has done for them upon the cross, and where He has set them, in eternal association with Himself, in the person of Christ. But if I separate myself on the ground of what I am in myself, it is the most senseless and vapid assumption, which will sooner or later be made manifest. God commands His people to be holy on the ground of what He is: "Be ye holy, for I am holy." This is evidently a very different thing from "Stand by thyself; I am holier than thou." If God brings people into association with Himself, He has a right to prescribe what their moral character ought to be, and they are responsible to answer thereto. Thus we see that the most profound humility lies at the bottom of a saint's separation. There is nothing so calculated to put one in the dust as the understanding of the real nature of divine holiness. It is an utterly false humility which springs from looking at ourselves—yea, it is in reality based upon pride, which has never yet seen to the bottom of its own perfect worthlessness.

Some imagine that they can reach the truest and deepest humility by looking at self; whereas it can only be reached by looking at Christ. "The more Thy glories strike mine eye, the humbler I shall be." This is a just sentiment founded upon divine principle. The soul that loses itself in the blaze of Christ's moral glory is truly humble, and none other. No doubt we have a right to be humble, when we think of what poor creatures we are; but it only needs a moment's just reflection to see the fallacy of seeking to produce any practical result by looking at self. It is only when we find ourselves in the presence of infinite excellence that we are really humble.

Hence therefore a child of God should refuse to be yoked with an unbeliever, whether for a domestic, a commercial, or a religious object, simply because God tells him to be separate, and not because of his own personal holiness. The carrying out of this principle in matters of religion will necessarily involve much trial and sorrow; it will be termed intolerance, bigotry, narrow-mindedness, exclusiveness, and such like; but we cannot help all this. Provided we keep ourselves separate upon a right principle and in a right spirit, we may safely leave all results with God. No doubt the remnant, in the days of Ezra, must have appeared excessively intolerant in refusing the co-operation of the surrounding people in building the house of God; but they acted upon divine principle in the refusal. "Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity budded the temple unto the Lord God of Israel; then they came to Zerubbabel, and to the chief of the fathers, and said unto them, Let us build with you: for we seek your God, as ye do; and we do sacrifice unto Him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assur, which brought us up hither." This might seem a very attractive proposal—a proposal evidencing a very decided leaning toward the God of Israel; yet the remnant refused, because the people, notwithstanding their fair profession, were at heart uncircumcised and hostile. "But Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, and the rest of the chief of the fathers of Israel, said unto them, Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the Lord God of Israel." (Ezra 4:1-3) They would not yoke themselves with the uncircumcised; they would not "plow with an ox and ass;" they would not "sow their field with mingled seed;" they kept themselves separate, even though by so doing they exposed themselves to the charge of being a bigoted, narrow-minded, illiberal, uncharitable set of people.

So also in Nehemiah we read: "And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers." (Chapter 9:2) This was not sectarianism, but positive obedience. Their separation was essential to their existence as a people. They could not have enjoyed the divine presence on any other ground. Thus it must ever be with God's people on the earth. They must be separate, or else they are not only useless, but mischievous. God cannot own or accompany them if they yoke themselves with unbelievers, upon any ground, or for any object whatsoever. The grand difficulty is to combine a spirit of intense separation with a spirit of grace, gentleness, and forbearance; or as another has said, "to maintain a narrow circle with a wide heart." This is really a difficulty. As the strict and uncompromising maintenance of truth tends to narrow the circle around us, we shall need the expansive power of grace to keep the heart wide, and the affections warm. If we contend for truth otherwise than in grace, we shall only yield a one-sided and most unattractive testimony. And, on the other hand, if we try to exhibit grace at the expense of truth, it will prove in the end to be only the manifestation of a popular liberality at God's expense—a most worthless thing.

Then, as to the object for which real Christians usually yoke themselves with those who, even on their own confession, and in the judgment of charity itself, are not Christians at all, it will be found in the end that no really divine and heavenly object can be gained by an infringement of God's truth. *Per fas aut nefas* can never be a divine motto. The means are not sanctified by the end; but both means and end must be according to the principles of God's holy Word, else all must eventuate in confusion and dishonor. It might have appeared to Jehoshaphat a very worthy object to recover Ramoth-gilead out of the hand of the enemy; and, moreover, he might have appeared a very liberal, gracious, popular, large-hearted man, when, in reply to Ahab's proposal, he said, "I am as thou art, and my people as thy people; and we will be with thee in the war." It is easy to be liberal and large-hearted at the expense of divine principle; but how did it end? Ahab was killed, and Jehoshaphat narrowly escaped with his life, having made total shipwreck of his testimony.

Thus we see that Jehoshaphat did not even gain the object for which he unequally yoked himself with an unbeliever; and even had he gained it, it would have been no justification of his course. Nothing can ever warrant a believer's yoking himself with an unbeliever; and therefore, however fair, attractive, and plausible the Ramoth expedition might seem in the eye of man, it was, in the judgment of God, "helping the ungodly, and loving them that hate the Lord" (2 Chron. 19:2). The truth of God strips men and things of the false colors with which the spirit of expediency would deck them, and presents them in their proper light; and it is an unspeakable mercy to have the clear judgment of God about all that is going on around us: it imparts calmness to the spirit, and stability to the course and character, and saves one from that unhappy fluctuation of thought, feeling, and principle which so entirely unfits him for the place of a steady and consistent witness for Christ. We shall surely err, if we attempt to form our judgment by the thoughts and opinions of men; for they will always judge according to the outward appearances, and not according to the intrinsic character and principle of things. Provided men can gain what they conceive to be a right object, they care not about the mode of gaining it. But the true servant of Christ knows that he must do his Master's work upon his Master's principles and in his Master's spirit. It will not satisfy such an one to reach the most praiseworthy end, unless he can reach it by a divinely-appointed road. The means and the end must both be divine. I admit it, for example, to be a most desirable end to circulate the Scriptures—God's own pure, eternal Word; but if I could not circulate them save by yoking myself with an unbeliever, I should refrain, inasmuch as I am not to do evil that good may come.

But, blessed be God, His servant can circulate His precious book without violating the precepts contained in that book. He can upon his own individual responsibility, or in fellowship with those who are really on the Lord's side, scatter the precious seed everywhere, without leaguering himself with those whose whole course and conduct prove them to be of the world. The same may be said in reference to every object of a religious nature. It can and should be gained on God's principles, and only thus. It may be argued, in reply, that we are told not to judge, that we cannot read the heart, and that we are bound to hope that all who would engage in such good works as the translation of the Bible, the distribution of tracts, and the aiding of missionary labors, must be Christians; and that therefore it cannot be wrong to link ourselves with them. To all this I reply, that there is hardly a passage in the New Testament so misunderstood and misapplied as Matthew 7:1: "Judge not, that ye be not judged." In the very same chapter we read, "Beware of false prophets;...by their fruits ye shall know them." Now, how are we to "beware," if we do not exercise

judgment? Again, in 1 Corinthians 5 we read, “For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.” Here we are distinctly taught that those “within” come within the immediate range of the church’s judgment; and yet, according to the common interpretation of Matthew 7:1, we ought not to judge anybody; that interpretation, therefore, must needs be unsound. If people take, even in profession, the ground of being “within,” we are commanded to judge them. “Do not ye judge them that are within?” As to those “without,” we have naught to do with them, save to present the pure and perfect, the rich, illimitable, and unfathomable grace which shines with unclouded effulgence in the death and resurrection of the Son of God.

All this is plain enough. The people of God are told to exercise judgment as to all who profess to be “within;” they are told to “beware of false prophets;” they are commanded to “try the spirits;” and how can they do all this if they are not to judge at all? What then does our Lord mean when He says: “Judge not”? I believe He means just what Paul, by the Holy Ghost, says when he commands us to “judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God” (1 Cor. 4:5). We have nothing to do with judging motives, but we have to judge conduct and principles; that is to say, the conduct and principles of all who profess to be “within.” And, in point of fact, the very persons who say, “We must not judge,” do themselves constantly exercise judgment. There is no true Christian in whom the moral instincts of the divine nature do not virtually pronounce judgment as to character, conduct, and doctrine; and these are the very points which are placed within the believer’s range of judgment.

All therefore that I would press upon the Christian reader is, that he should exercise judgment as to those with whom he yokes himself in matters of religion. If he is at this moment working in yoke or in harness with an unbeliever, he is positively violating the command of the Holy Ghost. He may be ignorantly doing so up to this, and if so, the Lord’s grace is ready to pardon and restore; but if he persist in disobedience after having been warned, he cannot possibly expect God’s blessing and presence with him, no matter how valuable or important the object which he may seek to attain. “To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.”

The Mystery

There were two objects embraced in Paul's ministry. He has expressed them in verses 8 and 9 of this chapter, where he states in brief and plain terms the character of his commission as an apostle or evangelizer.

First, the grace was bestowed upon him of his being sent to preach among the nations the unsearchable riches of Christ.

The emphasis here is on the fact of the Gentiles being those to whom he was specially commissioned. The publishing or unfolding of the riches of God's grace in Christ Jesus was in itself no special charge to Paul. Others before him had been sent forth to preach these precious truths, but their labors were in the main, if not exclusively, directed towards the Jew. A richer and fuller exhibition of these unsearchable riches there certainly was in Paul's ministry; but otherwise the specialty of the grace given unto him lay in his being selected to preach them "among the Gentiles."

The second branch of the apostle's commission, was that expressed in the words, "To make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery."

There is here, I apprehend, an intended contrast between the "all" and the "Gentiles" of the preceding verse. Jew and Gentile were alike indebted to Paul's ministry for the knowledge and intelligence of a "mystery" unveiled through him, and which he was specially commissioned to make all see. My occupation is not now with the former, but with this latter branch of his charge.

To many it will seem a bold or even a rash assertion, that to the vast majority of Christians, learned and unlearned, this side of the apostle's commission has remained to this hour without effect. The Reformation (great and blessed work of God as it was, for which we cannot be too grateful), while it brought once more into light much of "the unsearchable riches of Christ" that had become encrusted with the corrosions of Popish error, left this side of truth wholly in darkness; and it has been reserved, in God's inscrutable wisdom, to a later day, and to "a feeble folk," to exhume from the Word the long-buried treasure. As a sovereign, in the dispensing of His grace, God is pleased to revive or restore at the moment, and in the ways and measure that please Him. When men, because they did not like to retain God or His truth in their knowledge, have been given over of Him to a reprobate mind, and suffered for a season to reap the fruit of their doings, He is under no obligation to restore to them the knowledge and appreciation of truths they have forfeited. When, in the loving compassion and grace of His tender heart, He is pleased in any measure to do so, He chooses His own time and His own instruments; the latter, generally "the weak things of the world" — "earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God."

It is no disparagement of the Reformation, to say that it brought back only a part of the long-lost truths of the Word. It was pure sovereign grace that led men so far into truth as they did then go; as it is pure sovereign grace that has in these latter times, through other instrumentality, directed the minds of numbers of God's children to other truths in the Word not then discerned. The

investigation of the subject before us will make it sufficiently clear that we have to do with a matter concerning which, in the writings of the Reformers, as in those of all subsequent theologians, entire obscurity prevails.

The first point to be looked at is one of criticism, in reference to the text of the passage.

If the reader has access to the little hand-book of Textual Criticism published by Bagsters (p. 56), he will see, on reference to this text, that the unanimous voice of criticism reads “dispensation or administration” (οικονομία) instead of “fellowship” (κοινωνία); and so will he find “dispensation” given in the translations of Alford, Boothroyd, Ellicott, Davidson, and Darby; “stewardship,” Green; “administration,” Kelly.

“To make all see what is the dispensation (or administration) of the mystery,” is then the language of the apostle and of the Holy Ghost, which it becomes our task to weigh and search into the meaning of.

At first sight the change will probably seem to many to render the text less rather than more intelligible, and this feeling it probably was, that, at the hands of some man more confident in his own understanding, than imbued with a sense of the inviolable sacredness of the Word of God, led first to the substitution.

To many readers “dispensational truth” may be sufficiently strange, to render not unfitting nor unwelcome a few words in explanation.

The word before us, οικονομία—occurring also in verse 2 of the chapter, and translated “dispensation” there—is a compound word uniting two, which mean respectively “house” and “law,” so that to give its exact counterpart in English, it would stand thus— “house-law;” and its obvious and primary meaning would be—the law, rules, regulations or administration, of a household. The word itself is quite familiar to our English ears and tongues, in an Anglicized form— “economy.” This term (correctly used in such phrases as “political economy”), in current usage is mainly taken in the sense of carefulness in expenditure, or in the dispensing of means or substance; a portion undoubtedly, though far from being all, that pertains to proper household rule.

In Scripture we have it translated “stewardship,” in Luke 16:2-4; the kindred word, οικονόμος (literally, an economist), being translated “steward” in Luke 12:42; 16:1, 3, 8; 1 Corinthians 4:1-2; Titus 1:7; 1 Peter 4:10; “governors” in Galatians 4:2, and “chamberlain” in Romans 16:23 —while in 1 Corinthians 9:17, Ephesians 1:10, and Colossians 1:25 we have it, as in the chapter under review, “dispensation.”

As employed in these passages, and in the phrase “dispensational truth,” it looks at the world as a great household or stewardly, in which God is dispensing, or administering, according to rule of His own establishing, and in whose order He has from time to time introduced certain changes, the understanding of which is consequently needful, both to the intelligent interpretation of His Word and to intelligent action under Him.

If we suppose a couple of households in any city, conducted on very different principles—the one, the household of a godly man, of regular and orderly habits, who rules his house in the fear of God, ordering everything as under His eye and for Him; the other, that of a godless, dissipated man, in which everything is at sixes and sevens; and then imagine a domestic to pass from the

latter into the former, and to proceed to regulate her conduct in her new place by the order or disorder with which she was familiar in the old, one can at once discern what a source of confusion she would be in the family. In order to her becoming a faithful and profitable servant in the godly household, she must first acquaint herself with its order or “economy,” and then conform herself to that. Although there are certain general duties that may pertain alike to all households, the points of detail, even in well-ordered families, will of necessity vary with the varying circumstances, position in life, or occupation of the inmates; so that, the “domestic economy” being different—as meal hours and the like—a servant has always to change or modify her action in each case as required. Even a change in the circumstances of the same household will necessitate sometimes a change in its rule, and demand therefore a corresponding change in the conduct of its servants.

Now surely it is just as simple and plain, that if God has, from time to time, introduced changes into the order of His dealing with the world, and dispensing its affairs, the nature of these changes must be studied, understood, and acted on by His servants, if they would prove profitable servants, and co-operate intelligently in His plans. To import into one dispensation the directions or conduct prescribed for another must entail confusion and disorder, whether in the interpretation of the Scriptures relating to them, or in the regulation of action, individual or corporate, under them. Hence the necessity of what the apostle (2 Tim. 2:15) calls “rightly dividing the word of truth,” the neglect of which has ever been and ever must be the source of unutterable confusion; in short, of most of the confusion we see around.

When man, beguiled by Satan, with the prospect of being “as gods,” tasted the forbidden fruit, and acquired the coveted knowledge of good and evil—conscience—God allowed him to make proof for a season of the fruits, leaving him (with exceptional dealings in the case of individuals) to his own courses. The result is painfully developed in the first chapter of Romans.

At a certain period in the world’s history He took up a special family, Israel, which He developed into a nation, and, so far as they at least were concerned, introduced a change in His world-rule, placing them under a dispensation of law. That dispensation closed at the cross; and subsequently a thorough and universal change was introduced, constituting the dispensation under which we now are, called in this passage “the dispensation of the mystery,” and in verse 2 declared to be a “dispensation of the grace of God.”

To “make all see what is the dispensation,” or, in other words, to be the divinely-appointed instructor in the character and order of the present time, as Moses was in that of the dispensation of “law,” is that special feature in the commission of Paul, in which it was distinct from that of the other apostles.

If then it shall appear that, far from seeing what is “the dispensation of the mystery,” the mass of Christians have entirely missed it, and, as the natural consequence have almost completely misunderstood Christianity, importing into it the things proper to another dispensation, and so confounding Judaism and Christianity in an inexpressible jumble; surely it is matter for deep humiliation before God, and for earnest, prayerful effort to retrieve, with God’s help, this important and neglected teaching.

Let the reader then observe, first of all, that Paul claims to have had the truth in question given to him “by revelation.” (vs. 3) Now the word “revelation” means unveiling or uncovering, and is used

in Scripture to signify the communication, by God, of truth not previously known, or, up to that time shrouded under the veil of secrecy. The fact therefore, that the apostle claims for the truth he speaks of in this chapter, the character of “a revelation,” ought in itself to prepare us for the discovery, in his teaching, of somewhat not to be met with in any previous portions of the Word of God.

Next, be it observed, he calls it a “mystery,” or secret, which secret he insists on with repetition and emphasis, as entirely hidden till given to him to tell out. Thus in verses 3 and 5, by revelation God made known to him the mystery which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed; and so in verse 9, “the mystery which from the beginning of the world had been hid in God.” Language could hardly be more explicit than this. A secret which had not in other ages been made known to men, but from the beginning of the world had been hid in God, is now made known to the apostle by revelation. Granted for the moment that the “as it is now revealed” of verse 5, might, had it stood alone, have borne the interpretation that it was not before revealed with equal clearness or fullness, verse 9 thoroughly excludes the ambiguity, for language could not be more absolute than there employed. Nor is it here only that the apostle has put this on record. As though the Holy Ghost, foreseeing how this truth would be let slip, and the consequent need of special clearness in His teaching, in order to its ultimate recovery in the latter day, had been heedful to furnish the requisite light with superabundant power, one finds it again brought out in Romans 16:25, where the apostle speaks of “the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but is now made manifest;” and in Colossians 1:26, “the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but is now made manifest.”

At the risk of seemingly unnecessary repetition, I insist strongly on attention to this, and would have the reader to weigh well the Spirit’s language, and mark by what varied forms of expression he has labored to shut out all cavil, and to fix attention on this truth. To other ages (or generations) it was not made known; from (the) ages and (the) generations it has been hid—hid from the beginning of the world, hid in God, kept secret since the world began. I know of no truth in the whole range of the word to which the testimony is more explicit and unmistakable, and I trust the reader will be prepared, in view of it, to set it down as a point of certainty, that whatever “the mystery” may be, it is something quite unknown until the day of Paul.

If the reader has now fully bowed to the Word on this point, he will at once perceive that to look for an unfolding of this mystery in the pages of the Old Testament must be a hopeless and deceptive proceeding. For any man to imagine he finds there that which the Holy Ghost so expressly declares was hidden—an unrevealed secret—when that book was written; must be to follow a will-o’-the-wisp, that will lure him into the quagmire of misinterpretation and confusion. Let the reader keep this point in memory; it will meet us again when we have advanced our inquiry another stage, examining next into the subject of “the mystery” itself.

We have not far to search in order to the discovery desired. In verse 6 the apostle gives us the statement, in summary, of that which was the burden of “the mystery,” specifying it under three particulars:

1st. That the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs.

2nd. That they should be one body.

3rd. That they should be partakers or co-partners of God's promise in the Messiah.

In other words, the church or assembly of God as distinguished alike from the Jewish assembly and from the kingdom.

For this thing, the church of God, or for any one of these three features of that which distinguishes it most markedly, as well from all that has gone before, as from all that will follow after, the reader will search in vain throughout the pages of the Old Testament.

This, then, is "the mystery;" the church of God, as the apostle states it in chapter vs. verse 32, where, after exhibiting the typical counterpart of it in the marriage relationship, he sums up by saying, "This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church." In this connection he had set forth the headship of Christ over and to the church (enforcing by it that of the husband to his wife), and His relation to the church as His body, of which He is the Savior; the individuals saved being "members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones," as Eve was said to be of Adam, when he owned her as "bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh." So in Colossians 1:24-26 he fills up the afflictions of Christ for His body's sake, which is the church, according to the dispensation given to him... even the mystery.

"But," the reader may say, "surely the church is spoken of in the Old Testament;" does not Stephen affirm it in Acts 7:38, where he speaks of "the church in the wilderness"?

That Stephen uses the word "church," and applies it to Israel as found in the wilderness, is beyond a question; just as certain as that the Holy Ghost employs it in Acts 19:41, and applies it to the idolatrous rabble gathered into the theater of Ephesus; of whom, after they had spent two hours in shouting "Great is Diana of the Ephesians," it is said, "He dismissed the church." The employment of the word church or ecclesia in these cases no more implies that the one assemblage was the church of God than the other. Not only so, but if it were a mere question of a word, it might be found in the old Testament often enough for that matter, as the word "congregation" used of Israel continually (as in Ex. 16:1, &c) has precisely the same meaning; is translated constantly by ἐκκλησία in the Septuagint; and might with perfect propriety, so far as mere translation goes, have been translated "church" in our English version. Let it then be fully understood by the reader, that it is not for a moment a question of the Word, but of the thing known in the New Testament by the name of the church of God. Of this thing it is that, with the apostle, we affirm, not a trace is to be found in the Old Testament; save in the form of types, intelligible and expressive now that the veil has been taken off, but which in themselves revealed nothing whatever on the subject to their contemporaries.

Let us consider, then, in detail the three particulars of "the mystery" supplied us.

1st. That the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs.

The broad statement in this, as in the other points, is that of Gentile equality with the Jew. To be a fellow-heir, though it does not of necessity imply that each gets an equal share in the inheritance, does argue an equality of position or title. One heir is not necessarily as near a blood relation as another; but if he has a legal title to a share in the inheritance, be it to a large share or a small, his title is as good and his position as definite. As an heir he is the peer of all the other heirs, just as a baron is the peer of a duke, though he does not hold so elevated a rank in the peerage. A person

admitted to a share in the benefits of another's inheritance, or of another's share in an inheritance, is not a fellow-heir. And such is the highest position of the Gentile in the prophecies of the Old Testament; he is to share in the benefits of Israel's inherited blessing, but is never lifted into the position of a co-heir-never made Israel's peer.

Take as an example of this, Isaiah 60:3— "The Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising." "Oh, but," says some one of my readers, "isn't that Christ's light?" Not at all. Look at the context. It is Israel's light. Christ is the Light of Israel; and hence, in the first verse, she is bid to arise and shine, because her Light is come, and the glory of Jehovah has risen upon her; that is, when the time shall have arrived, as stated in verse 20 of the previous chapter, that the Redeemer shall have come to Zion, and shall have turned away ungodliness from Jacob; and when, while darkness still covers the earth, and gross darkness the peoples (plural), the Lord shall arise upon Zion, and His glory be seen upon her, so that the Gentiles shall come to her light, as already quoted. It is not Christ, but Zion who is invited, in verse 4, to lift up the eyes and see all gathered to her, the abundance of the sea converted to her, and the forces or wealth of the Gentiles coming unto her. It is not Christ's, but Zion's walls that the sons of strangers are to build up (vs. 10); not Christ's, but Zion's gates are to be open continually that the forces and kings of the Gentiles may be brought thither. It is not of Christ, but of Zion that it is said, "The nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted." (vs. 12) Not Christ, but Zion is to suck the milk of the Gentiles (vs. 16), and to know that the Lord is her Savior and her Redeemer, the mighty one of Jacob. True, it is of Zion, as enjoying and reflecting the light of Christ's presence, and as the center of His rule, that these things are said; but still it is of Zion or Israel that they are spoken, and the Gentile is there exhibited as coming to her light to be blessed, and finding his blessing in ministering to her; as might happen where the servant of a master who has come into a rich estate, might share in the benefit of his master's improved circumstances, though not himself a co-heir with him in his inheritance. Israel is to inherit the Gentiles (Isa. 54:3); but the Gentile is not to inherit Israel. (Isa. 61:5)

2nd. That the Gentiles should be "one body" —one body with the Jew.

Did my reader ever detect, in the course of his study of Moses and the prophets, anything that looked like this? Most surely not. If there is one thing more evident than another in the Hebrew Scriptures, it is the steadily-maintained distinction between Israel and the nations, from first to last; under the glory of the future as under the vicissitudes of the past. The welding of Israel and the nations into one body, from which their nationalities shall disappear; all distinctive autonomies be lost; is a thought as foreign to the ancient oracles as heaven is to earth. Take any of the scriptures that refer to the Messiah's reign and the blessings that are to attend it; the nations and Israel will ever be found in separation. Shall we select, for instance, the striking picture of the promised glory presented in Psalm 72? Here we have "the King" judging His people with righteousness, and the poor with judgment; descending in blessing like rain upon the mown grass; His dominion from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. But here also we have the kings of Tarshish and of the isles bringing presents, the kings of Sheba and Seba offering gifts; all kings falling down before him, and all nations serving Him; all men blessed in Him, and all nations calling Him blessed. Blessed and blessing, yet still "nations" with kings reigning over them. No blending with Israel here. Or shall we turn to Isaiah 2? Here again we have the mountain of the Lord's house established in the top of the mountains, and exalted above the hills, and all nations flowing unto it.

Then many peoples (plural, Heb) say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; the law goes forth from Zion, Jehovah judges among the nations; "nation shall no more lift up the sword against nation;" but there, the nations are.

So again in the kingdom picture of chapter 11, when the "Branch" from out the roots of Jesse shall be reigning, and Jehovah shall have set His hand to recover the remnant of His people (singular, Heb) from the lands whither they are scattered, assembling the outcasts of Israel, and gathering together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth; He sets up "an ensign for the nations," the root of Jesse stands for an ensign of the peoples (plural), and "to it shall the Gentiles seek." Blessing for Israel, Judah, and the nations; but, the nations are "peoples" and "nations" still. Or again, in Isaiah 61:6, when Israel are to be "named the priests of Jehovah," and men shall call them "the ministers of our God," then shall they "eat the riches of the Gentiles, and boast themselves in their glory;" their seed shall be "known among the Gentiles," and their offspring among the peoples (plural). In Ezekiel's vision there is the division of the land among the tribes of Israel. In Zechariah (14), when Jehovah shall be king over all the earth, and there shall be one Lord, and His name one, then every one that is left of all the nations which came up against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles. Everywhere it is the same: Israel and the nations in their respective places, in most telling contrast with what the apostle insists on as distinctive of the present order of things, wherein (Col. 3:11) "there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free; but Christ is all, and in all."

3rd. Partakers, or co-partners in God's promises in the Messiah.

If there is any one thing that excites the ire of the Jew, it is the claim of the Gentile to an equal share with himself in the Messiah. He laughs to scorn the Gentile pretension to show from the prophets that such a thing should be; and he does so triumphantly; it is not there, and to pretend to it is to weaken under pretense of strengthening the Christian cause. God has said it is not there; to profess to find it is to pervert His truth, and must lead to the confusion of him who attempts it. Intimations of Israel's failure and their rejection there are; predictions of blessing to the Gentiles under Israel, and in connection with the Messiah, abound, as in the Scriptures that have already been before us; but a co-partnership, anything like the equality of privilege in the Messiah that the gospel has introduced, and we ourselves at this moment enjoy, will be sought for in vain.

But if there is indeed no mention of the mystery—the church of God—in the Old Testament Scriptures, of what then is there mention? I answer, Of the kingdom.

A reign of righteousness and peace under the kingship of the Messiah. Zion, the seat of rule. Israel, a people of peculiar nearness and special privilege, with the nations grouped around this center, in their subordinate places; blessed in Israel's blessing, in whom all the families of the earth are to be blessed. Such is the future depicted by the prophets, alluded to in the New Testament (Acts 3:19-21), as "times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord," "the times of the restitution of all things." This and this only is the theme of the prophets of old. A state of things with which the present dispensation in no wise corresponds, at almost any point. A state of things the world has not yet seen.

Have, then, the prophecies failed? By no means. So certainly as these things are foretold, so surely will they one day come to pass.

Throughout the Word of God two mighty truths run side by side—God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. Man, in the narrow grasp of his little mind, is ever prone to lose sight of one or other; or, deeming them irreconcilable, to fill his eye with the one to the exclusion of the other; it is faith's office to maintain the balance; accepting truth in its completeness, as given forth by God, without pausing first to bring all down to the level of man's own small standard. From the plan of God's revelation, as from His counsels, neither of these truths is ever omitted; while in the fullness of His sovereign power and far-reaching wisdom, He governs all, orders and shapes according to the counsel of His will, giving no account of His matters unto any; triumphing over all the workings of evil; bringing forth higher and higher blessings out of the deepest falls and failures of the creature; everywhere gracious and righteous. At the same time, He ever gives to the responsible creature his full place in responsibility, throughout his actings; never treats him as a mere machine, nor fails to leave scope for the freedom of his choice; and for us to do otherwise, in the interpretation of His Word, is of necessity to miss its teaching and go astray.

In His dealings with Israel this principle of action has been studiously maintained. If the national failures and their righteous chastisements were from the very first foreseen and preintimated, in words of warning admonition, it never took on the form of a mere irresistible fatality, but opportunities for better things were ever provided; opportunities which might have been turned to account, for the averting of evils and the securing of good. Even so, in the matter of the kingdom and of the prophecies concerning it; while the certainty of its rejection and postponement were assuredly present to His mind throughout, and find expression in the admonitions of His watchful love, yet all is ordered, with the most careful provision for the full and uninvaded responsibility of Israel, so that if to this hour unblessed and under the ban of Lo-ammi, they suffer but the righteous retribution of their guilt.

For the Christian, then, today, to read the prophetic Scriptures simply and purely in the light of the existing order of things, and try to bring all into harmony with that, without taking into account the contemplated issues of Israel's responsible action, as such, is and must be misleading. The more closely the prophecies are studied, the more evident it becomes with what skill they are framed, so as to leave full room for the alternative of responsible Israel's faithfulness, had such been found. In the coming of the Messiah there was a real and perfectly consistent offer to Israel of the long-propheesied kingdom; an offer which, had it been accepted, would have led to the immediate accomplishment of the promises, in the introduction of His glorious reign. To say how this would have been effected is no doubt beyond us, to discern how it might have been is within our province, and the limits of sobriety. Had a portion of the nation, sufficiently large to give it a representative character, accepted the Messiah when He appeared, it is surely no vain overstraining of possibilities to conceive, how the more politically powerful party might still, in league with the Roman, have fulfilled the prophecies in His death, as actually occurred; in which case, His resurrection, instead of being followed by a suspension of the kingdom, might have been followed by immediate judgment on His enemies; the deliverance of His adherents, who by espousing His cause would have drawn down on themselves the wrath of persecution; the seventieth week of Daniel, with its crowded events, matured (as they ultimately will be) with a more than hot-bed forcing, might at once have run its course; and prophesy might have fulfilled

itself to the letter, without any such interregnum as at present has place.

To Satan, for whom, be it borne in mind, the counsels of God are as secret, until revealed, as to the children of men, it must have appeared a marvelous triumph of his ingenuity and devilish craft, when he had succeeded, to appearance, in overturning the plans and giving the lie to the prophetic teachings of God, by securing the rejection and crucifixion of God's King. That the Messiah should take into His hand the reins of earthly government, and set up a kingdom of heaven on earth, was clear to a demonstration in the word. That the Messiah had come, and no such kingdom had been set up, was no less clear from the facts. That the prophecies should ever now be capable of a literal fulfillment, such as should vindicate the truthfulness of God and His Word, seemed to him, doubtless, as impossible as it has seemed to thousands of God's own children, who have therefore long abandoned the expectation, and exchanged it for the fruitless effort to spiritualize the prophecies, into a forced and unnatural harmony with existing events. While many of the latter still cling to this error, Satan has assuredly long since been undeceived. The revelation of "the mystery," unfolded in vain before the eyes of God's children, has been seen of him with clearer discernment. Nor let the reader consider this as mere conjecture; it is the teaching of the Word itself. In verses 9 and 10 of our chapter, the apostle, in opening his commission "to make all see what is the dispensation of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God," adds, "who created all things by Jesus Christ: to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in the heavenlies might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God." Here we have the fact that the display of God's manifold wisdom, by means of the church, was a fore-contemplated object of creation, and that, with express reference to "the principalities and powers in the heavenly places." Now, if in Ephesians 1:21 and Colossians 2:10, "principalities and powers" seem employed to designate celestial inhabitants, in favor with God; in Ephesians 6:12, the same is used for the deadly enemies of God and man, the wicked spirits known elsewhere as "the devil and his angels;" by whom this manifold wisdom will be learned to their confusion and dismay, as by the others to their edification and joy, through the demonstration of God's ability to accomplish results, the highest and most blessed, through the instrumentality of the very elements that seemed most to thwart his plans and traverse his purposes.

Is the reader one of those who vainly dream of a gradually-diffused gospel, converting the world, under the agency of the Spirit, and ushering in a millennium of spiritual blessedness, without the presence of a personal Messiah, in manifested glory, on the throne of His father David? If so, he will have to revise his position ere he will be able "to see what is the dispensation of the mystery." Can a child of God rest satisfied, that such a victory should abide in the hands of Satan, as that he should have balked the literal accomplishment of prophecy, and reduced God to the necessity of giving to it only such a, so-called, spiritual accomplishment, as no simple reader of the Word could ever suppose to be its purport? No; Satan has not triumphed. God's purpose is not foregone. God's plans have suffered no frustration. A postponement, but a foreseen one, has delayed the immediate establishment; but, in his seeming victory the prince of darkness has outwitted himself, has wrought out God's secret purpose, to suspend for a season the erection of the throne, in order to the preparation of a bride for His King, to be associated with Him in His reign—the church of the living God—an otherwise unknown thing; a people brought into a special place of nearness; who, owning and taking part with Him in His humiliation and rejection, shall also have part in His

exaltation and glory; who, because they “suffer with Him, shall also reign with Him;” filling that very place in the heavenlies, in which Satan and his angels now are—those powers of the air of which he is prince, the “wicked spirits in the heavenlies,” against whom, as the opposers of her blessing, the church, in her individual members, has now to contend in spiritual conflict. (Eph. 6:12, margin.) No; the prophecies spoke only of earth; there was in these no intimation of a people to fill the place of the Satanic powers, no word of their being dispossessed in favor of a people redeemed from the earth. This was a secret, a mystery hid in God, which Satan’s seeming triumph gave occasion both to the unfolding and to the accomplishment of, to his own utter and eternal confusion, and to the display of God’s multiform wisdom, His grace and His glory; and the kingdom, the kingdom which Satan thought to frustrate, will yet be set up on earth—the millennium of New Testament prophecy—to the literal accomplishment of every detail of God’s Word, and the full vindication of the faithfulness of God and the truthfulness of His prophets.

The present dispensation is, then, an interregnum or parenthetical period, contemplated indeed in the counsels of God, but not revealed till “given” to Paul, as set forth.

Once this truth is seen, it becomes the key to the interpretation of Scripture and to the “rightly dividing the Word of truth,” in the sundering of things Jewish from things Christian. Until it is seen, neither Testament can be understood aright; and Christianity, instead of having its proper and distinctive character, is degraded into a sort of bastard Judaism. Of the manner in which this acts, King James’ translators of the Bible furnish a ready example.

Far be it from me to detract from the merits of these beloved men of God, to whose labors we, together with all the intervening generations, owe a debt of deepest gratitude. Their work is a monument of faithful and painstaking industry, and a marvel of success for their times. But they did not “see what is the dispensation of the mystery;” and because they did not, they have also left us, in their chapter-headings, a monument of the inevitable consequences of ignorance of this cardinal truth. In common with all the divines of their day, they took up the erroneous notion that Christianity, instead of being, as taught by Paul, a distinct thing, and a previously unrevealed secret, was but the foretold outcome—the regular and anticipated development of what had preceded—the full-blown flower from the bud of Judaism. Of the parenthetical or interregnum character of the dispensation, they had not a conception. That the church of God was a thing so distinct and peculiar, in respect of all that had gone before, as to be quite unknown to prophecy was a thought to which they were wholly strangers—a thought so foreign to their minds, that, taking for granted that Christianity and the church must be there, they turned to the Old Testament scriptures, with the deliberate purpose therein to discover it. The natural result of a research for what was not, under the control of a foregone conclusion that it was, is easy to anticipate. They must of necessity misapply to it what belonged to something else; and accordingly, the prophetic announcements concerning Israel and “the kingdom,” are made to do duty on behalf of the church; with the necessary consequence, in their own and all minds that have followed in their wake; of an entire misunderstanding of the Christian dispensation, no less than of the millennial dispensation, yet to follow—a blending of things Jewish with things Christian, to the lowering of the entire character of “the heavenly calling,” and a misapplication, throughout, of the truth of God.

Let the reader take up his marginal Bible of the “authorized” version, and turn, almost at random, to any of the chapter headings where prophecies of the future are found, and he may at once

verify the point. He will find “the church” abundantly in the headings, but for the church in the text, he will search in vain; he will find there only Israel, Zion, Jerusalem, or the like.

A single example to make it clear. The heading of Isaiah 52 begins with “(1) Christ persuadeth the church to believe His free redemption;” but on looking into the chapter, the reader will perceive, that it is Zion who is exhorted to awake and put on strength; Jerusalem, the holy city, that is bidden to put on her beautiful garments, and to shake herself from the dust; the people who went down aforetime into Egypt to sojourn; the people whom the Assyrian oppressed; and so throughout the chapter. The only glimpse of truth, in the heading, is in its last clause, “(13) Christ’s kingdom shall be exalted.” The kingdom is undoubtedly the thing in view in the place, but then, “the kingdom” in the view of the chapter headings, is but another name for “the church,” with which they invariably confound it.

Nor need we wonder at the widespread confusion that prevails in the interpretation of the Word, if we accept the correction of the critics on Colossians 2:2; who, omitting from the text, as an interpolation, the words, “and of the Father, and of Christ,” read, with the following verse, “all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, wherein are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

If all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hid in “the mystery;” so that the dispensation of it, as given to Paul, is the filling up, or completing, of the Word of God, as stated in verse 25 of the previous chapter; then it is self-evident, that where “the mystery” is not understood, the key to the understanding of the Word, is not in the hand; and the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,” though fully revealed of God, must remain locked. “God would make known to His saints,” through this ministry of Paul (vs. 27), “what is the riches of the glory of this mystery,” and, alas! the vast proportion of them are indifferent to the acquisition of the knowledge.

Christ is the center of the truth and ways of God; but the Christ of God’s counsels is not simply the man Christ Jesus; but, “as the body is one, and has many members, so also is the Christ.” It is “Christ and the church”—the mystery; the second Adam, not alone, but with His Eve; united with Him, even under a common name; as was the first Eve with him, bone of whose bone, and flesh of whose flesh, she was; so that in Genesis 5:2 it is said, “Male and female created He them; and blessed them, and called their name Adam.” As Adam was incomplete without Eve, so is the Christ of God’s counsels and purposes incomplete without “the church, which is His body, the fullness (or complement) of Him that filleth all in all” (Eph. 1:23).

The hope of the church is “the hope of glory.” Israel’s hope, in the wilderness, was the hope of the land (Deut. 12:8). Their hope, in the future, is still the land, under the kingdom, in the millennial blessedness. If there is glory connected with it, as there certainly is (Isa. 4), it is still earthly glory—glory in the earth. The church’s glory, on the contrary, is celestial glory—the glory of God and of Christ. “The glory which Thou hast given Me I have given them;” “I will that they also, which Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory.”

Israel’s hope of promised blessing rested on the presence of Jehovah with them in the pillar of cloud and of fire. “My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.” “Wherein shall it be known that I and thy people have found grace in thy sight? is it not in that thou goest with us? so shall we be separated, I and thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth.”

“For the cloud of Jehovah was upon the tabernacle by day, and fire was on it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys.” “They have heard that Thou Jehovah art among this people, that Thou Jehovah art seen face to face, and that thy cloud standeth over them, and that thou goest before them, by day time in a pillar of a cloud, and in a pillar of fire by night.” “For what nation is there so great that hath God so nigh unto them?”

Jehovah, with and among them, in a symbolical presence, was thus the glory of Israel's position in the midst of the nations of the earth, and the guarantee, on which their hope of the promised inheritance reposed.

The riches, or wealth, of the glory of “the mystery” is, Christ in His people, the hope of glory. (Col. 1:27)

Great as was Israel's privilege, in having Jehovah so nigh to them, as never to any other people or nation; their pledge of a land flowing with milk and honey; that glory is eclipsed, by the overflowing abundance—the wealth of glory, pertaining to the pilgrim church of God, in the dispensation of the mystery; which glory, is personal union with a risen, exalted, and divine Head, as members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones—a union which is to them the unfailing guarantee and basis, of that hope of glory which is set before them, as the goal toward which they journey onward. Well may the apostle term this a “wealth of glory”—a glory veiled indeed from carnal and unbelieving eyes; so that “the world knoweth us not, because it knew not Him;” but how real and how unspeakably precious, to him to whose faith and experience it is known! Well might he, in comparison of Israel's glory, say “Even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory which excelleth. For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious.”

“Christ in you, the hope of glory!” Do our souls enter into it? Does our faith lay hold on the fullness of its riches? Does the glory fill our eye and satisfy our hearts, till all earthly glory pales beneath its brightness? What an inheritance is ours—glory! — “an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God.” This is much. To be kept by power, and that the power of God, is strong, and sure, and precious; but there is more. The thought before us goes beyond it. It is more than being kept; it is union, oneness, with the Keeper. “He that is joined to the Lord is one Spirit;” “by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body;” “members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones.” And this is the peculiar, the excelling glory, of “the mystery;” and we, by grace, have our portion in it. Surely, for such a portion, we would praise and bless “the God of all grace, who hath called us to His eternal glory, by Christ Jesus.”

These thoughts lead us upward, to what may be called the heavenly side of the mystery; to which we are introduced in Ephesians 1:9: “the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself: that in the dispensation of the fullness of times He might gather together in one all things in [the] Christ, both which in heaven, and which are on earth.” This is not another mystery, but another phase, or a more advanced stage, of the same great secret.

The third chapter, which, along with Colossians, has mainly occupied us thus far, introduces us only to the present or earthly side of the mystery—to the church, in her pilgrim character, as journeying towards her inheritance, in the dispensation called by the Holy Ghost “the dispensation

of the mystery;" as that, to which the unfolding and development of the truths of the mystery, gives tone and character.

Here we are introduced to another, and yet future, dispensation; equally secret to the by-gone ages, but now brought forth, as the complement of the uncovered mystery—to wit, the union, under the scepter of the Messiah, of heavenly as well as earthly things in one kingdom of God. This coming dispensation is termed that of the fullness of times or seasons, as that in which the dealings of God with this earth (to which times and seasons, κρονοι και καιροι, belong) will attain their completion; and that which characterizes it is the gathering together—literally, the heading up—of all things in heaven and on earth in the Christ. The language is peculiar, and strikingly impressive, this heading up. Has the reader ever seen a cooper "heading up" a cask? He groups the staves together on end, around the head of the cask, fitted into the "chime" or groove, cut in each to enable it to receive and grasp the beveled edge of the head. When all are in position, he tightens a hoop around, and drives on hoop after hoop, till all the separate pieces are firmly compacted into one vessel. Did he drive the hoops on the upright staves, without the head, the first stroke of the hammer would cast all into confusion. The center of cohesion, around which the staves are headed up, is the head or end of the cask; and once that is in place, the greater the compression, the firmer and better the work.

Christ is the center and head, in whom are to be headed up all the separate elements, both heavenly and earthly, whose union, under the hand and scepter of the Messiah, like that of the union of Jew and Gentile in one, under the present dispensation, was wholly foreign to the scope of Old Testament revelations.

I have already somewhat anticipated this part of the subject, when speaking of the suspension of the kingdom and its results. It is the culminating glory of Him who, when seen of John in vision, as coming forth to inaugurate "the dispensation of the fullness of times," of which we speak, had on His head "many crowns;" and was followed by "the armies which were in heaven," when descending to set up the throne of His millennial glory on the earth. (Rev. 19)

I now turn from the doctrinal view of the subject to its practical bearings on our course and conduct.

As those whose lot is cast in "the dispensation of the mystery," it clearly behooves us, not only to inform our minds as to its true character and objects, but also to fashion our conduct in accordance with its order and aims. God never reveals truth to us for the mere gratification of our curiosity, but in order that it may exercise a formative influence over us, molding us into agreement with itself.

If God has revealed to us, that the order and plan of the dispensation in which He has set us is that Christ should, by His death, not only save our souls, but should "gather together IN ONE the children of God that were scattered abroad," so that there should be "ONE FLOCK and one Shepherd" (John 11:52; 10, 16); that in reconciling men to Himself, by the cross from among Jews and Gentiles, it was His will that this should be effected, not as scattered units, as in former ages, but that those so reconciled, should be found in unity—"in one body" (Eph. 2:16); that this "body," of His divine purpose, has been formed by the "one Spirit," by whom all are baptized into it (1 Cor. 12:13); that He "has tempered the body together," and "has set the members every one of them in

the body, as it hath pleased Him" (1 Cor. 12:18,24), "in order that the whole body, fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, should make increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love" (Eph. 4:16); and that, for this reason, His will is "that there should be no schism in the body" (1 Cor. 12:25). If, I say, such is the revealed mind and will of God, as concerning ourselves, and the dispensation under which He has placed us, then clearly all action on our part that does not conform to this truth, and has not this principle as its basis, must be in contravention of His plans and in opposition to His will, and therefore SIN. Had we not from Him one single word beyond the simple announcement, "There is one body;" the divinely-communicated knowledge of that fact would put us under as complete a moral obligation as any amount of perceptive teaching could do; for divinely-constituted relationships are quite as valid a ground of moral obligation, as divinely-given precepts. A Jew was as truly under obligation to "honor his father and his mother," while dwelling in Egypt, before he, or anyone else, had heard a commandment on the subject, as he was after God thundered it forth from Sinai; though the command gave an additional clearness, and added an additional sanction to the obligation. If he failed to do it in Egypt, he sinned; if he failed to do it in Canaan, he both sinned and disobeyed.

Now God has both revealed to us the fact, and enjoined on us the conduct befitting us, as arising out of the fact. He will have us to "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called" (Eph. 4:1); and inasmuch as we are not only called with a holy and heavenly calling, but are "called in one body" (Col. 3:15); accordingly, among the instructions in detail, which follow, a most prominent position is given to the duty of "endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace;" and this, as arising out of the truth, that there is one body and one Spirit, even as the hope of our calling (the glory) is one, and unity characterizes all that pertains distinctively to it— "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."

To act then in any manner contrary to this divinely formed unity, is to walk unworthily of the vocation wherewith we are called; and to set oneself in opposition to the whole order and plan of the dispensation; the very thing the entire church of God has been doing for centuries. What doctrine, in all the range of truth, has been so trampled under foot—so daringly and systematically set aside, as unity? Who, that lets the eye range over Christendom, would suspect for a moment that it was a fundamental truth of Christianity, that these people were professors of a calling to be one body, and that on their unity, its founder relied (John 17:21) for the standing evidence of His divine mission? What a multitude of bodies stand out on the platform, with their various names and characters. Look for unity anywhere but in Christendom. Judaism is a unity, though the nation be scattered. Mahomedism is a unity; but Christianity, of which unity should be the prominent characteristic, alas! alas!

Popery, the earliest parent of schism, is the only sect that has retained even the shadow; while Protestantism, yielding to the exigencies of its own position, has adapted its doctrine to these; and for the most part, laid claim to the liberty of ignoring the obligation entirely; with at best but an occasional sigh over unity, as a thing of the past. How few have had the courage, or the faithfulness, to look the obligation in the face; to go down to the root of the evil; to judge it, and to return to the old paths. Perhaps the most subtle snare and obstacle, to which enquirers after this truth are exposed, is the apparent impossibility of turning aside from the pathway of schism, without thereby increasing the very evil disclaimed, by adding another to the number of the already

too numerous divisions. Most specious is this difficulty, and many a soul does it hold back from taking the stand for God; but it is as unreal as it is specious. To separate from schism is not schism. To withdraw from that which has itself withdrawn from the order of God, is not to divide the church of God, but to renounce that which has already divided it. Let us suppose a ship's company to have mutinied, taken possession of the ship, and turned their captain and officers adrift, as the mutineers of the *Bounty* did. Would it be mutiny, for an individual, or individuals, of their number, to repent of their share in the crime; to protest against and separate from fellowship with the unlawful acts; and, at the risk of life or liberty, to insist on maintaining and owning only the Queen's right of ownership, and seeking to recall the others to duty? Would these few repentant loyalists, be chargeable with another mutiny; or would they only be doing the right thing under the circumstances?

But mark here a distinction. Supposing these individuals, instead of withdrawing from the others, in order to return to their allegiance to the Queen; separated, merely on the ground of some difference of judgment or will, as to the navigation, movements, or destination of the vessel; how different would be the case!

Just such is the distinction between return to unity and sectarian division.

The origin of all sectarian divisions has been diversities of judgment or will, as to points of detail, in principles, doctrine, or customs. No doubt, in many of these cases, there has been a conscientious desire, for the glory of God; supposed to be involved, in the maintenance of this or that peculiar tenet; but in no case have the reformers gone to the root of the matter. In no case, until very recently, has there been a sifting of the question to the bottom—a digging through, and clearing away, of the rubbish, right down to the foundations; that God's own foundation might be reached again, and built on. Each fresh sect has but modified or patched up the form of things it has been used to; and so, in coming out from one sect, has done so only to form another. So long as one item of unscriptural human corruption is clung to, sectarian ground is still maintained no matter what the pretensions may be.

When, however, the divine foundation has been reached; the divine ground once more taken up, this is not schism, whatever men may say; but obedience, and faithfulness to God. This, and this only, is to "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called;" this only is honestly to endeavor "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

What! exclaims some startled reader, do you mean to call it endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, to break peace and disunite yourself from every body, or from all but a mere handful of people as mistaken in this as yourself? Yes, I answer, I do. I mean unhesitatingly to say, that the Spirit has formed, and does form, no unity on any other ground, than that of scriptural obedience to God. The unity of a sect, or of all the sects together, could they tomorrow be compressed into a gigantic Evangelical or Catholic Alliance, is not, and would not be, the unity of the Spirit. Did the whole of Christendom succeed forthwith in arranging a platform on which they could once more unite, and form a single body, I should spurn it, and stand aloof from it, as much as I stand aloof from a divided Christendom this day. Every platform of union, other than that which renounces all that is of man—and with the rest all principles of voluntary association—is of man, and not of God—is the unity of the flesh, and not of the Spirit.

Meditations on Subjects of Interest

I. Dispensational Truth.

When souls surrender dispensational truth, they have committed themselves to the ocean of feelings and demands without a compass. If dispensational truth be not God's present revelation, what is it? And if it be, can I expect to walk in the present scene according to His mind, without the light which He in His grace has supplied me? Man knows nothing of God, except through revelation; how inconsistent then for a child of God to admit that he cannot see the necessity of adhering to that which is the revelation for this present time; for, as a Christian, he must own that, if it were not for revelation, he must have sunk into eternal darkness; and he has no right to reject or be indifferent to one part of the revelation, because it does not immediately bear on the question of his salvation.

God's revelation, in its full sense, and comprising all His arrangements on earth, is a structure of many stories, if I may say so. All the stories were not lighted up at once, but according to the need of those who would make use of the light. At one time it might have been sufficient to light up one story; but as the darkness increased (for in spite of what rationalists say, men are getting, in the spirit of their minds, every day further from God), there was of necessity a need for increase of light, which God, in His grace, vouchsafed for the use of those who would use it. Prophecy contained a suited and inexhaustible supply of the needed light; but this light could not act serviceably on any one who did not apprehend the order of God's counsels on earth. Such an one neither occupied the right story, nor did he (from not understanding his calling) seek or receive that knowledge from God which would have made him, not only know his proper place before God, but would also have furnished him with grace and power to act therein according to God's pleasure. How can God give a soul light to see the future of His purposes, if he be ignorant of or indifferent to the present? He who knows dispensational truth imperfectly, can never know prophetic truth rightly. If I disregard the manner of God's arrangements—the position of His people now according to His mind—how can I expect Him to unfold to me more distant things? "To him that hath shall more be given." It is no excuse to say that the church is in ruins; for if I cared for God's counsel in the church, the more inexpressive of that counsel I found the materials to be, the more should I seek to maintain it.

God will not swerve from His own counsel; and surely it is marvelous grace that He should allow us to learn it; and still more, that according as we know and submit ourselves to it, He should entrust us with further purposes of His mind. The more difficult the times become, the more do I need dispensational truth. What other chart have I? How can I solve any of the incongruities that encompass me, or discover a clue to my right course in them, if I do not know the order and intention of God, and how that has been counteracted and disturbed by the wickedness of man? From the smallest remnant of the church I ought to be able to put together what the church should be in God's counsels, and therefore to serve it according to His thoughts and love. In this relation to it I should most truly estimate what damage it had suffered, and what had inflicted the damage.

2. Guidance.

One of the greatest evidences of how much Israel gained by leaving Egypt was, that God marked out their way for them, and always guided them. At His word (of which the cloud was the expression) they journeyed, and at His word they encamped. The two grand characteristics of the wilderness journey were, the guidance and the manna. Practically speaking, we are now in the wilderness; and if we are enjoying manna, we may surely conclude that we are entitled to enjoy guidance. Few saints would deny their title to this great privilege; but many, who would aver that they receive and feed on spiritual meat, would hesitate to say, with anything like confidence, that they are guided as distinctly and positively as were the Israelites in the wilderness.

Now this should not be so; for one is on the same ground as the other: the cloud was attendant on the wilderness-march as much as was the manna. True, to Israel both were visible to the natural eye, and both are spiritual now; but they are not more difficult of realization to the spiritual man; and if I can asseverate with thankfulness that I am divinely fed day by day, and if I can only know this spiritually, ought I not with equal certainty to be conscious of my guidance in the spiritual mind? If I am entitled to one, I am equally so to the other; both are connected with the wilderness; blessed evidence of God's care of His people thus cast on Himself.

Why then is one spiritual blessing admitted and owned while the other, though valued, is little known, and more or less doubtfully expected? The feeling of Israel in the wilderness was that they did not know their way; they had no idea of it; and were so completely cast on God for guidance, because there was no one else there that could guide them; nor had He, blessed be His name! any other thought than to lead them Himself.

The first feeling in my soul then for guidance must be that I am in a wide desert, and that I have to depend on God, and on Him alone, to direct me. But how? By circumstances? Never. He did not guide Israel by circumstances improvised for the occasion, but by a cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night. These were His own appointed agencies. Anything below this is not guidance in its proper sense. It is true our gracious God, who, in spite of ourselves and our lack of dependence, will not allow us to lose our way, often uses circumstances to correct us and drive us back into the path of faith; and when in the path, He may allow them as helps to our weakness; but they do not mark the path; they are never intended to guide us; and I believe the watching of circumstances, as indications of the path, is a preventive to many true-hearted souls from enjoying this their real and rightful privilege in the wilderness way.

Psalm 32 gives us the filling up of the Lord's grace to us as to this blessed privilege. "I will instruct thee in the way thou shalt go." "I will guide thee with mine eye." This is His appointed agency for us as distinctly as was the cloud and the pillar of fire for Israel. But how am I to discern His eye? I must watch for it. If I do, I shall surely see it; if I do not, I cannot be guided by it. Where His eye is looking, there I ought to look. Unless I am spiritual, unless my soul is near Him, this will not be; I shall not look where He looks, and if I am looking to anything else for guidance, I shall not see His eye; but never is that eye hidden from the soul that watches for it. The "bit and the bridle" are God's alternatives for the soul that will not depend on Him, and be led by His eye; but the eye is there, lighting up the wilderness track for any who will discern and make use of it.

The Spirit has now come down to guide us into all truth; the spiritual man discerneth all things. The soul should wait on God, unable to proceed without Him, reckoning on His instructing it, and depending on nothing else for instruction but the spiritual sense of the direction of his own eye.

If I do this, I shall, as I go here or there, be assured that the eye of my Lord is directed that way; that such is the peculiar spot searched out by Him for me in the wilderness.

The Lord lead us to exercise our souls more in this blessed nearness and dependence.

3. The Appointed Path.

The effect of the presence of the Lord on His disciples was always to constrain them into the mind of God, so that He could say, "While I was with them in the world I kept them in Thy name." Wonderful is the effect of a presence which commands our veneration while controlling us into fellowship with itself. If we have no liking or drawing to it, we soon retire from it, for we cannot endure a restraint entirely foreign to our tastes. The taste may not be strong enough to sway us into the same line which the presence of one supremely powerful will sway us into if there be any real taste for it.

In John 11 we find that Martha, when the conference with the Lord becomes close, escapes from it. Not so with Mary; the closer it becomes, the more swayed is she by His all-controlling presence, and she walks according to God, side by side with her Lord, fulfilling everything in her path. Her grief at the death of her brother was none the less, nor her joy at seeing him raised up, and yet all the time her soul was gathering up that ointment of spikenard which was to be expressed at the proper time. She was lovely in the common walks of life; and, learning the heart of her Lord there, and walking with Him there, she could say to Him, when He came into His own house, "While the King sitteth at his table, my spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof." She was beautiful and useful in every position: she abode in the Lord, and therefore brought forth much fruit.

It is a very harassing and profitless occupation to lose time asking oneself, "What shall I do now?" If I were near the Lord, I should see in a moment what He would not have neglected; and the next thing to be done is always at the very doorway; for the smallest thing often leads to the greatest results; and it is in neglecting these that the greatest misadventures have occurred. Nothing is neglected by God.

If at any time I am at a loss to know my true path, I shall ascertain it better by drawing near to the Lord than by cogitating the various bearings of the circumstances. I may be very laboriously fishing all night, and have taken nothing; but if the Lord is with me, I shall surely find the difficulties vanish.

While He was with the disciples, they lacked nothing; He was both a purse and a sword to them; but when He was going to leave them, He says, "He that hath a purse, let him take it; and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one." He was going to leave them there for that all-absorbing work of sin-bearing, and they could not reckon on His care for the time being. No greater picture could be given of their desolation.

The presence of the Lord gives a perception and power for doing things. Not only does it furnish me with power, but the possession of power provokes me to use it like vigor in a man of strength. I feel He is better to me than a purse or a sword, and He will always succor me if I am in my true path; for there alone are the proper difficulties to the faith which He gives me, or rather the proper

exercises for that faith. If I turn aside from my path, I turn aside from the faith proper to it, and I must leave His presence, which could only attend me while walking according to God's will. Abraham sought to walk with God; and thus He entered into His joys and blessings. Lot sought to make a path for himself, and he was forever going from one sorrow to another, seeking to escape evil, instead of walking with God above it. There is no use in trying to better an evil or mistake. We must only, like Peter, abandon the ship, and cast ourselves on the Lord; and then the path will be open to us again, and we shall have grace to follow Him.

4. Light is an Armor.

The great power and characteristic of light is, that it refuses the entrance of darkness on every side of it. Be it ever so small a light, there is no access to it on any side. It is isolated to everything but itself, though with itself it will so unite that you could not distinguish in the unity between the light furnished by the largest lamp and the smallest rush-light.

It is exclusive; that is, it will not admit of any admixture; but the more it is increased, the more it will assert its isolation; though, at the same time, with each increase will it offer and present a benefit to any one in need of it, so that when most distinct, it is morally best qualified to offer and bestow, in a delicate, unobtrusive way, the most valued services. In Romans 13:12 we are told to "put on the armor of light;" in the original, the "arms of light;" that is, the weapons—the powers of defense as well as attack. Light becomes not only a panoply, but a weapon; for "light is that which doth make manifest;" necessarily painful to that which is manifested and exposed, but preservative to that for which it acts.

Refusing all intermixture or association with anything but itself, it will nevertheless co-operate and coalesce with the smallest fraction of light, which only renders it stronger in its own intrinsic qualities. If I walk in light, I am unconsciously helping the smallest ray of it in my associates. Whatever be the measure of it in me or in them, the two coming in contact must necessarily blend, and act in delicate and conjoint co-operation. So that there is a mutual benefit, often unknown or undefined, save in the sense of being preserved from the works of darkness. Nature is rebuked, but so rebuked on all sides that it is more subdued and less irritated than if, as in a guerilla warfare, it were attacked, now in one place, and now in another. Often when we are trying to behave well in given circumstances, and are making arrangements how we shall act, we shall find how vain our plans have been. Nature, though irritated, is not subdued by our forecasting; whereas if we walk in the least measure of light known to us, we shall most effectually preserve ourselves, as well as offer, and (if acceptable) bestow the best service to our surroundings. The higher we get, the more do we feel encompassed, and possessed of the "arms of light;" and the more we know what light is, the more truly shall we estimate all that is opposed to it.

5. The Effect of Worldly Society.

Have you ever considered the effect of association? I believe we are affected or altered in some way by association with any of the human family. The Nazarite forfeited the hair of his separation by touching a dead body, even suddenly; and I doubt if he forfeited it in any other way. I am convinced that we never come in contact with humanity without being either injured or served by it.

Now, that which cannot serve us must injure, if we blend with it. I know it is possible to maintain an elevated region towards another; but then it is plain I am not blending. I am, on the contrary, in a

sensibly distinct position, trying to myself, and I only submitting to it, for the sake of testimony, or the good of my inferior company. The moment I blend, the moment we are on equal terms in any line—my distinctness is gone, and my influence too. Could I ever help a person out of a slough by going into it myself? Is not my strength all the more applicable by my using every appliance in my power from the terra firma of a solid footing? By refusing intimacy I do not refuse help; for, in fact, I lose my power to afford moral help the moment I sink into intimacy; the very testimony to my own moral power being, that I keep myself from the slough or its neighborhood. If I meet on equal terms I fail to show that I am endued with power to help, or that it is a case that needs help. If I touch the dead body, if I lose my hair, my moral power, of what use am I?

A soul in true moral vigor and spiritual perception must feel the company of an unbeliever, or of the world, in any sense most irksome; for it must be braced up to testimony all the time, and guarding itself against any relaxation, which would rob it of its high standing. If I am right with such an one, I must not mingle with him; if I fail to raise him to higher contemplation, I must not sink to his level; for if I do, I have lost my place of testimony towards him, and consequently forfeited my moral power. He has injured me; he has fed my old man, which I have suffered to rise up and act in denial of the new; and even though my intent to serve him may be honest, I defeat it.

Nothing so convinces another of power as seeing its action in oneself. When Isaac (in Gen. 26) completely retired from the land of the Philistines, THEN the king owned his superiority. So is it always. If I see that you can surrender the world and its refinements, I must be conscience-stricken that there is something mighty there.

Oh let us ponder this in the Lord's name! Let us preserve inviolably our love and allegiance to Him; and as our souls enjoy the holiness of His way, we shall see more clearly how such associations injure us, and how we neutralize our best intentions by gratifying self.

6. The Responsibility Of Membership.

If we say we hold that the members of Christ's body are one with Christ, and that the Holy Ghost is down here forming one body in Christ; in short, if we hold the great truths which characterize the church of God, it is plain that although my individual place with Christ remains the same to me if I am personally faithful (see John 14:21-24), yet my place in the body down here, in which I am held by the Holy Ghost, suffers or gains according to the faithfulness of all other members as well as my own.

My testimony, my service, my worship in communion with the saints, is affected by the action or inaction of my fellow-members; consequently, wherever they are, their conduct is of material interest to me, independently of the regard I may have for my Lord's interest in them. And to seek to improve them, or preserve them right, is the only method I have of freeing myself from the embarrassment which they cause me.

If my Lord's Word or judgment excludes any of them because of radical failure from a sustained union, then I am relieved from this (may I say?) bodily encumbrance; otherwise, I have no remedy but the appliances of constitutional vigor to rally and reclaim them. If a gathering becomes dead and formal, and if, through mercy and discipline, my soul is kept lively and vigorous, I don't believe that I shall either help myself or them, or please the Spirit of God, by seeking another enclosure where I may congregate more kindred souls.

As long as I can recognize the assembly as meeting on divine principles, I am bound to maintain my membership unimpaired and utilized among them. If they fail as members, I am not. My measure of power will be owned where there is life. As all measures of light blend and diffuse when brought together, so do all measures of spiritual life, through the power of the Holy Ghost, when acting according to His mind and course. Am I to tie up my arm because the greater part of my body is paralyzed? Ought I not rather to promote vitality by the limb which remains in health?

I am persuaded that a faithful member, acting his part; and proving his vitality in the midst of an enfeebled constitution, would eventually rally and re-animate whatever is genuine. All Scripture history supports this belief. Impatience or hastiness of feeling is always an evidence of want of power. If I have power, I have only use for it where it is wanting, and it is not the amount of power that is valuable, but the faithful, energetic use of it. Phinehas-like, I do not desert the congregation of the Lord, if it be one; but the very fact that it needs so much, only makes the demand on me more imperative to maintain the truth in its midst according to the power God may give me.

The simplest and fullest evidence of divine power is the ability to apply the very quality of good suited to the attenuated existence of a weakly body. It is not the whirlwind, it is not the fire; it is the gentle and insinuating word that forms a place for itself in the soul, because the quickened soul feels that it is just what it wants. Christ presented according to the nature of the need, was the nature of the ministry prescribed for the declining churches of revelation. I believe that if we had grace, we should be like Elijah to the prophets of Baal, or any like them, we should let the latter have their full swing, and then in the Lord's name establish His grace to the souls that He loves.

7. Preparation for Glory.

It is only as we enter into Christ's sufferings here that we can either desire, apprehend, or be prepared for His glory. Everything connected with the old man is contrary to Christ; for on account of it He died. If I would enter into Christ's glory I must necessarily die to everything here which is contrary to Him His life leads me into His glory. But if it does, it also puts me into the sense of moral death with regard to everything against it; so that in proportion as I am able to walk here in the sufferings with which His life was oppressed, the more do I desire and apprehend His glory. If I find everything here antagonistic to me, the glory is my resource; so that I feel, as I am a co-sufferer with Him, I am also to be co-glorified with Him, and that this light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for me, in surpassing measure, an eternal weight of glory. The beauty and brightness of the glory itself does not move those who are not suffering with Christ here; and this explains why many who feel their need of Christ, and use Him to a great degree, have very feeble desires for or apprehensions of that glory. If I enjoy what Christ cannot enjoy, how can I enjoy what He does enjoy? And therefore the school or university for the glory is suffering with Him There I must learn, and there I must graduate. It is only as I take up my cross daily, and follow Him, that I can either desire or be prepared to ascend with Him the holy mount. Death comes on us in many ways here; not two of us die morally in the same way. Following Him will always disclose the nature of the death we have to die. Death is surrender of that which I should like to live in, and in which I could live humanly; but as I follow Him, I find that I must surrender this; and then, as I die thereto, following, accompanying Him, so to speak, do I find my soul enlarged in desire, apprehension of, and preparation for the glory. I feel that what I have to die to is against Him, but that the glory, where He is, is the joy and resource of my heart. When Moses felt the rebellion and

hopelessness of Israel, his eye looked out for something beyond man; and his prayer was, "Show me Thy glory." When Stephen reached the confines of testimony to Israel as a nation, the glory was presented to him as his home. So with Paul in the prison at Rome; so with John in Patmos. As each was made partaker of the sufferings of Christ, he could rejoice that when His glory should be revealed he should be glad with exceeding joy.

8. The Use and Abuse of the Eye.

The first great point to establish, in order to ascertain the error of anything, is to obtain a perfect knowledge of what is true and right. That which is right must be singular, while the counterfeits may be endless in number and variety. A banker once said, on being asked how he knew a bad note, "I never consider whether a note is a bad one; ascertain whether it be a good one." If I know what is right, it is very easy and simple for me to reject that which does not answer thereto. Many weary themselves to no profit in examining tire suspicious, to see whether the grounds for suspicion exist; whereas if they had simply adhered to that which they knew was right, they could have discerned and rejected the pretender at once, even though they might not have been able to tell the exact grounds on which they rejected it. I may add, that when I have rejected any pretension as spurious, I may then, in order to convince others, examine the imperfections which prove its unguineness; but the first occupation of my eye, whether in choice or in discernment, should not be with the imperfection or evil.

How then ought the eye to be occupied? If I am not able to determine this, I shall not find it very easy to determine how it ought not; whereas if I can decide the right occupation for my eye, I can easily perceive what is not so.

Here lies the cause of so much indecision and inconsistency. People have not defined to themselves what is right; and hence they make a trial of every offer on its own merits, instead of on the merits of an ascertained standard. Now the right occupation of the eye must be determined by reference to the power that has a right to control it. If the Lord has this right, then its occupation must be in accordance with His mind and appointments down here while in the body. The engagement or occupation of any organ is characterized by the power which controls it. If the Lord controls my eye, it is occupied and engaged with what is interesting to Him. If my eye is controlled by my own will, it will be characterized by my carnal tastes and likings; and it is a very active agent in furnishing the natural mind with provision for its enmity against God. Eve saw that the forbidden fruit was pleasant to the eye; and this promoted in her heart an inclination to act in independence of God. It is wonderful how the verdict of the eye affects us about everything, and how much that judgment is the fruit of our own state of soul.

Two persons may see the same thing with totally different impressions, but the impression imparted to each is in relation to his own peculiar state and condition before his eye thus acted. One admires, while another turns away pained from beholding the very same scene. The body is the Lord's, and the eye is the Lord's. Either the Spirit of God is using my eye to embrace and survey all that is important for me to see in my course, or the natural mind is using it to furnish materials for its own support; and therefore the "lust of the eye" is classed with the "lust of the flesh," though no man ever thinks that they could be placed together as morally equal. Both link us to the world which is not of the Father, and the "lust of the eye" is even the more dangerous of the two, because least feared or discountenanced, although Scripture abounds with warnings touching

the dangers for the eye. Remember the eye sends back a message to the soul corresponding to the power which used it. If the Lord uses it, then an impression furnishing materials for His will is conveyed to the soul; if my own mind has used it, the impression will, on the contrary, furnish materials for its own promotion, which, to a Christian, is a double loss; for not only does it deprive him of what he might have gained for the Lord, but it acquires for him that which hinders and shuts out his sense of the Father's love. How little do our souls ponder these things and take them to heart!

The New Birth

I desire to meditate a little on the third chapter of the Gospel of John and its connection with some other parts of Scripture, more particularly in reference to the new birth. I desire to do so for the profitable understanding of what the new man is, and the place in which we are set as made partakers of it, as we now are, in Christ. I shall necessarily go over some ground with which Christians are familiar in speaking of such a subject; but this is necessary, in order to connect with it the further developments and distinctions which lead me to treat of the subject.

Many believed in Christ when they saw the miracles which He did; but Jesus did not commit Himself to them...He knew what was in man. (Chapter 2:23-25) Their conclusion about Him was a just one; but it was a conclusion drawn by what was in man. It was perfectly worthless; left man in his own nature, and under the motives, influences, and passions to which he was subject before; nor did it take him out of the domain of Satan, who had power over the flesh and the world. The conclusion was right; but it was only a conclusion: the man remained what he was—unchanged. Jesus, who knew what flesh was, had—could have—no confidence in it.

But Nicodemus (chap. 3), under God's leading, for our instruction goes a step further. The others believed it, and left it there. But where the Spirit of God is at work, it always produces wants in the soul, craving and desire after that which is of God and godly; and so the sense of defect in ourselves. There is at once, instinctively too, the consciousness that the world will be against us; consciousness too of its opposition and scorn. Nicodemus comes by night.

There was a want of something better in his soul; but his being a ruler, and especially an ecclesiastical ruler, made it more difficult for him to go to Christ. The dignity of one set to teach is not a facility for going to learn. However, conscience urges him to go, and he goes; the fear of man makes him afraid, and he goes by night. How poor is that dignity which tends to hinder one learning of Christ. Nicodemus, though spiritual craving had led him to Christ, goes on the same ground in his inquiry as those who had no such want at all. Rabbi, we know that Thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that Thou doest, except God be with him" (vs. 2). It was a conclusion drawn from proofs, perfectly just; but that was all. Still he wanted something from Him who showed them; but he took for granted that he was, as a Jew, the child of the kingdom, and would have teaching. The Lord meets him (for he was sincere and known of Him) at once by declaring that the whole ground he was on was wrong. He did not teach flesh, nor had He come to do so. God was setting up a kingdom of His own. To see that, a man must be born again, completely anew. The kingdom was not yet come visibly, not with observation. It was there among them, but to see it a man must have a wholly new nature. Nicodemus, arrested by the language, does not understand how this could be; stops as a human reasoner, though sincere, at the present difficulty; and in truth does not see the kingdom.

But two great truths have been brought out here already. First, God is not teaching and improving man as he is. He sets up a kingdom, a sphere of power and blessing of His own; there He acts. And, secondly, man must have a new nature or life. He must be born again, in order to have to say

to God who so works. Flesh cannot even perceive the kingdom. Both facts are of supreme importance. A new divine system is set up where the blessing is—a new nature is needed, in order to have to say to it.

But the Lord does not leave the inquiring Nicodemus here. He shows definitively the way of entering into the kingdom: “A man must be born of water and of the Spirit.” (vs. 5) Of the Word and Spirit of God. The Word of God—the revelation of God’s thoughts—must operate in the power of the Spirit, judging all in man, bringing in God’s mind instead of his own, supplanting it by God’s, and an absolute new life from God, in which these thoughts have their seat and living reality—a new nature and life. It is not that two births are here, but two important aspects and realities in being born again. “Of His own will begat He us with the Word of truth” (James 1:18); “That He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word” (Eph. 5:26); “Ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.” (John 15:3) It is not teaching flesh, which has its own thoughts, but supplanting all its thoughts by God’s. We are born of water. Next, it is a nature coming from the Spirit— “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” (John 3:6) Everything born follows—is of—the nature of that which begat it. So here. The water acts on man as man; his person is not changed; but the Spirit communicates a new life, which is of itself [the Spirit] just as flesh’s nature is flesh-in that which is born of it. We have now, not flesh taught, but the thoughts of God, operative in power, and the partaking of the divine nature which is imparted by the Spirit. The mind and nature of God vitally communicated to us. This is my life, as mere flesh was before. This clearly opens out the blessing to Gentiles. “Marvel not,” said the Lord to Nicodemus, “that I said unto thee, Ye [Jews] must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth;...so is every one that is born of the Spirit.” 7, 8) The sovereign communication of a new nature (needed by the Jew as much as by the Gentile, when we come to his nature) as an entirely new thing, a new nature given in which the man thenceforth lives with God, is as applicable to a Gentile as to a Jew. For thus a man, as to his life, is neither [Jew nor Gentile]. “He is born of God.” This truth is here not unfolded; only the groundwork is laid down for it. The far deeper truth of the fact of the divine life, and that sovereignly imparted, is what is taught, only the other is directly implied.

This again stops Nicodemus. He does not come forward with, “We know;” he must be silent, to learn. And now some other truths come out, which associate us with heaven. But first the Lord shows what Nicodemus ought to have known—that as to even earthly promises the testimony of God was clear, that Israel had to be born again—born of water, and of the Spirit. The thirty-sixth chapter of the prophet Ezekiel is clear as to this: “But I had pity for Mine holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the heathen, whither they went. Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for Mine holy name’s sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen, whither ye went. And I will sanctify My great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I am the Lord, saith the Lord God, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes. For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put My spirit within you, and cause you to walk

in My statutes, and ye shall keep My judgments, and do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be My people, and I will be your God. I will also save you from all your uncleannesses: and I will call for the corn, and will increase it, and lay no famine upon you. And I will multiply the fruit of the tree, and the increase of the field, that ye shall receive no more reproach of famine among the heathen. Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for your own iniquities and for your abominations. Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord God, be it known unto you: be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel.” That is, to enjoy the blessings of God’s promises in the land, Israel must be born of water and of the Spirit; must be cleansed, according to God’s thoughts, and be renewed by the Spirit of God. The statement of the Lord is more simple, more full and absolute, because He is laying down the truth in itself: how man can enter into the kingdom, and therefore brings out the need of the communication of a wholly new life in terms, with the blessed assurance that it is a being really born of the Spirit, so as to partake of the nature of Him of whom we are born. “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (vs. 5). But Nicodemus, as the teacher of Israel, ought to have known that such a change was needed for Israel, in order to partake of their earthly blessings with God.

But this brings out the difference, of the Lord’s instructions and their character here, from the way in which the prophet had spoken of the matter. He had stated it prophetically, as the practical operation of Jehovah’s grace; and that was all right, and in its place. But the Lord had another kind of knowledge. The prophecy had perfect, divine authority, because the prophet said what he had been inspired to say. But the Lord knew the things themselves in their very nature. He could tell absolutely what was needful for God, because He was God, and came from God. This is indeed divine teaching—teaching of infinite price. We learn from Him, who essentially knew it, what is needful for God. It tells us what the Christian is. He has the knowledge of God from God Himself, according to His own nature, and is partaker of that nature—in order to know it, and to be able to enjoy it—without which he does not know it. And this brought down in man to us. But as the Lord spoke that which He knew, so He testified that which He had seen. He could tell of the heavenly glory, and what became it; what was needed to have a part in it Man did not receive this testimony. The human mind understood human things; what was heavenly and spiritual—not at all. That which was heavenly and spiritual was darkness and foolishness to it. Those who received this witness were born again (1:12, 13).

Let our hearts dwell a little on this blessed truth. In Christ we have one fully revealing God Himself. His words told His nature, the nature of God Himself, told it to man, so as to reveal what was needed in man in order that he might have to do with God in blessing, but told it directly, fully. His words were a revelation of the divine nature, which He knew. We are in the full light with God Himself We have—not merely messages, however true and however blessed it be to have them from God, but what leaves nothing behind—the revelation of God Himself, and in His nature; so that what is perfect in blessedness is revealed, and revealed perfectly. Here it is in nature first of all, then the fact of what He had seen; but it is the competency of witness specially which is expressed in this verse. But this necessarily leads to the nature of the things. No prophet could say, “We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen.” (vs. 11) God revealed future things to them, or sent messages to the people, and they announced the one and the other. But if Christ announced what He knew, and testified that which He had seen, these were necessarily

heavenly things.

Of course He knew what had been foretold of God; but, in speaking of the nature needed in order to have to say to God, and of that which He knew and had seen, He goes beyond that—to that which is above. Thither consequently He leads us. “No man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of man who is in heaven.” (vs. 13) No one had gone up to bring down word of what was there. But He came thence; and He could tell perfectly what was there, and was ever there, for He was God. But this divine knowledge was knowledge for man; for it was the Son of Man had it. Heaven and man were connected in the person of Christ. If man out of Christ, as all yet were, had not in any sense entered there, still there was one who was, in His person, the revealer of that which was heavenly. But how could man—who could not, even if a teacher of Israel, understand the reality of the new nature (even as needed for the known earthly things), for he thought in the old nature—understand heavenly things? But this brought out another truth, the necessary door of what was heavenly; but if so, it is the open door to every one that should believe. Not only was it necessary to be born again, even for earthly blessings, but there were further counsels of God.

The Son of man, for Jesus was more than Messiah, must, in the counsels of God and in the need of man, be lifted up, rejected from this earth. But this lifting up was this rejection by the world. Christ could not, for man was a sinner, take His place as Messiah in blessing to Israel. He was to suffer in the character in which He had to say to all men, “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness” (vs. 14), so, instead of a living Messiah, they were to have a rejected, dying Son of Man. The cross was healing, saving power for man. Whoever believed in Him would not perish, but have everlasting life! for God so loved the world—an immense truth then which opened the way to the fullest display of God and of grace, if one should not rather say it was such. It was an efficacious work of God, not to fulfill prophetic promises merely, but to bring to God, “that whosoever believed in Him” (this Son of Man), “should have everlasting life.” It was needed. Atonement must be made, redemption must be accomplished, if sinful man was to have to say to a holy God. If there was a revelation of the divine nature, and man’s partaking of it was connected with his having to say to God, there must be atonement as well as a new birth; the Son of Man, He who as man was to have in man’s nature the inheritance of all things, and who took up man’s cause, must be lifted up, like the serpent in the wilderness, made sin for us, that men might look upon Him and live. This met the need of man, but it was only one side of the truth. When men rest here they see what meets the holy nature and judgment of God, but God stands as a holy judge; nor does this therefore give full liberty to the soul. It is the propitiatory, the needed, side of Christ’s death. But how did this come about? It was that God so loved the world that the Son of Man, who must be lifted up, was the Son of God, whom He had given in love. God so loved that He gave. Thus, though propitiation was needed, love was the source of all. The holiness of God’s nature, His righteous judgment, maintained as regards sin, but His love manifested. The Son of Man was Son of God. Both with a view to one wondrous object—that sinful man, whosoever believed in Jesus, should have eternal life. This was the final test of man too. We have thus the nature of God revealed, and a twofold work wrought, which, while it fits man to enjoy that nature by his being born of it, glorifies it too in all its character; so that the gift of eternal life maintains and displays the love and holiness and righteousness of God. And this is what is essential and blessed. But the full, peculiar, dispensed character of this, as wrought out in grace, is not brought out here; and it is this

which I would now endeavor to bring out, the gracious Lord helping me.

If the Son of Man was lifted up, died to bring us to God, where and how is life? It is in resurrection. This too leads us to another important element of truth. If risen, I am risen from the dead. I have died in Christ. This we shall see has a double character. I may look at myself as having no spiritual life; hence as dead in trespasses and sins; or I may look at myself as alive in sin and the flesh, and then I speak of having died to it. Christ could speak of a new nature needed in order to enter the kingdom; but He could not then call on any one to reckon himself dead. He could connect that nature with God directly, in the statement of what it was, and what He was; and that was peculiarly suited, as is evident, to His person—a divine revealer of what He knew and of man's partaking of the divine nature. This was indeed the excellent part. But for our deliverance another truth was to be connected with this—the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. We receive Christ as our life when He has died and risen. He is a life-giving spirit. Because He lives, we live. He is our life; that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us. But for sinners to have—righteously, and according to God—part in this, Christ must make the propitiation, must die. He died to sin once; and now, alive in resurrection, lives to God. We receive Him through the Spirit in our hearts, and have life. “This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.” (vss. 11, 12) But He whom we receive is the dead and risen One, our life—the true “I,” in which I say of sin, this is no longer I. “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.” This is the life of Christ as risen from the dead in us—the power of life in resurrection. We are alive for faith only in and by Him, though the flesh be in point of fact there. Yet I do not own it as alive and part of myself, but only as an enemy which I have to overcome. Thus in Rom. 7 we find, “When we were in the flesh” (vs. 5); in Romans 8, “Ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you” (vs. 9). Many other passages illustrative of this point will come before us in pursuing our subject.

I have said that this view of the divine life in resurrection comes before us in two ways in Scripture. Man may be viewed either as alive in sin, or as dead in sin. His flesh is alive and active as regards evil; it is utterly dead as regards God—not one movement of soul in the natural man towards Him. The Epistle to the Romans presents the former view; that to the Ephesians the latter. They coalesce in presenting the man as risen with Christ, though the Epistle to the Romans barely reaches this ground, but just touches on it. Their epistle teaches fully Christ's being raised by God the Father, but only just touches on our being alive to God. The Ephesians saw, as regards the doctrine of their epistle on this point, Christ as dead, and the sinner dead in sin (2:1), and both raised up together. This flows from Christ being seen exalted on high and the church united to Him. Man is not contemplated doctrinally as wickedly living in sin, although the fact is recognized; but in the full apprehension of his state in relation to God he is dead in sin. And the whole condition of the church is the result of the same power being exercised in raising Christ Himself and every believer spiritually (Chapter 1, 2).

In the Epistle to the Romans, Christ is seen risen from the dead, but not ascended (save an allusion in one verse of chap. 8), because the object is to show the putting away of the old state, and the introduction in life and justification into the new; not the glorious results, save in hope. Man's guilt is largely proved. Christ has died for us; but Christ has risen also, for our justification; we are justified—dead to sin and alive to God—delivered from the law.

The Epistle to the Colossians is between the two in doctrine. It views man as living in sin, but the Christian as having died and as now quickened with Christ. Our new nature there, as born of God, takes, when our condition is fully displayed, the character of our having died and risen again with Christ, and even of our sitting in heavenly places in Him.

But my object now is: our condition in life. Let us recall, that Christ, as thus risen, is our life. The work of atonement must have been accomplished, or no sinner could have been united with Him. He could have given no life according to God to any. The corn of wheat would have abode alone. Not that life and the power of life was not in Him, but that the righteousness of God would have been in abeyance.

But that work has been accomplished; and now Christ—not the first Adam—is my life as a believer. But then I say, When I was in the flesh. I am not in the flesh, but in the Spirit. The first Adam in His sin and responsibility is not my standing before God at all; but the second, who has become my life. I am in Him as my righteousness; He is in me as my life. Now, I say, I have died to sin; I am crucified with Christ; I am alive to God through Jesus Christ. “In that He died, He died unto sin once: but in that He liveth, He liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves” (Rom. 6:10,11). This is what Paul insists on in the sixth chapter of the epistle to the Romans. “We were baptized into His death” (vs. 3); “planted together in the likeness of His death” (vs. 5). We are dead to sin. “If we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him” (vs. 8). Hence (for, as I said, the apostle only just touches this ground) we are to reckon ourselves alive to God through Him (vs. 11). So in the Epistle to the Galatians, “Christ liveth in me” (chap. 2:20); “the Spirit is life because of righteousness” (Rom. 8:10). But we are not said to be risen with Him.

And remark, in the elements even of this doctrine, necessarily, from its very nature, we are not called to die to sin.

No such thought is in Scripture. We are called upon, as alive in Christ, to mortify every movement of sin; but not to die to it. We are alive in Christ who has died, and we are viewed as dead; and called upon to view ourselves as dead, because Christ, who is our life, has died. “I am crucified with Christ.” (Gal. 2:20) “They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh.” (Chapter 5:24) “Reckon yourselves to be dead.” (Rom. 6:11) “You have been planted together in the likeness of His death” (vs. 5); “buried with Him unto death..(vs. 4) “Ye are dead.” (Col. 3:3) Such is the uniform language of Scripture. All the sentimental talk about crucifying being a lingering death, is the setting aside the plain and imperative sense of these passages. “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.” (Gal. 2:20) We have died in Christ; that is the doctrine of Scripture.

The epistles to the Galatians, the Romans, and the Colossians all alike teach this, and press it on Christians. I am wholly delivered from the whole system in which I lived as alive in the flesh. So the apostle appeals: “If ye be dead with Christ... why, as though alive [living] in the world, are ye subject to ordinances?” (Col. 2:20,21) This is life then, being born of God, as possessed by the Christian, now that Christ has died and become, as risen, his life.

The Epistle to the Ephesians goes a step further. It does not, as I have said, view Christ as alive in blessed love and godliness, and man in sin; but man dead in sin, and Christ is first seen as dead, which was for and to sin. That is, the apostle sees man down in the ditch and grave of death

through sin, and Christ has come down into it in grace where man was by sin. But so He has put away the sin as guilt, and come down to save and redeem out of that condition. God raises up both by the same power. "What is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe.... which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places." (Eph. 1:19,20) Of "His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ." (Chapter 2:4,5) Thus we are God's "workmanship, created in Christ Jesus." (vs. 10)

Thus as the third chapter of John's Gospel taught us the nature of the life which we receive, (that as born of the Spirit it is spirit; divine, morally speaking, in its nature) so do the epistles show to us the position in which the possession of this new life places us, inasmuch as it is the life of Christ risen, after being delivered for our offenses and having died to sin once. And what is the consequent effect as to our relationship to sin and to God? The Epistle to the Romans, as indeed that to the Galatians, teaches us that we have died with Christ, and that we are to reckon ourselves dead to sin, that our old man has been crucified with him; but that we are alive to God. That it is not we that live, but Christ that lives in us. The Epistle to the Colossians teaches us that we have died with Christ, and that we are risen with Him; and further, that when dead in sins and the uncircumcision of our flesh, God has quickened us together with Him, having forgiven us all trespasses, brought up from the dead with Christ into newness of life as to ourselves; but according to the blessed efficacy of His death, entirely forgiven all the sins and state of sin in which we were till thus raised, consequent on the efficacy of His death.

This last point the Epistle to the Ephesians takes up fully and exclusively, and shows us quickened with Christ and raised out of the death of sin by the same power which raised Christ Himself. It is not merely the divine nature become our life, but death to sin, life to God, raised up, forgiven and accepted, as in the state in which He is as risen; yea, sitting in heavenly places in Him. The nature is divine; that is, supremely excellent; but by death and resurrection having come in, and our being united to Christ, our whole relative condition is changed; we are not, for God and for faith, accounted as alive in the old man; we are not in it at all; have put it off. It is—for the reckoning of faith, and that according the possession of and being alive in a new life—dead and gone. We are in Christ, and Christ is our life; alive in Him and alive in what He is alive to—to God. Our standing is not consequently in the first Adam at all. We have died as in the first Adam to all that he is; but alive in the last Adam, the Lord Jesus, according to all the acceptance in which he now lives before God.

Thus the third chapter of John's Gospel teaches us the intrinsic excellency of the life we receive of God, and shows it in direct connection with what is divine—Christ speaking what He knew, and showing that we must have a nature from God, and fit for God Himself. Christ speaking thus, that which He knew is of the deepest interest, the direct communication of what is divine. This life is there shown in its nature and origin as contrasted with flesh. Its proper character and excellency is more seen in John. The Epistle to the Ephesians, however, confirms it in result: "That we should be holy and blameless before Him in love." (Chapter 1:4) But in its condition and state, the epistles are more full as to this life. There—inasmuch as Christ died—living in the life of Christ we are [looked at as] dead to sin, the life being a new thing wholly distinct from the old man, and we alive in Christ. We are not in the flesh; we have died and are risen again. Being regenerated is being dead and risen again; for we receive Christ as life. It is having left Adam, his nature and fruits,

condemnation, death and judgment, behind; and being, as delivered from all these things in necessary and righteous acceptance, according to Christ's acceptance before God. The natures are distinct. I am not in the flesh; I have died; I am risen again. I am accepted in Christ risen. I am partaker of the divine nature, and to enjoy its fullness in God. (2 Peter 1, 4), J. N. D.

The Unveiled Face

We have a remarkable series of contrasts in the third chapter of this epistle, designed to exhibit the perfect place of blessing in which we are set in Christ. After speaking of his own special relationship, through his ministry, to the believers at Corinth (vss. 1-4), the apostle points out the source of his qualification for his work, and the character of his ministry. (vss. 5, 6) We have then a parenthesis which extends to the close of the 16th verse; so that for the connection we must read the 17th verse after the 6th, though it is evident that the parenthetical passage contributes, by the contrast therein drawn between the “ministry of condemnation” and the “ministry of righteousness,” to further the general argument. Thus the apostle says, “Our sufficiency is of God; who also hath made us able ministers of the New Testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life” (vss. 5, 6); and then he adds, “Now the Lord is that Spirit” (vs. 17); i.e. not the Holy Spirit, but the Spirit of the “New Testament,” which he thus identifies with the Lord—the glorified Christ. In other words, he teaches us that the Spirit that runs through and underlies “the letter” is a glorified Christ. But when he says in the next clause, “And where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty,” he speaks of the Holy Ghost because he is now speaking of the power by which Christ glorified is apprehended, and the liberty into which we are consequently brought.

The parenthesis springs out of the contrast between “the letter” and “the spirit;” the former—the law, in fact—being a “ministration of death” and of “condemnation” (vss. 7, 9); the latter of “the Spirit” and of “righteousness.” (vss. 9)

In these terms we have indeed the essential characteristics of the two dispensations contrasted. By the law was the knowledge of sin, and resulting condemnation and death (Rom. 5:20; 7); whereas by the gospel is the knowledge of accomplished righteousness, and of a Christ in glory. Hence, too, we get in this parenthesis, and the 18th verse, a further contrast between the position occupied by Israel under the law, and that occupied by believers under grace; and it is with this position, and its consequences and responsibilities, that we desire in this paper especially to be occupied.

It is summed up for us in the 18th verse: “We all, with open [that is, unveiled] face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord.” The words, “as in a glass,” interfere with the clearness of the statement, having been added from a misconception of the force of the word employed. What we are taught is, that believers are now brought into the very presence of the glory of the Lord—they behold it with unveiled face. This is brought out by a contrast with Israel: “When Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart” (vs. 15); but we behold the glory of the Lord without a vail; so that our position corresponds rather with that of Moses when he went into the tabernacle to speak with Jehovah. (See Ex. 34:34,35)

The knowledge of this position is brought to us by the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God; for, says the apostle, “we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord” (4:4, 5)—that is, Christ glorified at the right hand of God. Such was the subject of the apostle’s ministry, the ministry of the Spirit; for it was performed in the power of that Spirit who came down

on the day of Pentecost as the witness of accomplished redemption, and of the glory of Christ. It was also the ministry of righteousness; for instead of requiring righteousness from man, as the law did, it proclaims God's righteousness revealed in the gospel (see Rom. 1:16, 17; 3:21, 22, &c); for Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. (Rom. 10:4) And a glorified Christ is the assurance of this; for when He died He bare our sins in His own body on the tree; yea, He was made sin for us (1 Peter 2:24; 2 Cor. 5:21); and hence, if He is now at the right hand of God in the glory, it is the everlasting proof that every question of our sins and sin has been settled; that all the claims of God's holiness have been met and satisfied; that indeed God has been so satisfied (for indeed He was fully glorified in that death), that His response to what was then wrought is seen in the place which He has accorded to Him who died.

It is on this account that He can in righteousness, as well as in grace and love, accord a place in Christ—in the same position of nearness—before Himself to every one who receives this gospel of the glory of Christ. The source of all is in Himself, and hence it is said, "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts." (4:6) He it was who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all (Rom. 8:32); who raised Him up from among the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the glory; and He it is who opens our hearts to receive these glad tidings of His grace, so that He might be able to bring us into that place where with unveiled face we can behold the glory of the Lord. Blessed be His name! How precious is His grace!

But let us not forget that this is our position, and that nothing short of this satisfies His own heart of love to us in Christ Jesus. It is therefore not enough for us to know that our sins are forgiven, and that we are the children of God; but He would have us also know that we are brought to Himself, that there is nothing even now between us and the glory of the Lord; we all with unveiled face behold it. This is our normal place. What a fruitful theme then for application to the heart and conscience! Do we know our place? Are we consciously occupying it? Is the glory of the Lord filling the vision of our souls? Do we know anything of not being "able to see for the glory of that light" "Is it our habit to judge everything about us by the light of that glory? Surely it ought to be the only light for our souls, and our joy to be ever standing with upturned faces, that every ray of the glory might fall upon us with its transforming power.

This indeed is the second point of the apostle's statement. "We all, with unveiled face beholding the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord." Here then we have the source, condition, and power of our moral transformation—the source, Christ Himself in the glory; the condition, our looking upon, the glory—beholding Him with the eye of faith, and the power being the Holy Spirit (for the meaning is the same as to this whether we read "the Spirit of the Lord," or "the Lord the Spirit").

It can never be too earnestly insisted upon that Christ Himself is the source of power, because it thus keeps Him as the object before our souls. Thus in the case of Stephen, how it strengthened him as he beheld "Jesus standing on the right hand of God." It lifted him out of and above his circumstances, and enabled him to tread in the footsteps of his blessed Lord—he praying for his persecutors, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge," even as his Lord had cried, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." (Acts 7:55-60; Luke 23:34) In like manner, when Paul was buffeted by the messenger of Satan, he was taught to look away from himself to his Lord, as he was reminded, in answer to his thrice repeated prayer, "My grace is sufficient for thee." (2 Cor.

12:7-9) But it is in Philippians 3 that we have the effect of beholding Christ in the glory.

There we are permitted, as it were, to see the power streaming down into the soul of Paul, and changing him into the same image, from glory to glory.

But if Christ Himself is the source, the condition of the reception of the power is beholding Him—the eye directed to Him. The power is in Christ; but there is no channel through which it can flow into my soul if I am not looking upward to Him by faith. This is remarkably exemplified in the case of Peter. When he was permitted to get out of the ship and walk on the water to go to Jesus, all went well as long as his eye was upon Christ; but the moment he looked off, he began to sink. And so always. As long as Christ is before our souls, we receive power; but if our gaze is intercepted or diverted, we stumble and fall. This is the secret of all interrupted communion, deadness, or backsliding.

But, on the other hand, if Christ fill the vision of our soul, then the Spirit of the Lord, ungrieved and unhindered, can work; and He will in this case never cease to work in transforming power within us. The model is before our eyes; the Spirit works on, fashioning us after the likeness of the model; and we are thus changed from glory to glory. Remark, however, that since it is Christ in glory, who is the model to which we are to be conformed, though there be increasing moral conformity wrought out in us daily, the full result will not be reached until we are like Christ, when we see Him as He is; that is, when He comes again to receive us unto Himself, that where He is we may be also. Then since we shall be raised from among the dead, or changed, if the Lord should come before we fall asleep, we shall be like Him bodily as well as spiritually; we shall then be altogether conformed to the image of the Son (Phil. 3:20,21; Rom. 8:29).

In the meantime, while we wait for this full and blessed result, beholding with unveiled face the glory of the Lord, the Spirit is incessantly engaged in working out our moral transformation. There can therefore be no perfection according to God while we are in the body, and consequently no rest in attainment; for the goal is, as we have seen, Christ in the glory, and God has predestinated us to be conformed to Him, that He might be the First-born among many brethren. And what a goal! Well might Paul exclaim as he beheld it, “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but [this] one thing [I do], forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling (the calling on high) of God in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 3:13, 14) May we all be endued with the same ardent desire; and may we all know in like manner the attracting power of Christ in glory!

But there is another point to be noticed. The word translated “beholding as in a glass” is, as is well known, peculiar, and the words “as in a glass” are sometimes (for example, the New Translation) omitted as unnecessary. There seems indeed to be a double action implied in the verb—reflecting as well as receiving; the thought thus being, that while we behold we also reflect the glory of the Lord. This is undoubtedly true as to doctrine, whatever may be our judgment as to the exact force of the word; for we can never reflect the glory of the Lord—His moral glory—even in the slightest measure, excepting as we are with unveiled face beholding it. These two things cannot be dissevered. The saint whose eye is most steadily and constantly fixed on Christ is he who will most nearly walk as He walked. Sometimes we speak of copying Christ, or of the imitation of Christ; and surely the need of it cannot be too often pressed on our souls. But together with this, the truth is equally urgent that there cannot be any imitation of Christ apart from being occupied

with Him, as risen and glorified. I may admire the life of Christ down here; I may be attracted by the beauty of His perfect example; but I have no power to “follow in His steps,” unless my eye is upon Him where He now is in the glory. If, on the other hand, I am beholding the glory of the Lord, I shall most certainly reflect it in my walk and conversation.

It is this same truth in another form which is brought before us in the next chapter: “Therefore seeing we have received this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not.” Having then described the character of his walk as to it, the apostle proceeds: “But if our gospel be hid [veiled], it is hid [veiled] to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds [thoughts] of them which believe not, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, for the shining forth of the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (4:1-6). The subject, then, of the apostle’s ministry was “the gospel of the glory of Christ.” To qualify him for service, God had shined in his heart (see Gal. 1:15,16); and He had shined in his heart, that in the work of the ministry there might be the shining forth of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; so that (and the importance of the point cannot be over-estimated, though it is only incidentally connected with the subject in hand) preaching and reflecting a glorified Christ went on hand in hand. It may be, as indeed it was, that the apostle alludes to the shining forth of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ in his preaching; but there was also in the apostle’s case, and should be in every case, a growing moral conformity to Christ in glory connected with the work of his ministry.

In the same way God has caused the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ to shine into the hearts of all believers. This indeed was the first act of God’s grace which brought us into the position of beholding the glory of the Lord, in which, as we have seen, we are changed from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord. “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us” (2 Cor. 4:7). The treasure, then, is the light which God has caused to shine in our hearts—the knowledge of a glorified Christ—Christ indeed in us; the earthen vessels are our bodies. The question then is, How is the light to shine through I how, in other words, is the glory to be reflected?

It may be observed, first of all, that the very nature of the earthen vessel is calculated to obscure the light. Dense and opaque it obstructs the shining forth of the light within. So with the bodies of believers. Organs for the expression of the old, or Adam-life, they are hindrances as such, being what they now are, to the manifestation of “the life of Jesus” (vs. 10); and hence if the light is to shine forth, just as in the case of Gideon and his men, to whom there is here perhaps a tacit reference, the vessels must be broken; and this is precisely what we get in this chapter. How then are they to be broken? or rather, How were they broken in the case of Paul and his companions in labor? “We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus’ sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.” (vss. 8-11) We thus gather that God used the circumstances—the trials, difficulties, and persecutions of His servants to break their “earthen vessels;” that is, to repress and annihilate what was of mere nature or flesh, to bring death in upon all that might

obscure the shining forth of the light, and to enable them, through the Spirit, to mortify their members which were upon the earth, to keep the old man in the place of death, in order that the light—the life of Jesus—cleared from obstruction, might be made manifest in their body.

Such then is God's method of breaking our earthen vessels; namely, the application to us of the cross. But it is just this from which we shrink; and on this very account God in His tenderness and love often leads us into circumstances similar to those described here to do for us what we are unwilling to do for ourselves. Our shrinking from the cross would be less if we remembered the words—for Jesus' sake. If our hearts were more occupied with Him, so that we desired to have Him alone as our gain—if we were more constantly occupying our place, and beholding with unveiled face the glory of the Lord, we should long for the application of the cross to all and everything that was unsuited to Him, and hindered our manifestation of the life of Jesus. As it is, too frequently it is the case that God has to bring death in upon us and our associations, in the way of discipline, to discover to us our failure, to wean us from "the things which are seen," and to attract our hearts to Christ. This is a very different thing from being delivered to death for Jesus' sake. Then we can esteem it a privilege that it is given unto us in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake (Phil. 1:29); yea, we can rejoice that we are counted worthy to suffer shame for His name (Acts 5:41); and the very persecutions which are thus endured become the bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus for the clearer manifestation of His life in our body.

The word "alway" should also be observed in verse 11. We cannot be delivered to death in this way once for all, but there must be the constant application of the cross. Our Lord thus said, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Luke 9:23). The apostle was enabled to say, "I die daily" (1 Cor. 15:31). It must be so, from the fact that the flesh, though judicially gone from God's sight, is irremediable and unchangeable; and hence the need of incessant watchfulness, and unsparing fidelity in the application of the cross; for nothing that belongs to it, not even the Agag of its fairest forms, must be excepted, if the life of Jesus is to be made manifest.

But where, it may be asked, is the power for such a task? In the answer to this question lies the connection between the third and fourth chapters; for it is only as we are constantly beholding by faith the glory of the Lord that we shall be enabled to bear about in our body the dying of the Lord Jesus. Thus, if our eyes are fixed on a glorified Christ, if He fill the vision of our souls, the cross will be applied to self, and to everything connected with self; it will be our ardent desire and joy to know Him and the fellowship of His sufferings. Knowing and being occupied with (beholding with unveiled face) Christ in glory is thus the secret of all practical power—of power for the application of the cross, for reckoning ourselves dead, for moral transformation through the Spirit—yea, in a word, the secret of all power for the expression of the life of Jesus.

How blessedly simple! Through the unspeakable grace of our God, He has caused to shine in our hearts the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. By it He has brought us out of our distance, sin, and death, and set us down in His own presence, in the light as He is in the light, in all the acceptance of Christ Himself; and there we are permitted with unveiled face to behold the glory of the Lord (expression of our perfect nearness, and of our wondrous place); and while we behold that glory, the Spirit of the Lord transforms us morally into the image of Him on

whom we gaze, causes Christ in us (who is thus formed within us) to shine forth in what we are and do; and, showing us the worthlessness of everything around us in the light of that ineffable glory, strengthens us to bear about in our body the dying of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. Blessed be His name! En. D.

Ephesians

Chapter 1

We must introduce our meditations on this epistle by recurring a little to the ways of God from the beginning, because there is a wonderful unity in His counsels, and the whole volume sets its seal to the divine thought: "Known unto God are all His works from the beginning." Therefore, when we come to a scripture like this, it is well to pause and look about us, and see its relation to previous scriptures. If I come to a merely moral scripture, such as "Let him that stole, steal no more," I may take it and use it at once, and alone; but when it is a doctrinal or prophetic scripture, which opens the divine mind, I have to ask how it is introduced, and what is to come after it, because we are to be fraught with divine intelligence—"We have the mind of Christ."

The Epistle to the Hebrews unfolds the heavens, and speaks of heavenly calling, putting you in company with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; but it does not open the mystery of the church. The Epistle to the Ephesians opens the mystery of the church, but does not keep you in company with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We are advancing, and we are called to distinguish between the heavenly calling, and the calling of the church. So there is a fitness in considering the epistle to the Hebrews before the Epistle to the Ephesians.

Now, why do I say the Epistle to the Hebrews opens the heavenly calling? Because it associates you with Noah, Abraham and Moses. The earth, at the beginning, was given to the children of men. What did they do with it? They forfeited it. Then, what did God do with them?

Well, he opened heaven to them! He gave them the earth to enjoy; they soiled and lost it by sin. "Well," said He, "I'll open heaven to you." This is one way in which the grace of God abounds!

What should I say if one who, when I had abused the gift which he put in my hand, put a better gift in my other hand? This is God!

Was not Adam brought back to God, and Enoch taken to heaven? I have no doubt that Abraham had the heavenly calling. They looked for a better country; "that is a heavenly." Moses was carried up to Pisgah to bear witness of it. Enoch bore witness of it, and Elijah in a later dispensation. From the beginning there has been heavenly calling, but not church calling. So when the apostle comes to address the Hebrews, who were brought from a Jewish root, he talks of heavenly calling, but does not go beyond it. When he comes to address himself to the Ephesians, once a Gentile people, the worshippers of the goddess Diana (but apart from all Jewish connections) he unfolds the mystery of the church—the richest thing in the counsels of God. Let me say another thing. How did God unfold His purposes in the earth? He knew a family in the loins of Abraham. They flourished into a nation in the book of Exodus; then, under judges and prophets; but they did not ripen to the culminating point of glory till God put them under a king. He goes on from step to step, till the elect family flourished under Solomon into a kingdom. So it is with His heavenly purposes. It is not till the apostleship of Paul is set up that they unfold in the bright culminating point of the church. God is always consistent in His ways. Let the earth be the scene of His activities; we find

them unfolding till they reach the palmy days of Solomon. In His heavenly purposes we follow on, till we see the church at the highest point in creation— “The fullness of Him that filleth all in all.” So it is impossible not to stand and say: “Oh the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!”

Now, having prefaced thus, we stand before the Epistle to the Ephesians. It is desirable to come up to this writing with intelligence. Here we are listeners in heavenly scenes to the same kind of thing as we saw in earthly scenery.

Let me remind you of a passage in Colossians 1:25: “the dispensation of God which is given me for you, to fulfill the Word of God” —or, “to fill it out.” To fill out the revelation of God—a magnificent commentary of Paul on his own ministry. Was it not left to Solomon to display the closing purpose of God in the earth by heading it with a throne? It was left to Paul to reveal, in his ministry, the bright magnificent point of the heavenly Mysteries. We are brought up by him to the headship of Christ.

The apostle begins by addressing all the faithful in Christ Jesus. He steps over the Ephesians. So that we are all called to learn these things. “Who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.” This could, not be said of the patriarchs. “In heavenly places” they would have been associated with us; but these are blessings in company with Christ.

Then, having put you in this peculiar place, he unfolds the divine roll of blessings to you. First, chosen in Him before the world was. These high privileges began before the foundation of the world. Could I say that properly of Abraham? Certainly he was chosen before the foundation of the world, but you are chosen “in Him.” The divine purposes rested in a peculiar way on a peculiar people. Then, predestination always follows on election. Election touches the person; predestination the place or condition: “Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ.... He hath made us accepted in the Beloved.” Now, is not that a peculiar form of adoption! Do I believe that Adam was a son of God? Indeed I do. Do I believe that he was “accepted in the Beloved”? No; I do not. Do I believe that angels are sons of God? Indeed I do. Do I believe they are “accepted in the Beloved”? No; I do not. So that here again is a peculiarity. It is an adoption of the highest order. We have the joy and liberty of the Beloved’s sonship. He goes on to say, “In whom we have redemption by His blood, the forgiveness of sins.” Why, to be sure, that is a thing of course. Who would think of asking a person up in heavenly places, “Are you forgiven?” Did you ever observe, in the parable of the prodigal son, that the father never says he forgives him? How could he? How could he frame his lips to say, “I forgive you”? You and I ought to walk in the sunshine of our calling in such a way as to assume forgiveness, as a thing at the foot of the hill, while we are up at the heights. Let the music and dancing, the ring and the shoes, tell me I am forgiven. So the father treats the prodigal, and so the Spirit treats us in Ephesians 1. Yet the soul is constantly busying itself about forgiveness, when it should be viewing the magnificence of its calling in Christ. There is a style in Love, that love could never rid itself of. The father would have wept to say, “I forgive you.” Would not you be ashamed to tell one coming back in sorrow, confessing his fault, “I forgive you”? Talk of a father, on the neck of his weeping, penitent child, saying, “I forgive you!” How little we know of the ways of love! Now, to go on. He abounds towards us in all wisdom and knowledge, having opened to us the bosom secret—all things gathered together in Christ. That is a secret never made known before. In the prophet Isaiah we get a

beautiful picture of the millennial earth; but do we ever get the millennial heavens with Christ at their head? Was it ever said by Isaiah, that all things in heaven and earth should be headed up in the Glorified Man? “In whom also we have obtained an inheritance.” We are heirs with Him. Was that ever unfolded before? And till the inheritance comes, we get the Holy Ghost. We get Him here under two titles—a seal, and an earnest. A seal of present salvation; an earnest of future inheritance.

When I look at the place of the Holy Ghost, in the mystery of redemption, it is wonderful to see the official glories that attach to Him here on earth. In the Epistle to the Hebrews, we have the official glories of Christ. Here we are called to witness the official glories of the Holy Ghost in this dispensation. What a blessed, glorious thing—to take the secrets of the divine bosom, and make them known to us! To seal us by His presence as possessors of present salvation, and to be the earnest of our inheritance! All, it is wonderful! I could not move a step in company with a soul not pregnant with the blessedness of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, being the one with whom we have to do. “The purchased possession” here is the whole scene—the whole creation. It is purchased, but not yet redeemed. The blood of Christ has purchased the creation as well as you; but it is not yet redeemed, and while in that condition you have the Holy Ghost as an earnest. When it is redeemed, you will be the heir of it. Are you redeemed yet? You are purchased, but you wait for the adoption; to wit, the redemption of your body, and that you will never get till God puts forth power as well as blood.

The Apocalypse is the display of redemption; the gospel is the display of purchase; but the purchased thing is not redeemed till God puts forth power to rescue it from the hands of the destroyer. At verse 15 the apostle ceases to be a teacher, and becomes an intercessor; and you will find that he never in prayer pulls down what as a teacher he had built up. You will sometimes hear people asking God to love them. I could never make such a prayer as that; I am to pray for a deeper sense of His love. Paul does not ask God to give them this, and the other; but he asks Him that they may have the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, that the eyes of their understanding may be, enlightened. Oh for a better heart to know these things! but to ask God to love me, to make me a co-heir with Christ, to appoint me to heavenly places in Him! I will make a prayer much more humbling than that, I am so blessed in my calling; so poor in my enjoyment! If God has lit a candle, I will not ask Him to light it, but to take the film from my eyes, that I may see what He has done, what this magnificent purpose is, and the power that has brought us there. So he prays that you may have an eye to discern the brightness of the heavenly glory, and the resurrection-power that has conducted you from such ruins to such glories. AMEN

Chapter 2

We have reached the second chapter, but we must look back at the first to resume the course of our thoughts. We were observing that we must distinguish between the heavenly calling and the church calling. The church has heavenly calling; but it does not follow that all who have heavenly calling have church calling. Heavenly calling arose from divine disappointment in the earth. The earth was given to Adam. Adam forfeited it, and the Lord then takes His elect to heaven.

The thought introduces you to the idea of relief.

The Lord found another way to bless His elect. If the earth is lost, where will He put His saints"! The blessed God of all grace says, "I know how I will dispose of them; I will put them in heaven." The Lord never merely repairs a breach; He brings a better thing out of the ruin. So, the forfeiture of the earth opened heaven, and the heavenly man finds himself in a better place than if he had never lost the earth. The two dealings of God with the earth are in government and in calling out, strangership and citizenship alternately. Citizenship, when God is dealing with and settling the earth; strangership, when God is calling people out of it. He has now called the church into strangership. That is the way to introduce our thoughts to the present dispensation. We see how God takes His present dispensational attitude. The earth is polluted; and God has put upon Himself to take His people to heaven. It is a dispensation of intense strangership. But the church is something more than that. Moses and Abraham were taken to heaven as witnesses of heavenly calling. Chapter 1 of this epistle introduces a new thought. We are not only in heaven, but in Christ in heaven. See how full the chapter is with the word "in." We are blessed in heavenly places in Christ—accepted in the Beloved. God has chosen us in Him In whom we have obtained an inheritance. We are raised in Christ. Seated in Him in heavenly places; and when the world has told its story, you will find yourself a co-inheritor in Christ. That is a new thing; that is the body of Christ. That is one peculiarity of the church.

Let me call your thoughts a little aside. We see in the argument of the Galatians, Abraham brought into our company. And in the argument of the Hebrews, Abraham is brought into our company. Not so in the Ephesians. This is the divine accuracy of the Holy Ghost. In Galatians, we do not get the church; we get sonship and heirship. I do not doubt that Abraham was as perfect as I am; but the moment the Spirit unfolds and displays the body of Christ, Abraham has no place in the argument. We lose sight of him. I see you and myself; but not Abraham. Is there not a meaning in these distinctions? Can I put myself in the presence of three such august witnesses to the mind of Christ, and not see these things? I have no warrant for saying that Abraham takes a place in the church. Now, let me just ask you, Are you prepared for this? Is there any analogy in the divine dealings? I think there is—By-and-by, the Lord will fill the whole face of the earth. All nations will bow to His scepter. The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. But is that all I get in the millennial earth? No; I get the twelve tribes in special nearness. I get the land of Israel in special relationship to God. And I get in the midst of the tribes a royal people, and a priestly people. This is further separation; and I get a Jerusalem. No one can read the prophetic letter, and not see that Jerusalem will have her special place, seated in her beauty, "The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob." With that divine analogy I travel to the heavens. There will be beautiful varieties there, the Noble Army of Martyrs, the Goodly Fellowship of the Prophets. But, as Jerusalem will take the chief place on earth, so the church will take the chief place in heaven. So we may be prepared for what is revealed under the title of "the mystery."

Do you remember when Israel stood between the Red Sea and the hosts of Egypt, what is said to them? "Stand still, and see the salvation of God." They had got from under the claims of the destroying angel. They were in the salvation of God; but God had secrets in the cloud not yet unfolded to them. There was a glory there that could scatter the hosts in the Red Sea. It could turn one side, and take the wheels off the Egyptian chariots. It could turn the other, and make crystal walls on either side the Israelites. So, in standing before the Ephesians, we do not come to see

justification by blood, but to let the rich purpose of God unfold itself to our gaze. How blessed these divine ways are! Are we satisfied to know the blood on the lintel has delivered us? All leans on that; but still I say, Stand by, and mark the secrets—go and inquire into the cloudy glory before you. This is just the attitude to take up in Ephesians. Now, mark this. The moment the history of Israel closed in the Babylonish captivity, the glory departed. The glory never went over to the Gentile. The sword went; the glory never. A great deal of your intelligence of Scripture depends on your taking up a right attitude in presence of it. If you know what point you are standing on, it gives you a divine advantage. Now, in standing before Ezekiel, we see that the glory has gone up to heaven, and the sword has gone to the Gentile. Has the glory ever come back? It has; not to accompany the sword of Caesar, but shrouded in the humiliation of the man of Nazareth. The sword had failed to keep the earth in order. We know where the glory dwells. It has not accompanied the sword of Caesar, as it did the sword of David and Solomon. The glory is as much apart from the sword now, as when it went up before Ezekiel, and the sword went to the Gentile.

The powers that be, are not ordained of Jesus; they are ordained of God as God. Power belongs to God in His supreme place. Jesus expresses God brought into certain conditions and relationships. All dignities belong to Jesus in title; but we could not look at Him yet and call Him King of kings, and Lord of lords. The epitome of the Remnant's religion is, "Render unto Cesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's." In a theocracy, Caesar and God are together. Now, I must recognize God's domain, and Caesar's domain. I must take knowledge of the confusion, and not say that the glory is returned to link itself with the sword; or, He who said, "Who made me a ruler or a judge," would have been a very different person in this world.

Do you and I detect the unity and variety of the divine volume? It is a beautiful whole, but infinite in variety.

Thus, having seen our attitude, we are entering on the second chapter. We are let down a little here, but only to take up an important truth; to see out of what we are called. The chapter distinguishes itself into three parts. From verse 1 to verse 7, we have the subject of death and life; from verse 7 to verse 10, we have the subject of good works; and from verse 10 to the end, distance and nearness.

What manner of people were we when God took us up to baptize us into the body of Christ? Our condition was death—a profound moral ruin. What is the verdict that lies on us? "Dead in trespasses and sins;" but, then, what condition are we brought into by Christ? The contrast is very fine. It is life of the highest order that has been imparted to us. We are linked with Christ Himself. How suitable, having shown us our high calling in the first chapter, to show us in the second the place out of which we were called! Our death-estate in nature could not be lower; our life-estate in Christ could not be higher.

Another subject is good works, and I am charmed with the beauty of it. "Not of works, lest any man should boast."

As far as good works could have been the ground of boasting, they are shut out by God; but you are created of God in such a way that you must be bringing them forth. John's epistle shows us the same thing; our very new creation secures them.

Then, to the end of the chapter, we get the subject of alienation and nearness. This is just like death and life. Two things attach to us—in our own person, either death or life; in relation to God, either alienation or nearness. I look at myself, and see death in me; but as to life, I have been quickened with the highest form of life a creature could enjoy. So, by nature, nothing could be more distant than my alienation— “No hope, without God in the world.” Essentially cut off from Him, my nearness now in Christ is ineffable. It could not be more perfect. It is right we should have low thoughts of ourselves; but the value of Christ rests upon every stone of the temple. The whole temple is built in the Lord; and then, when built, what other glory is put upon it? The Holy Ghost dwells there.

Thus, we have disposed of the first two chapters. The first unfolds our position in Christ; the second draws us aside to look at ourselves. He shows me first, in my own person, dead, then in alienation from God. Then he reverses it, and shows me what manner of life I have got, and what manner of nearness I have got; and there is not a single feeble thought in it. Have you feeble thoughts? They belong to nature. They are not the breathings of the Holy Ghost. They are not the counsels of God touching you. He is not weak when He delineates your condition in nature. He is equally strong when He delineates your condition in Christ Jesus.

Chapter 3

We will now read from the opening of chapter 3 to chapter 4:16. When we meditate on such a scripture as the Epistle to the Ephesians, we ought to take care that knowledge be not over-valued; that we do not give it a disproportionate place. When Nicodemus came to the Lord to inquire into heavenly secrets, He turned him back from being a mere enquirer as to heavenly objects, to begin with himself. So Paul refused to bring out the mystery to the Corinthians, because of their low moral standing. So we ought to approach Ephesian truth rather cautiously, looking at our own moral condition. The Lord's dealing with Nicodemus was morally of one character with Paul's dealing with the Corinthians. So there is a moral title to breathe Ephesian atmosphere, or else we might get giddy on such heights. We must tread softly, not timidly, as if they were not our own. These deepest secrets of the bosom. belong to us; but the vessel is to be fitted morally to receive them.

Now, we were distinguishing, in the first chapter, between the heavenly calling and the calling of the church; and, in the second chapter, we were looking at our death and life condition, and our alienated and near condition. In entering on the third chapter, we resume the mystery. Did you ever see a moral beauty in this chapter being a parenthesis? It has struck me a good deal, the mystery being a parenthesis, that it should be here unfolded in a parenthetical chapter.

Here we get the church more largely opened out to us. Paul was the depository of this mystery, and he got it by revelation. You will say he got everything by revelation; and so he did, as he tells us in Galatians. Where does Paul date his apostleship? From Christ in the flesh? No; from Christ in Glory. Where the ether apostles? From Christ in the flesh—the Lord walking down here. But Paul never knew Christ in the flesh. So specific was his calling, and so specific the truth committed to him. By revelation, then, the mystery was made known to him. Now, why does he say, "In few words"? Why, if he had spent chapters on it, it would have been but few words. If all that the Lord had done had been written, the world itself would not contain the books that should be written, John tells us, in a note of admiration. Just so; this thing was so magnificent that to spend chapters on it would have been but few words. You and I want to find these notes of admiration in ourselves. They are very suited to us. "He made known unto me the mystery—which in other ages was not made known—that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs," not with the Jews merely, but with Christ. The body will have Jews in it; but still it is characteristically Gentile. So he loses sight of the Jews, and tells the Gentiles that they are fellow-heirs with Christ.

Here we have a new kind of inheritance—to be of the same body, and fellow-heirs with the Son of His love; not Gentiles grafted on a body of Jews. "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints." This is characteristic. The Jews were taken up, because they were the least of all nations. You were taken up, because you were a poor uncircumcised distant Gentile, with no hope or God; and Paul was taken up because he was less than the least of all saints. He takes the beggar from the dung-hill. That is the way of God. Now, what was the operation of the mystery? "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the

manifold wisdom of God.” This reminds us of Colossians 1:25. Paul’s ministry came “to fill out the Word of God.” You will say: Will you put it above the ministry of Christ? Indeed, I do, dispensationally. The ways of God shine brighter and brighter unto the perfect day. What light we stand in! We are in the light as God is in the light. The multiform variegated wisdom of God is now told out in all its forms of beauty. That which I now get is high calling into fellow-heirship—one body with the Lord of glory. I have reached the very head itself; and sit down in sight of the coronation of Christ and His elect. So I have completed it; I have reached the manifold wisdom of God. Then He comes down a little, “In whom we have boldness and confidence by the faith of Him.” How He loves to put that foundation under our feet! If we are in the light where God dwells, we are in the citadel of strength which God has erected. It would not do to be in the light, if we were not surrounded by the citadel.

The apostle now becomes a suppliant, as he did before in chapter 1. Having again rehearsed the mystery, he becomes, in verse 14, a man of prayer for us. In chapter 1 he prays to the God of our Lord Jesus; and he prays that you may know the glory that awaits you, and the strength that is conducting you there; and he prays to the God of our Lord Jesus.

Here his prayer is, that you may know the love that has destined you there; and he prays to the Father of our Lord Jesus. His heart instinctively turns itself to the Father’s bosom, which is the source of all our eternal blessedness. “Out of thy heart Thou didst it,” as David says. And does not your heart instinctively dictate this distinction, as you find yourself in prayer with God in glory, the Father in love, and Christ in salvation? When I think of glory and strength, I am in company with the God of the Lord Jesus. When I think of love, I am in company with the Father of the Lord Jesus. These are evidences in the Book that address themselves to the conscience. Scripture is a great self-evidencing body of light. Then he makes his prayer. One little word we must pause on—“Of whom the whole family.” Critics say a better translation is, “every family,” and I accept it from the whole context.

I believe there are to be households in heaven, as well as on earth. I believe, when I take an intelligent view of the coming millennial heavens, I see various families, as well as on the millennial earth. I see principalities, thrones, dominions; and I see the church as the body of Christ, carried and seated above all. There may be, as was quoted before, “The noble army of martyrs,” “The goodly fellowship of the prophets.” There may be a patriarchal household, and a prophetic household in the world to come; but the church of the living God, in company with her Head, will be there above all.

It is a fine thing to read astronomy and geography after this manner!

There will be a heaven, by-and-by, studded with the sons of God—with morning stars! and there will be no jealousies or envyings among them.

We want largeness of thought; and largeness of thought need not take us out of accuracy of thought.

Having closed this parenthetical chapter, and its parenthetical purpose, we are entering the fourth chapter. He resumes what he was saying in chapter 3:1: “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord.” That again is characteristic, that the church should have her high calling told out from a prison in Rome. If we walked a natural path, and died a natural death, we should go from prisons and

stakes to Christ in glory. The saint should be an unresisting witness against the world. The world thinks separation from it an insult ; and it will not be insulted without revenge. So Paul unfolds the mystery from the gloomy dungeons of Rome. The church is a martyred thing on the earth. Now he tells us to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. We should be cherishing that temper of soul that makes us in honor esteem one another. What a beautiful casket in which to deposit such a treasure! "All lowliness, and meekness, with long-suffering." In the moral history of Christendom, pride has broken that casket. Then he shows what the unity of the Spirit is, which we cannot destroy. We may break the casket, and expose the treasure; but we cannot break it. Do we come from north, south, east, and west, Jews and Gentiles? When we sit down together, it is in one Lord, one faith, one baptism. We should be cherishing that temper of soul that makes us in honor esteem one another. What a beautiful casket in which to deposit such a treasure! "All lowliness, and meekness, with long-suffering." In the moral history of Christendom, pride has broken that casket. Then he shows what the unity of the Spirit is, which we cannot destroy. We may break the casket, and expose the treasure; but we cannot break it. Do we come from north, south, east, and west, Jews and Gentiles? When we sit down together, it is in one Lord, one faith, one baptism.

We must pause a little on the verses that follow. Suppose I say, "We must look back to Genesis 3." You may answer, "These are very distant scriptures, both locally and in the material." But there is a beautiful connection between them. In Genesis 3 we see the victory of the serpent, and the ruin of man. In Ephesians 4 we see the conquest of Christ, and the redemption of man. It is the undoing of the mischief of Genesis 3 Satan made man a drudge on the earth, and a captive to his lusts. The Lord comes to make the devil and his hosts His captives. There is a magnificent moral opposition in this. And what has He done with the old captive He puts him in a more wonderful place than that out of which Satan took him When He comes to make the hosts of hell His captives, He will let them learn what He can do with him that was once a captive. He has made us independent of everything. We are not only made proof against the deceiver; but we grow up by resources given us. The church grows up with energies deposited in herself. He makes captivity captive, on the one hand; and, on the other hand, shows what He is about to do with that poor thing that the serpent once ruined. The story is reversed since Genesis 3. We get the captivity of man, and the glorification of man. There the doctrinal part ends. Now how shall our souls deal with it? Shall we be prepared for such magnificent disclosures of God's mind? Are they too weighty for us? I have often felt it so. Intercourse with men on the footstool is so pleasant; but that arises from a quantity of the human mixing with that which should be unmixed. So he prays that we might be strengthened with might by the Spirit in the inner man. The human mind is not able to measure these things. If my heart were opened to the sense of what the Lord Jesus is, I should say, "Nearer, my Lord, to Thee; nearer to Thee." The footstool may be very pleasant, but, "nearer to Thee!" That Christ may dwell in my heart, and not the scene around me; and that I may know His love, which passeth knowledge.

Chapter 4

I observed that the doctrinal part of the epistle closes at chapter 4:16. We will read to the end of the chapter. Let us just retrace the doctrinal teaching of the epistle. The first grand characteristic we are given about the calling of the church is, that it is a calling in Christ. So we find in chapter 1 the word in abounds. "Seated in heavenly places in Him;" "Accepted in the Beloved." And it is not only present possessions in Christ, but our interest in Him was before the world began (vs. 4), and

after the world closes. (vs. 11). You will tell me all the ransomed rest on sovereignty; and so they do; and the very angels too who kept their first estate; but the character of the church-election is, that it is not mere abstract election, but election “in Him,” and you never leave Him.

The church finds herself in closest connection with Christ from before the foundation of the world till the glory after the world has run its course. This is the first thought about the church. These things are not predicated of Israel. It is the peculiar calling of the church to be linked and bound up with Christ. Then this church has been “hid in God.” It was, so to speak, God’s bosom secret. The secret that lay nearest to His heart, and deepest in His counsels. We do not find the election of the worthies of old spoken of in that way of mysterious beauty and intimacy. It was hid in God from all ages up to the ministry of Paul. The Epistle to the Ephesians is an instance of accumulation of language. Language grows on the thoughts of the Spirit Himself. Will you tell me, if your soul is bubbling up with some commanding thought, that you will not tell it out again and again, multiply words about it, and even become eloquent? For the heart, not the head, is the parent of eloquence. That is the style of the Spirit in bringing out this secret in this epistle. We get “the praise of His glory;” and “the riches of the glory;” and “the praise of the glory of His grace;” and “the exceeding riches of His grace.” So in chapter 2, when He comes to show those who are the objects of this calling. When He shows their death-estate, description after description is given of them; and when you are brought to see your nearness, again the Spirit multiplies descriptions of what you are.

The consummation of revelation waited on Paul’s ministry, the Gentile apostle. When he brought out this secret, it was the last in the revelation of God, and it was the crown of all the divine purposes. Let me refer you to a little analogy; how did the work of the old creation proceed? One thing after another was created in its beauty, and man came at the last. He was put in the garden; and what was his condition there? He was at home there; but when the cattle were brought up to be named by him, he was not only at home in his own proper place, but he gets the lordship of everything before him He was in his dominions. Was that all? There remained a thing behind, and that thing was the chiefest. He had everything before he got the woman. It was the last thing revealed, and the tip-top of his happiness.

It opened his lips. “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.” Adam was happy before, but he was not abounding. When the woman was given to him, it was the height of his joy. So we ought to be prepared for the church waiting for the ministry of Paul. I should be prepared for the last ministry bringing out the richest thing in the counsels of God.

I get the same thing in the story of Jerusalem. When Israel went into Canaan, the sword of Joshua reduced the land to their possession. So it went on in the days of the Judges; and in the days of King Saul they still remained in possession; but all that time Jerusalem was a Jebusite city, all through that season this favored spot, this chief spot in the land—this queen, destined to fix the eye of God—was in the clutches of the Gentile; and it was not till the days of David, God’s own king, that it became the chief absorbing center of everything in the land: the sanctuary, the throne, the place where the tribes went up. It was the chiefest of everything, and it came last. Do we not get there an image of Ephesian truth? God delights Himself in analogies. What are parables but divine analogies? And so, in the very end of the book, we see the woman reappearing as the last and chiefest. The victories have been won—the kingdom seated in dignity; the very last thing in

the book is the revelation of the church coming down to show herself in her beauty. (Rev. 21) So I am prepared to listen to Paul without charging him with arrogancy when he says he fills out the Word of God.

Again, the revelation of the church is the richest display of God in grace, glory, and wisdom. The calling of Israel was a rich display of Him. Be it so. God cannot put His hand to anything without displaying Himself thus. But when we come to listen to the mystery of the church, the body and bride of Christ, we are instructed to know that grace in its glory, in its riches, in its exceeding riches, has been manifested, and manifested in the face of creation; in the hearing and seeing of principalities and powers in heavenly places; and there is a simplicity about all this. Does magnificence touch simplicity? It would not be simply divine, if it were not unutterably glorious. If it lay deepest in the divine mind, it was most full of grace, glory, and wisdom. Principalities and powers shall hold their breath while listening to the story that the calling of the church is rehearsing.

Now, what are its titles? It is called the body and the bride; and what do they mean? The body is the expression of this—that the church is set in the highest place of dignity. As the bride, she is set in the nearest place of affection. As the body of Christ, occupying the chiefest point in dignity, all that is in this world, and in that which is to come, will be beneath her. He will be seated above all; and the church, which is His body, is the fullness of Him that filleth all in all. As the bride, she will be in the nearest place of affection. You cannot be too near to the person you love. As the bride of Christ, the church is set close to His heart. The church is destined to be to the heart of Christ what the woman was to Adam. Chapter 5 is as the utterance of Adam over the woman “We are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones,” is a reechoing of the ecstatic utterance of the first man over the first woman.

If we love a person, we love to see them in dignity and glory. There you are set in the tip-top place of dignity, and, as the bride, in the nearest place of affection. You might be surprised to hear me say that the Lord Jesus did not complete the revelation of God. When you read the four Gospels, do you read them as the full picture of gospel grace? The Lord’s ministry was a transitional time. Till His death was accomplished, He had not the platform for the display of full gospel grace, or the instrument for forming the church. How could you form a thing with nit the instrument? The Spirit was not given; and the Head was not yet glorified. The opening of the Book of God prepares me for the mystery, and the close of the book shuts me up to it, and seals it on my apprehension, as we now see.

But in the Epistle to the Ephesians, we get not merely the church, but saints individually. (Chapter 5 and 6) We do not lose our personality. This is said to be the meaning of chapter 4:12. That is an individual thing. The business of gifts is with you individually: “He gave some apostles..... for the perfecting of the saints.” There is a deep intimacy and personality between me and Christ that nothing can ever touch. So the first business of gifts was with each individually, “For the perfecting of the saints.” Then, let the perfected saints set themselves to the work of the ministry and to the edifying of the body. Consequently, in Corinthians, when he had the mystery to bring out, he says, “We speak wisdom among them that are perfect.” So, when we come to practical details, we are addressed individually: “That ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk,” and so on; “Who, being past feeling,” that is, a seared and hardened conscience, with no sense of their own

lasciviousness. "But ye have not so learned Christ; if so be that ye have heard Him, and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus."

The introduction of the word Jesus here shows personality; and do not you love a personal lesson? Do not you delight to think that you and Christ have a business that none can interfere with? Look at John's Gospel, as a beautiful picture of the sinner and Christ together. We do not find the Lord in John as a social man, working with apostles. He works alone with the sinner. It is very sweet to see the Spirit refusing to lose sight of the individual. "And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness." This is a much richer creation than the first. Adam was the only object in the first creation that carried an understanding; but you could not say he was created "after God in righteousness and true holiness." We are told to put away lying, as being members one of another. "Be ye angry, and sin not." Anger may be as holy a feeling as any other; but do not retain it, so as to let it degenerate into nature. Then, resist "the devil. Let him that stole steal no more." This is very beautiful. He is not merely to cease from stealing, but to become a workman for others. "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, and grieve not the Holy Spirit of God." Our works are looked at; our words; and now our tempers.

Are you not thankful that Christianity legislates for every bit of you! But what dignity! Your lips may be employed in communicating grace to the hearers; and your thoughts, either in refreshing or grieving the Holy Spirit of God!

"Forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." This is a change from "The Lord's Prayer." There you are instructed to know that God will measure Himself by you. "Forgive.... as we forgive." Here is quite the reverse. I am to measure myself by God; "forgiving, as God hath forgiven you." This shows, as we were observing before, that the Lord's ministry was a transitional thing; it had not come out into the full glory of salvation. Now a ministry has gone forth for the perfecting of us individually, and for our edification as the body of Christ.

Chapter 5

We have observed that the doctrinal part of the epistle closed at chapter 4:16. Then, from that to chapter 6:9, we get the practical part, and we get conflict in the end.

Read now chapter 5, and to chapter 6:9; the practical details of Christian life. I should like, first, to say a little about precept.

If we consult the Epistles to the Romans and the Colossians, we shall find in them a different construction from the Philippians. There the apostle is eminently a pastor; looking at the souls of the Philippians. But in the Ephesians, Romans, Colossians, he is a teacher; therefore in them we get doctrine, followed by precept. Now, why do we get precepts in the epistles? Do you always get your conduct directly from precepts No; but by putting your mind in connection with Christ Himself, and the grace of God in your calling. So we get in Titus: "The grace of God.... hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly;" that is, if I know the moral virtue of the grace in which I stand, I shall be taught, without precepts, to live soberly, righteously, and godly. Peter tells us exactly the same thing: "Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be?" and again, "Seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent." There is no precept to be diligent; but the eye of the soul is directed to the glory, and to the dissolution of all things present; and it says what

manner of persons ought we to be! So practical power derives itself from the grace of our calling.

We get the same thing in the book of Genesis; there are no precepts there, but the patriarchs lived holy lives (through the Spirit, surely) by virtue of their calling. One is called out by “the God of glory.” It is said, as on the lips of Joseph, “How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” It is not that he had precepts; but He looked at God. So in your daily walk you are not commonly looking at precepts, but at Christ. But why, then, the precepts? For several reasons.

Precepts serve as tests. If a soul is backsliding, you may use them in discipline. It is very well, in such a case, to have a well-defined precept to guide you.

The Attractive Power of Christ Crucified; the Separating Power of Christ at His Coming

John 3:11-17; 12:20-33; 1 Thess. 4:13-18.

The history of man has been failure and ruin throughout, and Scripture is not silent in its testimony as to this, either in the Old or New Testament. The second chapter of John furnishes a striking proof of this statement; whether that scripture be regarded from a moral or dispensational point of view, the same solemn reality is inscribed upon it. Let us examine for a little the concluding verses of that chapter. "Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, in the feast day, many believed in His name, when they saw the miracles which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself unto them, because He knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man: for He knew what was in man." Here, then, is a fact of the deepest moment, and one specially necessary to remember in these days, when human ingenuity is taxed to its utmost, to produce an effect on man as he is: if his feelings can be wrought upon in any way, then it is expected a lever power has been placed underneath him, whereby mighty results may show forth themselves in him. This being the case pre-eminently just now, it is well to have God's estimate of the value of all such efforts. It is said in the feast day at Jerusalem many believed in His name, seeing the miracles Jesus did; yet that unto such Jesus did not commit Himself, knowing man, and what was in man. Does anyone inquire what point or force has such an utterance with respect to the subject in hand? Much every way, but specially that in the next chapter, Jesus declares to the master in Israel, the positive necessity of a new man; the fact is, there must be a new nature, a creature of God, born of water and the Spirit—the old can neither be trusted nor improved; no power in heaven or earth can ameliorate man; he may be convinced as to mind, he may be reformed as to outward habits, as we may have seen the once cold and negative skeptic, changed into the respectable citizen who gives an outward credence to all the great facts of Christianity; or as we may see the drunkard and profligate man, outwardly turned into the sober and steady man; but all this touches not the springs within, these are left in their nature and source, corrupt and irreparably bad.

Now herein lies the moral beauty and magnificence of the cross of Christ, that no one in heaven or earth, could conceive as the blessed God did, or accomplish as the eternal Son did, that and that alone which could meet the desperate nature of the case. So perfectly has God been glorified about the ruin of man, that not only are mined creatures like us, constituted the righteousness of God in Christ; but believers in Him are blessed up to the very heights of that glory where God's right hand has exalted our Savior and our Lord. There are two sides in this wonderful economy of grace, God's side and man's side; as to the latter, the Word is unmistakable, "ye must be born again." "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." As to the former, the word is equally significant, "the Son of Man must be lifted up." How completely these two sides of truth with their respective aspects, combine in winding up man's history as such; without a spark of goodness in himself, he had not even the appreciation of it in

another; if it had been there the blessed Son of God would have drawn it forth; but, alas! we know too well that it was in the presence of manifested goodness as seen in Jesus, that the badness and hatred of man for all that was lovely and divine was most witnessed. The historical fact recorded in the Old Testament, with which John 3 is associated, is very instructive. We are carried back to Numbers 21, which describes a scene in the thirty-ninth year of Israel's wilderness pilgrimage, rebellion of such a character sprang up in the camp, as to bring down upon the people the punishment of death, and death too of such a nature, even the poisonous venom of fiery serpents!

This marked change in the ways of God with Israel calls for notice on our part. Let it be observed how up to this point every curative process had been resorted unto and tried; but now as it were in the very close, the last year of wilderness wandering, the blessed God exposes man in his true light, as one whom no curative process could reach, and introduces that which pointed on to other days, which pre-figured that redemption which was no afterthought with God—that which was nothing less than the introduction of life into the midst of death. If in the midst of life we are in death, how very blessed to know that in the midst of death there is life; and oh, what life! No less a life than that which has gained the victory over death, and him who had the power of death!

“Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live.” Observe, there is no thought whatever of setting aside the judgment of God. Where would be righteousness in that? And if, on the other hand, it were all righteousness, in peremptory destruction, where were the love? Herein then shines out God's wisdom, in that He provides an answer commensurate with His own nature to His moral claims. God ever sustains His relations with us, not only according to His own nature, but also after a manner which carries security and confidence to us. This, the serpent of brass put upon a pole, was to Israel, and this the Son of Man lifted up upon the cross is to poor sinners today. The death of Christ was historically, “in the end of the age.” Every trial had only brought out the solemn fact that hope alone was in God; and then it was that He, in whose nature all the springs of love and mercy were, came forth to show Himself able, not only to vindicate His righteous attributes in the face of rebellion and revolt, but able at the same time, and as well, to save the guilty rebel, and to give him the place of a son and heir—an heir of God and joint-heir with Christ. Marvelous grace of our God, who is “wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working.”

Now, observe how the Son of Man lifted up on the cross is set forth as the resource and attractive object of poor hearts, all whose hopes and joys had departed and fled; just as the serpent of brass lifted on the pole, in the midst of Israel's misery and distress, was the one point whither dying ones were attracted and blessed. In the eyes of man, what could be more futile or contemptible? So Christ crucified, the Son of Man lifted up, writes scorn on all the wisdom of man, and is scorned thereby; that which was a stumbling-block to the Jew, and foolishness to the Greek, is God's wisdom and God's power, and is, as well, the one spot where weary hearts overburdened with sin find shelter and rest. We shall find the same blessed facts brought out in John 12. Let us turn to the Scripture for a little. It was a wonderful moment for Jesus; Mary's affection and sympathy entering into its peculiarity, anoints His body for the burying; the kingdom is present before His eyes and thoughts; for Israel welcomed Him, at least for the moment, and the Greeks want to “see Jesus.” Is there any reason why He should die in order to take it? Does not every affection of your heart resent the impious thought? But does not your soul bow down and worship in His presence

who could have claimed the kingdom as His own, but would not without dying, because His love would associate with Himself in the possession of it, poor things like us “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit;” and then there opens out before the Savior’s eyes the value, import, glory of His work. “Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me. This He said, signifying what death He should die.” Being thus lifted up from the earth, He became the attractive object for weary souls in a world that had departed from God; as another has blessedly expressed it, “By death, He morally and judicially destroyed him who had the power of death.” It was the total and entire annihilation of all the rights of the enemy, over whomsoever and whatsoever it might be, when the Son of God and Son of man bore the judgment of God, as man, in obedience unto death. All the rights that Satan possessed through man’s disobedience, and the judgment of God upon it, were only rights in virtue of the claims of God upon man, and come back to Christ alone. And being lifted up between God and the world in obedience on the cross, bearing that which was due to sin, Christ became the point of attraction for all men living, that through Him they might draw nigh to God. While living, Christ ought to have been owned as the Messiah; lifted up from the earth as a victim before God, being no longer of the earth as living upon it, He was the point of attraction towards God for all those who, living on earth, were alienated from God, as we have seen, that they might come to Him there (by grace), and have life through the Savior’s death. Wondrous spot this, which thus forms a meeting-place between God and ruined man! And how must it not have stood out before His soul at this moment, when the great constituent parts of the kingdom, in which He is to be glorified had passed before the Lord? And is it too much to say that the “much fruit” which His precious death was to bring forth, both as regards His Father’s counsels and glory, and us, the children of His love, was beyond everything to His heart?

There is another point of peculiar beauty here. Let us observe it well. It is a festive scene; all are, as it were, in the joy of the Feast of Tabernacles; but Jesus is solitary and alone—death is before His Spirit, and not the kingdom with its honors and joys. But this solitariness of Jesus here is only in keeping with all His blessed path on earth; He was ever in life the solitary man, His heart looking on to the time when He should enter into the deepest and most profound loneliness, to leave it behind Him forever. Do our hearts, beloved, grasp the moral magnificence of these words—“much fruit”? Have we the divine appreciation of such result of the Savior’s death? Do we carry in our bosoms the overpowering fact that we are part of that much fruit? Is it a small thing to know that a Christian is a man of another generation from the first Adam? Blessed it is surely to receive through His name present pardon and peace, a full and final discharge on the merits of His death; but to think that I am part of the harvest of the Savior’s death, part of that company whom He has brought through His death to stand in His own place before His Father and God, part of that assembly in the midst of which He praises, part of that family that He confesses as His brethren—not ashamed to do so— “Behold, I and the children which God hath given Me;” all this, and much more, is past all human thought, and silent adoration is the only proper attitude of the soul introduced into the presence of such grace and glory.

I turn now to the other branch of our subject; namely, “The separating power of Christ at His coming.” The scripture which unfolds this most in detail is 1 Thessalonians 4. It is important to remark one or two points of great interest in connection with the taking up of the saints ere we

examine the subject in detail. First of all, it was to the apostle of the church a special revelation in connection with this, its hope, was vouchsafed. "For this we say unto you by the Word of the Lord," signalizes what comes after as something special; it was suitable every way, that what related to its finish, at least as regards the earth, should be communicated after the same manner, as well as through the same channel, as that which marks "the revelation of the mystery," and also the symbol of its unity here below. (See Eph. 3:1-3; 1 Cor. 11:23-26; chap. 10:16, 17) The Lord's Supper and the rapture of the saints raised or changed were subjects then concerning which Paul the Apostle of the church received those special communications and revelations already alluded to. It is evident that this special revelation touching the coming of the Lord to the air had both a general and a special aspect. With regard to the first, it is made known as the true and proper hope of the church; it is not death, but the coming of the Lord. With respect to the latter, it is plain that the uneasiness regarding the position of those who had fallen asleep in Christ at Thessalonica was met by the apostle through this special revelation of God.

The Thessalonian saints did not sorrow for their dead as if any uncertainty rested on their minds with regard to them, but they were perplexed as to the part or position of these sleeping ones in view of the coming of the Lord. Hence we say this revelation to Paul has a particular as well as a universal bearing. This "gathering together unto Him" is the great crisis for which we wait; and it is as well, blessed forever be His name and grace, the one thing for which He the Lord Jesus waits. "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, ye may be also." What wonderful grace! He reckons that nothing could be so comforting to us as that He should come and receive us to Himself, not merely to heaven, but to Himself. What a moment that will be for Jesus when He comes to the air and welcomes to Himself those whom He has loved, and whose affections He died to win! How shall not our hearts overflow with joy when we throng around Him as the center He has become to us.

Let us meditate a little on the order of the rapture as it is unfolded in this scripture. The first fact communicated was intended to tell upon the sorrow of the saints at Thessalonica. Those who are alive at the moment of the rapture shall not take precedence of those who have fallen asleep. This was designed by the Lord to meet the perplexity of their hearts, as to the supposed place of inferiority which sleeping in Christ assigned to any who had passed away. They suffer in nowise in this respect—they slept in Christ; they were waiting there, as we who are alive are waiting here; but more than that, they first are the subjects of His quickening power, who is the resurrection and the life. Is it not like Himself the Lord, to put forth His power on the weakest first? In them is displayed the glory of Him who said to the sorrowing sister: "I am the resurrection and the life." Thus would Jesus wipe the tears of the sorrowful and bereaved. "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." His glory as "the life" is displayed in these, as that of "the resurrection" is displayed in those. A virtue will go forth from Him which will entirely obliterate all trace of mortality; then shall what is mortal be swallowed up by life; then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory." It is very blessed to notice how it is said, we "shall be caught up together." Time and years, circumstances, death and sin, may have severed us from each other until then; but now there shall be no more mention made of divided or severed interests. We shall be caught up together—attracted, drawn by a common object, abundantly able now to win and claim and satisfy these worthless hearts of ours, even as He

Himself is the perfect delight of His Father's heart.

There are two things in connection with being caught up—we shall see Him, and we shall be like Him. Wonderful realities! What a consideration for us all; and yet how few of us that have our hearts thus under the power of divine realities— “We shall see Him as He is!” We are predestinated to this. (See Rom. 8:29) Blessed invigorating hope to cheer the heart amid the trials and sorrows that intervene! Oh, when we look into that blessed face, how will not the heart find its abundant compensation for all its waiting and watching for Him!

“Forever to behold Him shine,
For evermore to call Him mine,
And see Him still before me;
Forever on His face to gaze,
And meet the full assembled rays,
While all His beauty He displays
To all the saints in glory.”

But it is also said “we shall be like Him.” This, too, is wonderful; we, so little like Him now, then to be perfectly like Him, and as we have borne the image of the earthy, to bear the image of the heavenly. How blessed to think that God has before Himself, in the one who adorns His throne in the heavens, the type, the pattern, the sample of what the fruit of the death of Jesus is to be. When Israel entered the land of promise, and reaped the harvest of Canaan, they were directed by Jehovah to bring a sheaf of the first-fruits of their harvest to the priest, “and he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted for you: on the morrow after the sabbath” (that is, on the first day of the week”) the priest shall wave it. And ye shall offer that day when ye wave the sheaf an he lamb without blemish of the first year for a burnt-offering unto the Lord. And the meat-offering thereof shall be two tenth deals of fine flour mingled with oil, an offering made by fire unto the Lord for a sweet savor: and the drink-offering thereof shall be of wine, the fourth part of an hin. And ye shall eat neither bread, nor parched corn, nor green ears, until the self-same day that ye have brought an offering unto your God: it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings. And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave-offering; seven sabbaths shall be complete: even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meat-offering unto the Lord. Ye shall bring out of your habitations two wave loaves of two tenth deals: they shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven; they are the first-fruits unto the Lord. And ye shall offer with the bread seven lambs without blemish of the first year, and one young bullock, and two rams they shall be for a burnt-offering unto the Lord, with their meat-offering, and their drink-offerings, even an offering made by fire, of sweet savor unto the Lord. Then ye shall sacrifice one kid of the goats for a sin-offering, and two lambs of the first year for a sacrifice of peace-offerings. And the priest shall wave them with the bread of the first-fruits for a wave-offering before the Lord, with the two lambs: they shall be holy to the Lord for the priest.” (Levs. 23:11-20)

Now Christ risen from the dead on the morrow after the Sabbath, that is, on the first day of the week, is the great antitype of the sheaf of first-fruits; and the same relation which existed between that sheaf and the harvest of Canaan, exists likewise through grace between Christ and His own. Is it not blessed to think of this? His saints, His own, are the antitype of the new meat-offering. Observe how leaven was allowed in this. Because it was intended to represent the people of God, they are the fruit of His death; as He said Himself, "If it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." (John 12:24)

When the blessed Lord walked as a man on earth, wonderful and beautiful as was His path, He walked therein absolutely alone. He was solitary in life, solitary in death. Truly we may say, "Of the people there were none with Him" His life of perfect obedience, precious as it was under the eye of God, never brought one soul to stand with Him where He Himself stood; but His death produced fruit. "If it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." And in that bright day which is approaching, His saints, the fruit of His death, shall be perfectly like Himself. The attractive power of Christ at His coming is what we look for; we expect to be caught away, snatched away, as it were. How little, alas! are our souls under the formative power of such a hope.

It is interesting to observe the different ways in which the coming of the Lord is treated in Philippians and Thessalonians. In the former it is brought in at chapter 3, and is to the soul what home, suddenly breaking on the vision, is to the jaded, foot-sore traveler. He had pressed on amid heat, and dust, and jog, and suddenly, as it were, home greets him, and the satisfaction of the heart is expressed at meeting Christ Himself. But in Thessalonians there is the energy and power of the Lord, as suited to the weakness of His own, as well as the finishing touch, so to speak, put upon the revelation of the truth through Paul. If this be a reality, as assuredly it is, what kind of people ought we to be who profess to hold it as the hope of our hearts? The Lord grant, in His rich mercy, that our conversation may be in heaven, from whence we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

W. T. T.

2 Corinthians 6:14-18 Part 2

4. We have only now to consider the philanthropic phase of the unequal yoke. Many will say, "I quite admit that we ought not to mingle ourselves with positive unbelievers in the worship or service of God; but then we can freely unite with such for the furtherance of objects of philanthropy—such for instance as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, reclaiming the vicious, in providing asylums for the blind and lunatic, hospitals and infirmaries for the sick and infirm, places of refuge for the homeless and houseless, the fatherless and the widow; and, in short, for the furtherance of everything that tends to promote the amelioration of our fellow-creatures, physically, morally, and intellectually."

This at first sight seems fair enough; for I may be asked if I would not help a man by the road-side to get his cart out of the ditch? I reply, certainly; but if I were asked to become a member of a mixed society for the purpose of getting carts out of ditches, I should refuse—not because of my superior sanctity, but because God's Word says: "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers." This would be my answer, no matter what were the object proposed by a mixed society. The servant of Christ is commanded "to be ready to every good work;" "to do good unto all;" "to visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction;" but then it is as the servant of Christ, and not as the member of a society or a committee in which there may be infidels and atheists, and all sorts, of wicked and godless men. Moreover we must remember that all God's philanthropy is connected with the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the channel through which God will bless—that the mighty lever by which He will elevate man, physically, morally, and intellectually. "After that the kindness and philanthropy (φιλανθρωπία) of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior." (Titus 3:4-6) This is God's philanthropy. This is His mode of ameliorating man's condition. With all who understand its worth, the Christian can readily yoke himself, but with none other.

The men of the world know naught of this, care not for it. They may seek reformation, but it is reformation without Christ. They may promote amelioration, but it is amelioration without the cross. They wish to advance, but Jesus is neither the starting-post nor the goal of their course. How then can the Christian yoke himself with them? They want to work without Christ, the very one to whom he owes everything. Can he be satisfied to work with them? Can he have an object in common with them? If men come to me and say, "We want your co-operation in feeding the hungry, in clothing the naked, in founding hospitals and lunatic asylums, in feeding and educating orphans, in improving the physical condition of our fellow-mortals; but you must remember that a leading rule of the society, the board, or the committee, formed for such objects, is, that the name of Christ is not to be introduced, as it would only lead to controversy. Our objects being not at all religious, but undividedly philanthropic, the subject of religion must be studiously excluded from all our public meetings. We are met as men for a benevolent purpose, and therefore Infidels, Atheists, Socinians, Arians, Romanists, and all sorts, can happily yoke themselves to move onward the

glorious machine of philanthropy." What should be my answer to such an application? The fact is, words would fail one who really loved the Lord Jesus in attempting to reply to an appeal so monstrous. What! benefit mortals by the exclusion of Christ? God forbid! If I cannot gain the objects of pure philanthropy without setting aside that blessed one who lived and died and lives eternally for me, then away with your philanthropy, for it assuredly is not God's, but Satan's. If it were God's, the word is, "He shed it on us abundantly THROUGH Jesus Christ," the very one whom your rule leaves entirely out. Hence your rule must be the direct dictation of Satan, the enemy of Christ. Satan would always like to leave out the Son of God; and when he can get men to do the same, he will allow them to be benevolent, charitable, and philanthropic.

But in good truth such benevolence and philanthropy ought to be termed malevolence and misanthropy; for how can you more effectually exhibit ill-will and hatred toward men than by leaving out the ONLY ONE who can really bless them for time or for eternity? But what must be the moral condition of a heart, in reference to Christ, who could take his seat at a board, or on a platform, on the condition that that name must not be introduced? It must be cold indeed; yea, it proves that the plans and operations of unconverted men are of sufficient importance in his judgment to lead him to throw his Master overboard for the purpose of carrying them out. Let us not mistake matters. This is the true aspect in which to view the world's philanthropy. The men of this world can "sell ointment for three hundred pence, and give to the poor;" while they pronounce it waste to pour that ointment on the head of Christ! Will the Christian consent to this? Will he yoke himself with such? Will he seek to improve the world without Christ? Will he join with men to deck and garnish a scene which is stained with his Master's blood? Peter could say, "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." Peter would heal a cripple by the power of the name of Jesus; but what would he have said, if asked to join a committee or society to alleviate cripples, on the condition of leaving that name out altogether? It requires no great stretch of imagination to conceive his answer. His whole soul would recoil from such a thought. He only healed a cripple for the purpose of exalting the name of Jesus, and setting forth its worth, its excellency, and its glory in the view of men; but the very reverse is the object of the world's philanthropy; inasmuch as it sets aside His blessed name entirely, and banishes Him from its boards, its committees, and its platforms.

May we not therefore well say, "Shame on the Christian who is found in a place from which his Master is shut out"? Oh, let him go forth, and in the energy of love to Jesus, and by the power of that name, do all the good he can! but let him not yoke himself with unbelievers, to counteract the effects of sin by excluding the cross of Christ. God's grand object is to exalt His Son, "that all should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father." This should be the Christian's object likewise; to this end he should "do good unto all;" but if he join a society or a committee in order to do good, it is not "in the name of Jesus" he acts, but in the name of the society or committee, without the name of Jesus. This ought to be enough for every true and loyal heart. God has no other way of blessing men but through Christ; and no other object in blessing them but to exalt Christ. As with Pharaoh of old, when the hungry Egyptians flocked to his presence, his word was, "Go to Joseph;" so God's Word to all is, "Come to Jesus." Yes, for soul and body, time and eternity, we must go to Jesus; but the men of the world know Him not, and want Him not; what therefore has the Christian to do with such? How can He act in yoke with them? He can only do so on the ground of practically denying his Savior's name. Many do not see this; but that does not

alter the case for those who do. We ought to act honestly, as in the light; and even though the feelings and affections of the new nature were not sufficiently strong in us to lead us to shrink from ranking ourselves with the enemies of Christ, the conscience ought at least to bow to the commanding authority of that Word, **BE NOT UNEQUALLY YOKED TOGETHER WITH UNBELIEVERS.**

May the Holy Ghost clothe His own Word with heavenly power, and make its edge sharp to pierce the conscience, that so the saints of God may be delivered from everything that hinders their "running the race that is set before them!" Time is short. The Lord Himself will soon be here. Then many an unequal yoke will be broken in a moment. May we be enabled to purge ourselves from every unclean association and every unhallowed influence, so that when Jesus returns we may not be ashamed, but meet Him with a joyful heart and an approving conscience!

The Typical Character of Genesis 1, 2, 3

The first chapter of Genesis, with the first three verses of the second, evidently forms a distinct section of the book. It represents creation as the work of God, and the rest consequent upon the work being finished. Nothing else is allowed to mix itself up with this. It is God's work and God's rest.

I believe it also to be a type of new creation; meaning by that God's work of recovery when creation was fallen-recovery, whether of the individual fallen man or in general of the world, from the time the first ray of light from the promise broke upon her darkness until the glory of God lights up a "new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness."

I find in it accordingly two distinct applications, yet interwoven one with another—one dispensational, the other moral, and relating to the individual.

Let us take first the dispensational view.

We have presented to us at the outset the necessity for God's working—"Earth was without form, and void, and darkness was on the face of the deep." The language seems to suggest that this was not its primitive condition, but one into which it had lapsed after the hand of God had first created it. However this might be, it needed, that is certain, God's interference. There was no "womb of nature," as one speaks, out of which the present fair order of earth and heaven—fair still, even while bearing the sad marks of defilement—could be produced. God must come in to produce it. How true of a ruined world!

The agents in new creation are the Word and the Spirit of God, the Spirit making the Word effectual. And "the entrance of Thy Word giveth light." So it is here: "God said, Let there be light: and there was light." And so we find it in chapter 3, "The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head." There the light shone upon the darkness of the world, and Adam's heart received it with joy. "He called his wife's name" (her name by whom death came) "Eve; because she was the mother of all living."

Yet it was long before the sun came, He whose rays had begun to light the earth from the beginning. Long men looked and waited. Day after day passed over, and then He came. It was after "the third day" —after resurrection—the lights were placed (Christ and the church) in heaven. His is a full-orbed, unchanging, underived light; hers a reflected, inconstant one. Yet is it said, "The moon to govern the night," just as it is, "The sun to rule the day." "Ye are the light of the world," just as "I am the light of the world." But Christ is absent, and it is now night; although, thank God, "the night is far spent, the day is at hand." How strange would a day be for the world—and yet many look for it—without the sun!

On the fourth day, therefore, I find in type the present or church period come in. But on the sixth day man is created in the image of God, and set over the lower creation, the woman being united with him in this glory; just as in the coming kingdom the church reigns with Him who is the "image

of the invisible God,” the second Adam. A beautiful little picture of millennial days is suggested by the limiting of the food of man and beast, which follows in the concluding verses of the chapter. A picture of that time when there shall be no more blood-shedding; but, under the reign of the true Solomon, “nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more;” when “the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard lie down with the kid; and the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.”

The three verses of the second chapter, which belong rather to this, show absolute rest—a day without any following “evening,” and in it only God. Work is at an end, for creation is finished: rest follows absolute and unbroken, but the creature is not seen in it; God only is there. So, past the millennial age, beyond the final outbreak of Satan’s enmity, all trace of sin gone; death, the last enemy, destroyed; we look on to the perfect rest that remaineth, where no shadow lengthens, no voice of discord breaks the ineffable peace, to see redemption-work completely finished, and the full harvest of joy and gladness gathered in. “And when all things shall be subdued unto Him, then shall the Son Himself also be subject unto Him that put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.”

We go back now to consider the individual application. Man is a fallen being. So fallen that he needs, just as much as “earth without form and void” ever needed, the interference of the divine power. “We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works.”

In this case also the entrance of the Word giveth light, and the Spirit of God is the agent. We are “born of the Word” — “born of the Spirit.” This is man’s quickening—regeneration. But here too, although there be light from the first, a full-orbed Christ does not necessarily shine upon the soul at once. Resurrection-day must come to it before this can be. Often there is a long interval between. And when the light breaks in first, darkness is not banished by it: only limited, having still its times of return, and seasons of prevalence. And, moreover, the light brings out nothing lovely—a waste of unquiet waters was all that met the sight during the first day; yet God blessed the light, and divided it from the darkness; “and the evening and the morning were the first day.” With us too, blessed be God, it is first evening, and then the morning; and when the morning shall be fully come, the shadows and the sorrows of night shall have fled forever. It is said of new Jerusalem, “There is no night there.”

The next day sees the heavens made, though not yet has the finger of God garnished them with splendor. So when light has broken in upon the soul, immediately we find that heaven and heavenly things begin to take their proper place in it. Faith, the “evidence of things unseen,” has come, even although yet all is as disquiet and seemingly as barren as ever.

But now the waters must give place, and the dry land appear. On the third day, resurrection-day, this is accomplished; for “the power of resurrection” known gives to the soul firmness and fertility. As it was with the darkness, so with the waters now; they are not wholly removed, but controlled and bounded. So we may say of all that causes the uncertainty, disquietude and barrenness of the soul, It is not removed; but God has given it its bounds, which it cannot pass, nor turn again to cover the earth; and the time comes when it will be said, As “there is no night” more, so also “there is no more sea.”

And earth becomes fertile too. Fruit is brought forth, “whose seed is in itself.” True of all Christian fruit—it is reproductive. If you “let your light shine before men, they shall glorify your Father which is in heaven.”

And now, when resurrection-power is fully known, the third day ended, Christ is seen, full-orbed, in the heaven. And with the sun, the moon; with Christ the church. The relationship between the two is grace; on the one part merely giving, on the other merely receiving. “What hast thou that thou didst not receive?”

The soul established in grace, higher fruits of life appear. Earth, hitherto bringing forth the herb and tree, now brings forth the living creature And even the waters—in the love of Him who makes all things work together for our good—become productive. Even the sadness of evil experienced innate in the soul, giving thoughts of the quiet and joy of home—of its holiness, changeless and eternal.

Accordingly, at the close of the sixth day the joy and perfectness we long for is come in the “kingdom which cannot be moved.” Man is in the image of God; the conflict is over forever, and the victory is come: he too “shall not learn war any more.”

What remains but the joy of Him whose work we are—of Him who calls us children, and whom we call Father, and whose rest from His work finished shall not again be disturbed, no, not forever!

The Epistle to the Ephesians Continued

2. Then God is dealing with living realities in His Word. If doctrines tell me that God is dealing with me, precepts tell me that it is with me God is dealing. God is not revealing an indefinite light that may sparkle before me. He addresses Himself to me, a corrupt creature, and says, "Let him that stole steal no more."

3. There is this beauty in precepts. They do greatly honor the doctrine; they are the expression of the hidden moral virtue that lies in the doctrine. For instance, "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God." The doctrine had already taught me that I had received the Spirit as the seal of salvation. The precept tells me, that the Spirit I have received is sensitive of the least touch of unholiness. So the doctrine is glorified by the precept.

4. I will tell you further what precepts do. They show you that your holiness must be dispensational. You will say, Are not God's demands always the same? No; I boldly say they are not. We can only judge of this in the dispensed light of God. Is it unholiness now for the Jew to traffic with the Gentile? No; it is not. Yet under the law they dare not eat with them. So holiness may vary its form.

Now suppose I were to keep a good conscience, just because my conscience resented evil; and were moral, because morality is comely, would that be Christian morality? No holiness is Christian holiness but such as derives itself from the truth. When you come to apply that to yourself, you will find you have something to do. You will have to associate the Lord Jesus with every bit of your life. How did the elders obtain a good report? Was it a precept that worked Abraham's separation from his kindred and his father's house, and Moses's abdication of Egypt? It was God making Himself known to them. Precepts never will make a Christian man. The soul must come in contact with the revelation of God. "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us." Now, let me ask you, supposing I was a good neighbor, just to keep my conscience a little easy, would that be meeting the demands of this passage? "Walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us;" that makes kindness Christian kindness. I take the Lord Jesus as my great prototype. Does not this take morals out of the hand of Moses? This puts my morals on a new ground altogether. I am to walk in love, because Christ has loved me, and given Himself for me an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor. The Lord has not only presented you in all the value of His blood, but in the sweet savor of His sacrifice. Is it accepted in the righteous one you are? No; but "accepted in the Beloved." The high priest, when he took the blood into the holiest, went in enveloped in a balmy, savory cloud of incense, was it a grudging acceptance that waited on the sacrifice of Christ? No; it was a delighted acceptance; and you are in all the value of that acceptance. Well, then, could I give the atmosphere, in which I am set before God, one glance of faith, and come back to indulge my enmities?

You know your renewed conscience would never be satisfied by merely doing what is right. You must have the springs of action purified. It is what Christ has done that asks it from you. These uncleannesses, as I read in verse 3, do not become saints. Am I to lay aside uncleanness,

because it is uncleanness? No; but because it does not become saints. So it goes on. "For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord." I refuse participation in uncleanness, because I was darkness; but now I am transformed. I am a new creature, a child of light. And I pause here again to ask you, Would you qualify this beautiful intensity? Do you want to leave Christ when you come to the practical details of life? We never leave Christ. So when we come to meditate on conflict, we are just as much in His company as in the details of life, or as up in heaven in the early part of the epistle. There is something sublime in this. If a doctrine comes to unfold God to me, a precept comes to show me the moral virtue that lies hid in it. The fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness as in the benevolent virtues—righteousness, as in integrity and honesty, and all connected with truth. We find goodness and righteousness in the world; but we shall not find them connected with truth, save in the household of faith. These things are given to make us practically Christ. As an old writer says, "Christ Himself is the ground of all laws to a Christian;" one loathes cultivation of soul by anything short of Christ. Christ would have us sober, truthful, honest. Now are ye light; and what quality of light. Light "in the Lord." You have not kindled the spark that is in you from Moses, but from the Lord of Light. You have borrowed a ray from Him, and you are to walk in it, proving what is acceptable to Jesus. I am sure, after this, we shall not ask why the precepts of the New Testament, when we see the blessed Lord connected with each bit of the details, the Spirit bringing down my Lord Jesus to be the sanction of my ways.

You will often find here that the Spirit is not satisfied with mere abnegation of evil. He insists on the cultivation of good. "Let him that stole, steal no more; but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good." There is the negative in company with the positive. The evil is denied, and the good is brought in. So here, "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." Because you have put off the old man; but are you merely an emptied, stript thing? No; you have put on the new man. As the old man would have made plunder of what belonged to another, so now you are to work for him whom before you would have plundered. Moses never set me to that work. Will Christ measure Himself by Moses? Will He measure Himself by anything but Himself? There is such dignity in this. We should keep morals up in their own elevation. Man would drag them down; I do not say this, when we get Moses passed through the filter of Christ, as in the sermon on the mount. Would Moses have required you to lay down your life for another? Christ does, because Christ has done it. "Wherefore it saith," I would rather have it in verse 14. It is the voice and language of light. The light that is now shining is the light of Christ. So "Christ shall give thee light;" a peculiar moral light has risen now.

"See then that ye walk circumspectly... redeeming the time." Now, how is understanding to exercise itself? In the philosophy of the schools? I am to have an understanding of the will of the Lord. He keeps you, again I say, as a heavenly creature in company with Christ; as a man walking across the face of the earth, He keeps you equally with Christ. When He sends you into the field of battle, He arrays you in Christ, He puts Christ upon you.

Who but the Spirit could come down into the traffic of such a world, and keep Christ in your company through it all? So the old man gets drunk with wine. The new man has the Spirit to fill himself with. If that is to be mortified, this is to be cultivated. And how will this filling with the Spirit express itself? "In psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs." There is a vessel filled with the Spirit. It is the very same vessel, only transmuted. It was once filled with wine; now, in a spirit of thanksgiving, it is bubbling up with melody to the Lord. We have been in a fervent heated

atmosphere, heated by the Holy Ghost; and now we are suddenly let down, with a beautiful calmness, into the ordinary virtue of taking a low place. There is a beauty in the very style of this. How can we be sufficiently charmed with it! We do not know which to admire most, the doctrinal or the practical part.

Having come down to that, He details it, and addresses husbands and wives. There, I need not say, how deeply we are in company with Christ. Do not a wife and husband get their sanctions from Christ? Many a good wife never thinks of the Lord Jesus. Is that a Christian wife Here let me turn aside to note a title that occurs three times in this epistle. Christ is called, "The Head" in chapters 1, 4, and 5; but in each place the Headship has a different aspect.

In the first chapter it is as the Head of the Body. He is Head over all things to the church; the principal feature of the mystic man.

In chapter 4, it is as being Head of influence, dispensing virtue to the members. "From whom the whole body, fitly joined together... maketh increase of the body."

Here, in chapter 5, we see Him in another aspect, as the Head of authority, "The husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the Head of the church." In verse 30, it ought to be, "This is the great mystery." Then, having addressed wives by the common duties that belong to them, in chapter 6, it is the same thing with children. "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." Even in the time of Moses, this was an honorable duty. But here, it is because it is right in the view of the Lord. This takes it out from the legal promise, and the Lord becomes the new sanction.

So with fathers. A father ought to be his child's Christian servant. I mean that he should every hour be watching that the nurture and admonition of the Lord be ministered to his child. He should minister Christ to him.

As to servants—beautiful this is! —they are to be obedient. It matters not the character of their master. They are to be doing service "as unto the Lord." Did you ever get up to that verse in James 1:9, when you see people maintaining station in this life, that you ought positively to rejoice in anticipation of these distinctions passing away? Not touching the thing in passing along. 1 Timothy 6 would tell me that; but it ought to be the hidden joy of the heart that, by-and-by, station will have passed away with the fashion of this world.

Then, as to masters. Do not be guilty of threatening. The lordly ways of masters and mistresses are hateful. How does your Master in heaven treat you'?

Here the practical part ends; but I ask, does it not dignify you? As George Herbert says, "Who sweeps a room, if for Thy laws, makes that and the action fine." It is the same thing to Christ, if you are up there in His company. It is the same Jesus who is enfolding, embracing, enriching you in every step of the journey, and that for His own eternity.

Chapter 6

We have observed that this epistle naturally distributes itself into three parts—doctrinal and practical; and here, from verse 10 to the end, we get a scene of conflict. Teaching, Walk, and Conflict.

The teaching, we remember, was the education of the church, the body of Christ; and we were observing that there was heavenly calling before there was church calling. We have constant proof all along the line of Old Testament days, of heavenly calling; but we have only distant shadowy intimations of the body of Christ, as has been said by another, "It would have sounded absurd in the ears of a Jew, to talk in divine mysterious language, of giving Messiah a body, completing Him, filling Him out." It is not said of Abraham, that he was blessed in heavenly places in Christ, incorporated in Christ. This is the grand teaching of this highest of all the epistles. Then, leaving the doctrinal part, we enter on the practical part, which goes on to verse 9 of this chapter 6; and I should like to repeat what we were observing. When we come to the practical part of the epistle, we get the doctrinal part gloriously honored. Precepts become, in the hands of the Spirit, the expression of the moral virtue that lies in the doctrine. If I had my heart open to God, I should be guided by the intrinsic virtue of my calling; and, oh, if we have common spiritual taste, we must enjoy that! Is it not beautiful, to see the doctrine and precepts thus in company!

In the same way, Peter stands before the doctrine, and wonders that we should not prove the moral virtue of it; and so do I. Then, in the next place, it gives precepts a dispensational character. God is not dwelling in the same light now, as when He was sitting on the throne in Jerusalem. That was an earthly light; a light that shone on earth. The light in which God now dwells is the awful, yet most precious mystery, that He has been rejected here in His dear Son, and that that Son is now glorified in heaven. And you must be in the light where God dwells. You must make God's dispensational truth the rule of your ways. I speak not, of course, of the light in which God dwells, as in His own proper glory, as we read in 1 Timothy 6:16.

Now, the difference between chapters 5 and 6 is this.

In chapter 5 we see the saint taking his walk in the midst of the circumstances of human life. Here we see the saint in the field of battle. Do you believe your conflict is as constant as your walk? Are you to be in conflict today, and in conflict again tomorrow? There is plenty of work for us to do; our hands will be full enough if we are practical living saints of God.

Now, in opening this third view, he tells us to be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might, taking to us the whole armor of God, that we may withstand in the evil day; and having done all, to stand. The Spirit contemplates that it is a war from beginning to end. There may be certain battles; but, having done with the specific fight, you must still stand as in a war. Are you prepared for finding human life a war? That is what this passage is pregnant with. Whether the specific fighting be present or not, your whole soul is to rest in the conclusion that it is incessant war, till you have done with this world, this flesh, and the devil. If two nations are at war, they may not be fighting every day; a battle may be a rare thing, but war has been proclaimed. The Lord forbid that you and I should not know that as long as we are in the body we are in a field of battle. "The evil day" is a specific battle. If we have won the victory, why are we still to stand? Because war has been proclaimed. Have you proclaimed war with the lusts that are in your members, and the spirit of the world around you? Your soul is to recognize, that while you are in the body you are a fighting man. That being your position, you are to put on the whole armor of God; "for we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." Now, how do you understand this? Do you rest, in the thought that wicked spirits are in heavenly places? It is abundantly taught us. In 2 Chronicles

18 the Lord says, "Who shall entice Ahab king of, Israel?" "I will entice him," says a spirit; "I will go out, and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets." This is a fruitful, lively expression of the thing that is taken up in Ephesians 6. It is beautiful to see the Spirit so at home in His own Scriptures. He takes it up as a settled thing that Satan is in heaven. He does not make a difficulty or a question about it. He assumes it as a thing sealed and accredited, and so takes it up. What does the Lord say? "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven." This was not a mere honorary expression. Then, in Revelation 12, Satan is cast down from heaven. Satan and the principalities and powers are now in heavenly places.

But what do these wicked spirits do? They come down with all their wiles, and lies, and deceivings, to practice them in your heart and mine; as in Micaiah's vision, the lying spirit came down with a wile to Ahab; and again, as Satan tempts David to number the people. The Old and New Testaments are pregnant with all this. Paul says, "We are not ignorant of his devices;" and again, "Oh, full of all subtlety and all mischief, thou child of the devil." All these prove that he acts by wiles. He acts by violence, and by persecution also; but that is not contemplated here. If we go over the story of Satan in Scripture, we shall find him an accuser. Was he not an accuser of the brethren in the book of Job? And is not the very same character attached to him in the book of the Apocalypse? Thus we now find ourselves put in the presence of the enemy. I am in the war, and I can never get out of it, though I may get out of the evil day. What then am I to do? I am to take the whole armor of God.

And now I just ask you to inspect each part of this armor. Is there one single piece of that which is declared to be the armor of God fitted to send you out into a field of battle with flesh and blood? Is that the way He armed Joshua and David? They were to meet flesh and blood, and they were carnal weapons which He put into their hands. Now, there is not a touch of that here. There are no slings, and stones, and jaw-bones of asses; but that is declared to be the whole armor of God. If this is not the armor I have on me, I am not fighting for Christ. Saints may take carnal weapons; but if I do—if, for instance, I go into a court of justice to assert my rights, do not let me talk of being in the light of God. That is where dispensational truth is so important. I find here that the Spirit sends me into a field of battle, and I find that my security depends on truth, righteousness, faith, peace, and the sword of the Spirit.

Now, supposing we were to describe a few of these wiles. Infidel heresies, superstitious vanities, evil doctrines, false expectations about the history of the world. We are not here in company with our lusts, but in conflict with direct attempts of the enemy. We must withstand the temptations of our hearts in walking through the world, as in chapter 5. Here we are set face to face with Satan, the deceivableness of unrighteousness, doctrinal heresies. These are the things we are to withstand. And is it not perfectly right, that being delivered by the Seed of the woman, we should make our war with him who was our captor? How could you attach yourself to Jesus, and not turn round in the face of the enemy, and let him know that you are at war with him? Having passed this fervent scene, we find that, having this armor on us, if a quickened condition of soul be not maintained in communion, the armor will be cumbrous. "Praying always... and for me... that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds." Did you ever hear of such a thing as the ambassador of one nation being put in bonds by the nation to which he was sent? Why, Christ has fared worse in this world than any nation in it would. And, pray, what message did this ambassador bring? A message of boundless grace. And

that is the way He has been treated. The law of nations would not allow it for an instant. Yet that is the way God, for 1800 years, in the person of His servants and witnesses, has consented to be treated.

Then he tells them that he sends Tychicus “that he may comfort your hearts.” Oh, if we could be in that way—in prison, yet able to comfort others! As dear Saunders, a clergyman in the Bishop of London’s coal-hole, sent to his wife, “Be merry, dear wife, be merry; we ‘re all merry here. We weep with Him now; but we shall laugh with Him forever.” That is like Paul, sending from a prison in Rome a cheering word to his brethren at Ephesus. What cannot the Spirit of God work?

The Lord grant that we may be taught by the doctrine, instructed in morals, and put in something of strength for the battle by this closing scene. Amen

Extract: His and Our End Reached

"I have just been reading again that lovely fourth chapter of John. What a little heaven it is to sit in spirit there, and be in company with Him that is the eternal life, in full grace dispensing Himself to one of the degraded captives of pollution and death!

"The satisfying water springs from that grace in the Son of God which reaches and quiets the conscience; and it was such that Jesus here dispenses to her. Till our need as sinners is met and answered, we must be thirsting again, let us get what we may, because the soul is not at rest with God. But Jesus came to repair the breach in the conscience—to give rest before God, and in God, and thus to impart the satisfying water of life through the Holy Ghost.

"And when this is done, in a great divine sense, the end is reached—God is glorified—the sinner made happy, and entrance into the places of glory becomes a necessary result.

"This end is beautifully shown in this same exquisite and marvelous chapter; for the woman goes away with a spirit in deep refreshment because of conscious acceptance and life, and the Son of God Himself is so satisfied in the fruit of His own way, that He has had that which sets Him above the thirst He had been feeling and the food He had wanted. 'I have meat to eat that ye know not of.' It was as manna to Him. What a thought! the Son of God comes down to our degraded earth to find His manna, His strange mysterious food and satisfaction of heart bread which He could never have known in heaven—a joy that He could never have tasted amid the glories of His unfallen creatures. But here, on earth, among sinners, He finds, in the dispensing of the Father's grace, the deepest and fullest answer of all the longings of His divine love.

"When a sinner is happy in Him, His end is reached, and so is ours, and all that remains is to spend eternity in the glory that becomes such an end as this—His joy in us, and ours in Him." J. G. B.

"O LORD, thy love's unbounded!

So full, so vast, so free;

Our thoughts are all confounded

Whene'er we think of Thee.

For us Thou earnest from heaven,

For us to bleed and die;

That purchased and forgiven,

We might ascend on high."

In Everything Give Thanks

"In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." - 1 Thessalonians 5:18.

"In everything give thanks."

My God, is this Thy will?

Give thanks for disappointments given,

For prayers unanswer'd still?

Give thanks! In vain I've pray'd

That I might useful be,

And by Thy Spirit's helpful aid,

Bring many souls to Thee.

Give thanks! when in the place

Of health and usefulness,

Through sickness, Thou hast paled my face

With pain and weariness.

Give thanks! If 'twere Thy will

Submission to demand,

I then might bid myself be still,

And bow to Thy command.

But hush, beneath my eye

I see, in words of blood,

"Will He who gave His Son to die,

Refuse thee any good?"

Give thanks! Yea, Lord, I do,

And by Thy help I will,

Give thanks for blessings not received,

Although expected still.

Give thanks for mercies given,
Unnoticed oft by me;
Give thanks for sins forgiven,
Known only, Lord, to Thee.
Give thanks in word and deed,
For Thy surpassing love,
That sent Thy Son on earth to save,
And now to plead above.
Give thanks for tender love,
That our Redeemer show'd,
Who, in the absence of Himself,
A Comforter bestow'd.
Oh grant me by Thy grace
To walk by faith alone,
Until before my Father's face,
I know as I am known!
J. G. B.

A Light From Heaven Above the Brightness of the Sun

I would desire particularly to ask the question, Why was it that Jehovah said to Moses—who was a good man, as we should popularly term it— “Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet” (Ex. 3:5); but to a wretched rebel like Saul of Tarsus, in the hour when his malignity against Christ was at its height, God, as it were, draws nigh to him, addresses him by name, and then and there takes him up to make him a pattern of the grace that is in His own heart? There surely must be some weighty reason to account for the different way in which the blessed God acted in both these cases. Let us look a little at both. Moses, as I have said, was a man remarkable in his day for the very opposite of that which distinguished Saul of Tarsus, raised up as well as fitted of God to lead forth Jehovah’s people out of Egypt; and yet, when he ventured to draw nigh and look at the burning bush, he is not permitted, Jehovah Himself insisting on distance between Moses and Himself. Surely it is not that the blessed God is in any sense indifferent to the sorrows or afflictions of enslaved Israel. What a beautiful word that is— “I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows!” And yet, to the man who is to carry out all that is expressed in such words, Jehovah says, “Draw not nigh;” and Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God.

The very contrary and contrast of all this is supplied in what is commonly called the conversion of Saul. Why is it that God keeps up distance with Moses, and Himself draws nigh to a persecutor like Saul? The answer is at once simple and plain, His own Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, had died upon the cross, and in death had so completely glorified God respecting all that was contrary to Him, that what God was not free to do in consistency with His own character in the day of Moses, He is perfectly free to do in the day of Saul of Tarsus. In the day of Exodus 3, and up to the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, man, as a child of Adam, was recognized by God, and although fallen and ruined, had demands made upon him by God in righteousness; in other words, God was requiring from man what man was both unable and unwilling to give. Man was still on his trial, and because so, to him as such God says, You cannot come near Me; “draw not nigh hither.” The blessed God may, and does, bear with man, test him and prove him in every way; but nearness to God is that which cannot be known, while as yet the first man is allowed a standing before God.

But it may be said, Why could not God have granted nearness to Himself, or Himself drawn nigh to a sinner, as in the case of Saul of Tarsus, on the ground of the sacrifice of Christ TO BE offered? The answer is as simple as it is plain: so long as the history of the first man (or man as connected with Adam) is not closed or ended, as long as man is allowed a place, though on trial, God must, while demanding from him, keep him at a distance, else we should have a willful, rebellious creature allowed on that ground, and brought into that relationship which is true only of the one who is in Christ a new creation; and beside all this, as long as the first man is a recognized existence before God, God must, in consistency with Himself, demand from him; but this very demanding from him is in itself keeping man at a distance, as he cannot meet the claims of a Holy God. When I speak of the first man, I mean man as he is by nature connected with Adam, who brought ruin upon the race; and when I speak of a recognized existence, and God making

demands upon it, I mean that judgment had not been executed upon it: God looked at man as still to be tested and tried, and consequently looked for what became Him from man.

But to turn to the history of Saul of Tarsus; how different it is there. God comes to give righteousness, not to look for it or demand it. His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, had been to earth, had died on the cross, and by His precious death had both completely and fully glorified God, as well as judged and condemned sin in the flesh, and in doing so He most blessedly and righteously supplied an answer to every righteous claim of a holy God. God can now come out and express His love for the sinner, yea, for the very chief of sinners; and here it may be well to look at what made Saul of Tarsus the chief of sinners. It surely was not that he was an immoral man, or an outcast from society, as we say: were he of this character he would never have been selected for, and charged with, the mission on which he was running when God stopped him; on the contrary, Philippians 3 tells us that Saul was one unequaled among his fellows for morality. "If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless."

What then constituted him chief of sinners? not immorality, not the gross wickedness at which refined society blushes, but the dreadful will and malignant opposition with which he set himself against the purpose and mind of God. Hear his own account of it: "I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities." (Acts 26:9-11) Who could conceive willfulness or hatred of Christ and God more desperate than this? To force from city to city the scattered saints of God, and not this only, but to compel them to blaspheme the one who was to them above everyone; on whose account they are suffering at the hands of this relentless hater of Jesus of Nazareth.

Oh, what contrasts rise up before the soul as we think of it! With our natural thought of God and His ways, what should you predicate would be the course He must adopt with a wretch like Saul, breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the object of his terrible hate? Why, of course you say, Almighty power would sweep from the earth such a plague; the sword of divine vengeance and justice must be unsheathed to overtake such an one in his wild wickedness. But oh, how different from all this natural thought of God was His blessed way with poor Saul. Stop him God will; but with what? with the pit? No; but with glory. A light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shone round about him. At midday, when the sun is brightest, Saul is arrested by that which is brighter still. What a sight! A scorner, despiser, hater of Christ in heaven, awakened, arrested, addressed by that very blessed one Himself— "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" That very one Himself, too, who had been on the cross, under the judgment, because of man's sin—that very one Himself who, in that wonderful moment, knew what it was to be forsaken of God, that such as Saul might never be forgotten of Him; now risen up from among the dead, and received up into glory. He it is who commands the rays of that glory to fall upon the persecutor's path, draws nigh to him, speaks to him, comes not to hurl him into the bottomless pit,

but to take him up, in the riches of grace and mercy, to give him forgiveness, righteousness, glory, to make a pattern man of him, a chosen vessel unto Himself, to bear His name before the Gentiles, kings and children of Israel. Such is the way of His grace now, even to the vilest sinner. Christ has died, and by His death righteousness has been established; the love of God, which was not set free to travel out to sinners until righteousness is established, now goes out worldwide. There is not only salvation for the vilest sinner, but glory. It is the very joy of the heart of God to minister now everything from Himself to sinners, even the vilest of the vile, and to make them not only vessels of mercy in themselves, platforms as it were upon which the blessed God makes declarations of His grace and goodness; but He delights to make them living witnesses of what His own Son the Lord Jesus can be to them, as well as what great things He has done for them.

W. T. T.

Truth and Love

There is a peculiar rest to the heart in meditating on John's writings. For in them God in the grace of the Father and the Son seems to shine immediately on the poor sinner; and though all committed to man may have failed, yet in Jesus there is a something (and that the true eternal good) outliving all wreck and failure. The world is a ruin, we know; but the church in the world is a ruin also. Nothing can touch or even soil her, as "the LAMB'S wife." But as responsible to God on the earth, like as the garden of Eden was lost when in man's hand, and the inheritance of Israel was lost when in man's hand, so do I believe it is with the church also. All is safe in Christ, to be manifested in due time; but man holds nothing.

Now the comfort of the soul in reading the epistles of John is this—that he does not contemplate the church as the Lord's "candlestick." Paul does. He looks at it at Corinth, at Philippi, and elsewhere; and we may have to grieve, when reading his epistles to churches, that things are not in the same ecclesiastical power, and order, and grace that they once were. And such grief is holy, if it be in the measure of the mind of God, who has provided the relief for all this. But John does not call forth that grief; for he does not look at things ecclesiastical, but at things personal. He deals with the sinner and the saint in immediate personal connection with God, and thus deals with truths which are independent of all ecclesiastical outward state.

From this I do feel and judge that there is peculiar rest to the soul in meditating with John upon God's revelations. Because we must, in the present state of things, be conscious of sad disorder. But Jesus as Savior survives, the sinner still lives, and consciously has his being in our very selves, and there can be a meeting between the Savior and the sinner—happy, restoring, satisfying, though the light of the "candlestick" be gone; there can be a learning of the secrets of the Father and of the Son by the renewed mind, in the power of the Holy Ghost, who still also survives in the consciousness of our new man within, though again I may say, the light of the "candlestick" is no more.

Thus John meets very much the desire of the poor wearied saint now-a-days. He rises upon the soul to tell it there is something better, something more enduring, something even giving a brighter light than any "candlestick." And as this is the character of the message he bears to the soul, as it is of the Father, the Word, and the Comforter he speaks, and as they live and shine still for the poor sinner, though all else may have failed him, so the perfect stillness of the soul is that attitude in which His message is to be listened to. The soul to be silent, and let the Lord pass by, revealing Himself. He will publish His own name, and what has the soul to do but, like Moses, to remain in the appointed "clift of the rock"? It is God Himself who has risen. Let the shoes of a busy talkative mind be taken off; for the place is a sanctuary where God is to be seen and heard. It is unto God that the Spirit by John would conduct the soul. And as the happiest human moments are enjoyed when a tide of influences or of affections is rolling on, and the soul has nothing to do but to stoop and let it roll on, and spend itself upon us, so our seasons of meditation on these precious divine oracles should have the savor of the like joy. God in His fullness has risen, and our joy is to look

and to listen, to be, like Mary, at the feet of Jesus, simply receivers, drinking in the rain from such a heaven. For strikingly has it been said by another, "Mercy has now an unlimited vent towards the redeemed, as justice once had the like upon the Redeemer."

And I may add, there is much of the family of God in John. This also makes his witness very grateful to the affections of the renewed mind, to the thoughts of the saint, wearied, as I have said, with anxieties and searching about the church of God. John does not contemplate the saints in their formed and ordered condition as a "church," but in their more free character as members or children of the family. Thus he addresses his first epistle, not to any body as a church, but "to children, young men, and fathers;" and his second and third to private persons.

This has much struck me before now, while meditating on John. But ere we speak a little of his second and third epistles, as I proposed to do, I would take leave to add a little further here.

The dealings of the blessed God in this world of ours have more simplicity of purpose than we imagine. We have to look at God passing from one dispensation to another; yet in all we are taught that the great purpose before Him is, to manifest Himself in richest blessings, in love and mercy to poor sinners, unto His own eternal glory.

When the Savior commented on all that had gone before His ministry, he said, "My Father worketh hitherto." There we are let into the secret of the purpose of God. He came forth in the law to test what was in us; yet "our Father" had a deeper purpose than that, one with which His heart mixed itself. Mount Sinai was never the place of the Father's ministry. Moses and the angels might work in Sinai; but deeper than all, "my Father" wrought, said Jesus. Though a little hid under a large and more public thing, yet the mind of Christ coming to apply itself to all that had gone on before, He said, "My Father worketh hitherto." This lets the soul into this, that God from the beginning had been working in grace. The operation of the Father is another mode of expressing God working in grace. Here we get the unity of the divine design, from the beginning to the end, to be this, to bring Himself out to us poor sinners as "the Father of mercies." Whether He be manifested to us as destined for earthly or heavenly glory, it is still as "the Father of mercies" to poor brokenhearted sinners.

What is the gospel of John up to chapter 10:3? A trial whether man had learned that secret, that the Father had been working hitherto. In chapter 8 we have the Lord's mind brought out in contrast with the Jew on that point— "If ye had known Me, ye would have known My Father also." Why did they not receive Jesus? Because they had not been seeing the Father "working hitherto" —not learning God as poor broken-hearted sinners—not learning Him as the Father. If we do not learn Him in this character, we shall never learn Him aright.

What is the glory which passes before us in that gospel? "The glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." This Gospel of John is the passing of that glory across this ruined world of ours; but no eye of the children of men could discern it, save the eye of poor convicted sinners.

There are many signs of this throughout that gospel. It may shine in the world, may pass from scene to scene, but it is the eye of the poor conscious sinner, and of none else, that meets it; it is the conscious sinner alone that understands it, that is gladdened by it, and falls into the train of it. Thus when John says (chap. 1), "Behold the LAMB OF GOD!" Andrew follows Jesus in that

character, and the door of Jesus is opened to him He had followed Jesus as the LAMB OF GOD, he had gone after the “glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth;” and if any follow Jesus as such, His door shall be open to them. Just follow Jesus as the “LAMB OF GOD,” and He opens His house, His heart, His glory. All opens to us at once. Nicodemus comes not so (chap. 3), and he has to go back to the brazen serpent, and there get the faculty to apprehend the glory of the Father, and the things of the kingdom.

In chapter 4 the poor Samaritans receive Him, and He goes and dwells with them for two days. In that village “the glory of the only begotten of the Father” could unbosom itself, because He was received in character. Where there was an eye that had learned Jesus as the friend of sinners, there the glory could go. This is the way to receive Him in character, and all that Jesus wants is to be thus received. We see the opposite to this in chapter 2, where He says, “Woman, what have I to do with thee?” He was shining in “the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth;” and if His own mother could not see Him in that glory He had naught to do even with her.

So in chapter 7 his brethren are distanced from Him; for they looked at Him in a glory that suited the world; but in the next chapter, and again in the ninth, a convicted adulteress, and a poor outcast excommunicated one, are brought and kept near Him; for they learned Him in that glory which met their necessities as poor sinners.

Thus is it through these chapters. And it is comforting to our souls to keep the path of this glory before us. And in chapter 10 we see this blessed Son of the Father as the Shepherd full of grace in the midst of His flock—His flock of poor convicted, believing, accepted sinners. And after all this we see this same one looking upward to the Father’s house. For in chapter 14 this glory of the only begotten of the Father, that had been thus shining down here to poor sinners for awhile, is going again to its place; and Jesus says, “In My Father’s house are many mansions. 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.” I rest on this promise of Jesus. When He comes again, He will receive me unto Himself. Is there not intimacy here? It is the first hope to rest on the sinner’s soul. He is gone to the Father’s house until all are gathered; when everything is ready, He will come out to receive the children unto Himself—He “will come again to receive” these poor redeemed sinners UNTO HIMSELF—to meet them in the air, and then they will all go together to the FATHER’S HOUSE. This is the immediate hope, beloved, of POOR SINNERS such as you and I.

This then is the trial in John. It is the application of “the glory of the only begotten of the Father” to the eyes and consciences of men, to see if they would receive Him in that character.

Matthew opens in a different style; but the same lesson is taught.

In chap. vs. we read, “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” This is in the style of Matthew, but in fullest moral harmony with John. One who had been learning law, learning God in terms of mount Sinai, must have had thoughts altogether disturbed by such a word as this. In law, it was the flesh trying to meet the demands of Sinai; but now He has to say, “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of God.” There is no kingdom of God in the world that is not the kingdom of the Father. The law never furnished the kingdom; for it is to be furnished by the Father with poor sinners. The lesson in Matthew and John is one and the same.

Whether we be going on to the heavenly part of the kingdom now, or the Jew to the earthly by-and-by, it is still the kingdom of the Father. It is the Father's kingdom from one end of it to the other, from the top to the foot of the hill; and none get into the kingdom, none become citizens of it, but those who, as Matthew speaks, are "the poor in Spirit," or as John says, "are born again"—those who have learned Jesus as "the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

So again, "Ye are the salt of the earth; ye are the light of the world." I judge that the word of value here is "ye." After Jesus had shown the character of the kingdom, that it was such as was to be taken by the poor in spirit (our only title to it, and we as convicted sinners are cast upon Him), He entirely changes the character of "the light" and "the salt." The light reflected from Sinai had been proposed to man if he could gather it; but now that which constitutes the "light of the world" is not Sinai light (the light of righteousness), but the light of the poor broken-hearted sinner reflected from the glory of the Father. That which, was proposed to man at Sinai he was unable to reflect; but what distinguishes us now is, that we are basking in the light of our Father, His beams shining on us—our poor souls advancing and beaming under the light of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. There we must go to season ourselves, there to illuminate ourselves "salt" to season, "light" to shine.

Again, "If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." What is the value of this to our souls, beloved? Why—that our Father will not value our offerings, as children and as worshippers, unless we are cultivating the affection of brethren; and this is quite as John says, "This commandment have we received from Him, That he who loveth God love his brother also"—there is perfect harmony between them. Our Father is working to fill a kingdom with children and with brethren—with citizens who shall know Him as their Father and each other as brethren. This was the simple purpose from the beginning, and He ever secures it. He not only brings each to Himself in love as His child, but all to each other in the sweet relationship of brethren. If we be not hallowing the confidence of brethren, our worship cannot be accepted. Our God is jealous of the rights which we have to render to each other, that we maintain affection amongst ourselves. He says, as it were, "You must come to me in the path of brotherly love, otherwise I cannot receive your gift; my altar is indeed among you, but I cannot receive your gift whilst you are without love to one another. If I see not my beloved family in order, my children in peace and love one with another, I cannot take my place amongst them." This is the gracious desire of the Father, the head of the family, "that he who loveth God love his brother also."

The Lord spoke what was familiar to His own soul from the beginning. In Eden, the patriarchs, Noah, Abram, Sinai, this was always the thing, and the mind of Christ goes beneath all to bring it forth, to bring out this treasure, "My Father worketh hitherto." There is one simple, undistracted design from the beginning to end. Whether we enter into the heavenly or the earthly part of it, it is "our Father's kingdom, a kingdom of children and brethren; this is His precious design, and though all else may fail, this shall be accomplished. Love never fails, for God never fails. His gifts and callings are without repentance.

Now these two epistles of John come in the train, in harmony with all this; and this too is the value of the book of Revelation. We may differ in our measure of attainment in the understanding of it; but we can together discern this precious feature there, all may agree in this joy, that though at the

very beginning of the book the “candlestick,” the public witness for God, may be gone, yet to the very end of the book, “the Bride, the LAMB’S wife,” remains, as indeed I have already noticed. She may be put to shame in her stewardship; but as the beloved, the chosen of and for the LAMB, she stands forever, she survives all. So in these epistles. I see all else gone, save that which can never go—that which is established in the grace of God, in the love of the Father. Everything may fail, but the purpose of God before the foundation of the world can never fail.

Second Epistle Verses 1, 2. That truth which dwelleth in us, the gospel truth—that which reveals “the only begotten of the Father” —that truth shall never go, it shall be with us forever. It is that precious seed which has constituted us, poor sinners, children of the kingdom, “that word which by the gospel is preached unto you,” and it “liveth and abideth forever.”

Verse 3. Here the peculiar spirit of John shows itself. Paul says, in addressing the churches, “Grace be to you, and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ;” but John adds, “the Son of the Father, in truth and love.” He brought out the intimacies of the Father; he had got at the under current; for he had lain in the bosom of Jesus, “the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth”—the sinner’s place.

Verses 4-6. This love from the beginning is that which survives all. The truth survives time, place, wreck, ruin, and everything; service may be all failure; but truth is as fresh in the wild woods now as it was in Jerusalem at first. So does love, that which it begets; truth is the seed of life, and love is the principle of the divine nature in the saints; and as the seed, so too that which it produces survives and lives.

Verses 7, 8. John does not take the place of Paul, addressing the churches in the aggregate character; but he writes to an “elect lady” whom no one knows anything about, except that she had “truth and love.” She was known and “elect” of the Father, that was enough, and she is told to look to herself. This is increasingly in our day a valuable principle of truth. If there is anything which comes to us with peculiar value, it is that it comes to us as a personal, individual thing. In his preaching to Israel, the Lord says, “Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.” He could assume that blindness rested on the nation, and so could say, “He that hath an ear, let him hear.” So too in Revelation 2, 3 the Spirit could not trust the “candlestick” any more than Jesus could the nation of the Jews, and therefore says, “He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear.” So too here, the elect lady is told, “Look to yourselves.” This applies to her personal and individual state of soul. And so we can now speak; for whatever the aggregate failure may be, the word remains “look to yourselves.” We are “the elect lady” still, and are not to be made the sport of the deceivings of unrighteousness now, any more than when the church stood in power. The “candlestick” may be removed, but we are protected from error—the “truth and love” are with us, and we must “look to ourselves.”

Deborah was taken up in a day of strange informality. She was a strange successor to Joshua; but the Spirit was with her, and she could fight the battles of the Lord. So the “elect lady” here is made the guardian of the truth; she is told to let her hands hold truth in as much purity and security as though she were a “candlestick.” And this is precious to us; for though we are alone, like her, we have authority to keep the deceiver outside the door. Something irregular this may appear. But in a day of apostasy, irregularity is the order of the Spirit, and the Spirit is always according to God.

Verses 9-11. How simple is the point of unity, “the doctrine of Christ,” of the Father, and the Son. If our souls were drinking more simply of the precious doctrine of the Father and the Son, we should be ashamed to talk of any difference of judgment, of being apostles of disunion. We want to get more light from “the Father and the Son.” “He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.” If the light of that doctrine were full and clear on the soul of each of us, we would rebuke such a thought. But still he tells to this “elect lady,” “If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God-speed: for he that biddeth him God-speed is partaker of his evil deeds.” He gives her authority to keep the deceiver outside the door; and so with us. Let every one of us be the weaker vessel (that is what she was), and if the deceiver come, we are to look to ourselves, and keep him outside!

And now, verse 12, “Having many things to write unto you, I would not write with paper and ink: but I trust to come unto you, and speak face to face, that our joy may be full.” Just as the departing Spirit of Christ, at the close of Revelation, leaves the volume, saying, “Surely I come quickly,” so here—I hope to come shortly to speak face to face with you, and then our joy shall be full. “I have many things to say unto you”—not all told out from Genesis to Revelation, not written “with paper and ink.” He hopes to come shortly, and then it will not be communication, with “paper and ink,” but “face to face, that our joy may be full.” O blessed hope! The lover of our souls, the LAMB in the throne, will feed us Himself at the fountain forever!

Third Epistle “The elder unto the well-beloved Gains, whom I love in the truth.” We see the same spirit here as in the former epistle.

He desires that Gains may prosper as well as be in health; for Gaius was distinguished, like some beloved ones now-a-days, in all offices of Christian hospitality, as we read of him in Romans 16. John might then desire all health and prosperity to him; for his prosperity was thus the servant of the saints. And he was now about to draw on this well-known grace of the beloved Gaius, in behalf of some who had gone forth to the service of the gospel in a very blessed self-devoting spirit.

And happy is it to get these notices of such sweet grace in the one, and such devoted zeal in the others, at a time when ecclesiastically things were bad.

And it must have been very sweet to John to be able to say, “I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth.” This kept John’s heart so much at ease; this told him of his peculiar joy. Paul’s joy was at seeing the church walking in order. That might now be gone; but here it is, “I have no greater joy than to see my children walking in the truth.” We may be troubled at seeing the candlestick ruined; but there is a deeper joy—that of seeing the children “walking in the truth,” and when brethren come, to get a good report of them. It is sad to one’s soul to look abroad and see what ought to have characterized the dispensation, and then the present fruitlessness. But where does the Spirit lead us? —to this unfailing joy, “to see the children walking in the truth.” Let us pray the Lord to give us more sympathy; we want to have the Spirit leading us to this.

It is only here that the word “church” occurs in John’s writings. And we find that he had honored the church in the place that belonged to her, by commending Demetrius and his companions in the ministry of the gospel to the hospitality and fellowship of the church. But now he finds he can trust the church no longer, and he gets his relief in the personal individual grace of this “beloved Gaius.”

He had honored the church at a distance; but he was disappointed. "Diotrephes, who loved to have the pre-eminence," had got in, and John has to fall back upon that which can never fail, upon "truth and love" in the "beloved Gales."

As he leads us to "the elect lady" in the former epistle, so here he leads us to the "beloved Gaius;" and from that day forth the question has become one of individual, personal concern.

If the "candlestick" has failed, we are to cultivate "truth and love" in our own souls and among brethren. Thus the Spirit of God now teaches us to find relief and rest. Amidst the wreck and ruin of everything around, may He knit our souls together in "truth and love;" may He keep our souls in the doctrine of the Father and the Son. Do we not thus happily see, that when the church failed there was a turning to the individual grace and brotherly love that was still in the saints? And as this is an irregular and disorderly state of ecclesiastical things, John shows that personal grace still survived, and was the relief, when the soul might thus be wearied by all things around.

These two epistles thus gently breathe one spirit. The "lady" was cautioned against receiving certain ones; "Gaius" was exhorted to receive certain others. Both, in their several grace, were used by the apostle or elder of Jesus. And both epistles, as I have already observed upon the second, close with the expression of a hope that these lovers of each other "in the truth" would soon see each other "face to face," till which time, much that might be added shall therefore be deferred. And so with Jesus. All has not been told out; having reached John, nothing is to be added with "pen and ink." The spirit of revelation, as it were, has ascended back to heaven. The volume of written inspiration is closed. The paper and the ink is filled up and exhausted. John was the last to use it. But, as we know, that which is now "seen through a glass darkly" shall be seen "face to face," "that which is now in part shall be done away, and that which is perfect shall come."

And may we, beloved, always be ready—ready in the spirit of our minds to meet Him—longing with the desire of our hearts to see Him "face to face." Then shall we learn many further precious unfoldings of His heart, and "our joy shall be full."

And till then may we ever come together as "elect ladies," and as "beloved Gains," each heart full, and kindling the love one in another! Amen.

Colossians

The profound character of this epistle consists in its being, in the first chapter, a concentration of the Epistles to the Thessalonians, Ephesians, and Philippians, presenting the person of Christ substantially, to faith, in relation to the subjects of all these three epistles. The second chapter is to teach us the exclusiveness of Christ. The third is the highest practice of the condition brought in by this. The fourth contains some practical exhortations. The current of it is full and highly practical.

It has been a question among critics, whether this epistle preceded or followed those to the Ephesians and Philippians. Those to the Thessalonians are acknowledged to be prior. This, and the two former, were written during Paul's first captivity. The difference would be, that, if written first, the former epistles (with the introduction of the subject of those to the Thessalonians) would be a development of these; or, if written after, a throwing of their subjects together, with Christ more distinctly introduced. But, whether written before or after, we see the goodness of God, showing us very emphatically, that holding the Head in all things, and for all ends, will ever be the sum of blessing to the church.

Verses 1 and 2. As there is something peculiar in the opening address of every epistle, so there is in this—an apostle, by the sovereign will of God. Timothy is “the brother.” They might have stood together as “servants” (or slaves) of Jesus Christ, as in the Epistle to the Philippians; but not as apostles. But Timothy here is (implying special designation to the Colossians) “the brother.”

The diversity in the method of addressing them from that in the other epistles is manifest, and in all, with definite purpose, in the spirit, is most generally taken, in the writings of Paul, substantively, as saints. It is used alone in the Epistle to the Philippians, with bishops and deacons, manifesting the subjection to order, and consistency of the whole body as such.

In the Ephesians, it is to the saints at Ephesus, having the distinctive character of the word, and believers in general; but this is (that is, the address to all believers) not as manifest as in Corinthians. We have in the epistle before us the separation of saints, and separation confessed; and also believing brethren, as in the Epistle to the Ephesians. In the Philippians, the saints, and none other; and the subjection of the body and its order. We see this distinctly, from the first action of the gospel, by the hands of the apostles. After the death of Ananias and Sapphira, the people greatly magnified them, but no man durst join themselves to them; but, at the same time, multitudes, both of men and women, believed. They wondered at the power. They acknowledged the righteous exercise of discipline, and rejoiced in the grace proclaimed; but kept aloof in fear, and thus were not subject to the rule which God vouchsafed, nor to one another in the fear of God. Among those with the apostles, there was fellowship under their teaching, prayer, breaking of bread, and confession of the Lord. The others are mentioned as believers, but aloof in some degree or measure, suffering assuredly loss, by missing all that the Lord intended in blessing, by their being together under Him; and peculiarly as the object of His care as representing His body, and in faith of the Spirit (not only as in individuals, but) as in the body of Christ. The table expressed all. The Epistle to the Thessalonians is addressed to the church, or assembly, in that

fullest corporate character and confession. And in what blessing! “In God the Father,” as said to none else— “knowing, beloved of God, your election.” The apostle seems more warmed to them than to any other body (except though, in another way, the Colossians). He addresses them, joying in the manner of their reception of the Word of God, sympathizing with them in the righteous judgment that should place them both in the rest of glory. The salutation of the epistle we are considering is the usual one— “Grace and peace.”

3-5. “The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ “is the church-name of Christ. Subject as the obedient man to God. The Son of the Father. Bringing, the children of the Father in Him into the obedience of God. All is fullness in this epistle.

Thanksgiving is offered by the apostle (since he heard of the faith and love to saints, or the saints at Colosse) for the hope laid up for them in heaven.

We have again here the peculiar fullness of this epistle; the hope which they had heard in the word of the truth of the gospel from Epaphras, who was a minister of this fullness, and though the gospel of grace was much; this was the “grace of God” in truth, embracing all that grace which was in Christ. And it is said that they had acquaintance with it. No wonder that he to whom it was committed, to make the fullness known, should have his heart drawn out to the, Colossian assembly, bearing as it did its excellent fruit, and increasing continually.

6-11. For this cause, and on this ground, he prayed and made petition to God, that, in order that they might walk worthy of the LORD, they might be filled with the knowledge of the will of God, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; bearing fruit, and increasing in acquaintance with God.

The result of what they should receive on his petition to God, was acquaintance with God. Experimental knowledge of God, through intelligent fulfillment of his mind under Christ. An habituation of walk and service in subjection to Christ and His Word, was to work this. This order is deeply to be observed. In Ephesians, the knowledge of the Son of God comes through the unity of the faith wrought through a true course of church action in the Spirit; and so in the Second Epistle of Peter, “growing in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” But this goes beyond them all. IT IS ACQUAINTANCE WITH GOD: first came knowledge of God’s will in spiritual understanding; then practice, and thereby true acquaintance.

What a solemn occupation for the soul! But in this walk, what practical proof and experience was required. The walk here contemplated is in face of the enemy; and the power of the glory to which suffering was attached was to sustain, it in all patience and long-suffering, with joyfulness. The confession of the Lord was the confession of the supremacy of God in the world, in the kingdom of the Son till He come, in all virtue and grace, according to the heavenly calling of the saints.

Thus far is the subject of the Thessalonians, where, as in this portion of this epistle, all are regarded as members of the rejected kingdom.

12-14. Our present ground of thanksgiving to the Father is, that He made us meet to share the inheritance of the saints in light, who saved us from the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption, even the remission of sins The depth of this epistle cannot be plainer seen than in the following verses. Christ is presented in all His eminence. Let us collect a few of the expressions, and we shall see how our redemption, and

the reconciliation of all things, is connected with this eminence. He, by whom is our redemption, even the forgiveness of sins, is the image of the invisible God, and the Head of all creation (what a new Adam is granted unto us!) because He was Creator, and being before all, sustains all. Heaven and earth, and powers, are all of Him and by Him.

18-22. We now come to the church as offered to us in the Epistle to the Ephesians (in its part in this epistle) which He had purchased with His own 'blood. The charge of this epistle being here to declare Christ as the Head of it. What would be attached to the church, as found in the Ephesians, is not mentioned till later (2:19), where that is reposed which rejects both the head, the joints, and bands, by which the members of the body are kept united together. Christ had this headship, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that thus He might be the first in all things; because in Him, by divine counsels, all fullness should dwell, that having made peace by the blood of the cross, He might reconcile all things to Himself, and ourselves who were estranged by wicked works, BY THE BODY OF HIS FLESH THROUGH DEATH (oh, the wonder of the work of Him—the Word made flesh—to the shiner brought into the light of God!) that He might present us holy, unblameable, and without charge before Him Here are the two stages of His dealings—our redemption, even the forgiveness of sins, and the work of presenting us holy, unblameable, and without charge before Him, as the wife in the Epistle to the Ephesians, without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing.

Nothing may be less than fullness in the way of grace in the word of the truth of the good tidings laid before us in this epistle.

23. "If ye continue in the faith." Faith is confidence and assurance in the Word of God and in His faithfulness. This may apply to many things. It is not "abide in faith" simply; but the expression is, "the faith," and in the fullness of the things here presented, grounded and settled in them. We have a marked instance of this sense in Jude. The expression, "the faith once delivered to the saints," in relation to the subject of that epistle, subjection to Christ (4); for He had purchased the slaves of Satan out of his hand, but who now walked after Cain, Korah, and Balaam. So, all of which Paul was made a minister manifested in this epistle is "the faith," the circle of all the revelations from the first to last revealed to him, whether common to the other apostles or peculiar to himself. The faith of the kingdom, of the church in heavenly places, and the union of Christ with His members, fulfilling (making up the fullness of) the Word of God; and, it is added, are not moved from the hope attached to the good tidings, which is, of being with Christ when He comes.

24-29. But we have not done yet. The apostle rejoices in sufferings, and he fills up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in his flesh for His body, which is the church.

How many think it a satisfaction to gather saints for some body to which they are attached; but if it be carried on in the Spirit, and according to the purpose and ways of God in Christ, this would bring in many afflictions here spoken of. This was the complement of the afflictions of Him who bought them; and this was the work of Paul, here mentioned as a commission from the Lord towards those for whom Christ had died, in order to separate them out of the evil age, according to the will of God and their Father. Paul was the minister of the body according to the dispensation which was given towards them, to fill up the measure of the revelation of God—the mystery which had been hid for ages and generations, and was now made manifest among the saints, to whom God willed to make known what was the riches of the glory of it among the Gentiles. "Christ is thus

the hope of glory.”

In the Epistle to the Ephesians, it was given to him to make known the mystery of the church in Christ. Here it is Christ in them. There they got spiritual blessings; here the hope of glory.

In the Epistle to the Philippians it was the inward life, and reaching to its fullness. In this epistle it is characteristically Christ, the substance of that life by the Spirit, whom (that is, Christ) we preach, warning every man and teaching every man, that I (says Paul) may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus, he laboring in the power of God to this end which worked in him in divine energy.

Chapter 2:1-7. The apostle would not have the depths of the dispensations of the grace of God remain unknown to any, not even to those that had never seen him. He declares that he has earnestly pleaded with God that the blessings of that grace which he had committed to him to make known might be vouchsafed to them; that their hearts might be comforted (having been), knit together in love, and unto the full assurance of understanding unto acquaintance with the mystery of God, of the Father, and of Christ. The saints, strangers in the world, bound together in the same hope, are comforted, having been knit together in love, and being knit in the gospel, have reached an apprehension unto the full assurance of understanding, even unto the acquaintance with the nature of the mystery of God. It is to guard them from everything that would be presented to them in the place of Christ.

He rejoices at their firmness and order. As they had received Christ Jesus the Lord, so let them continue to walk, rooted and built up in Him, confirmed in the faith we have before heard of, abounding in it with thanksgiving.

8-10. To the believing soul, every word is in these words a volume. Christ in whom dwelleth the fullness of the Godhead bodily being He in whom the saints are completed—faith in Him, in all we have in Him, faith in our place in him; faith working by love.

11, 12. From this verse onward, we find the moral and practical and formal application of the truth set out in this epistle. Still, however, it is “in whom” all is found. To think to find it elsewhere is Antichrist. “In whom” ye are circumcised—the end of the flesh and its power on the eighth day (ever the token of resurrection), makes a dead body of it by the Spirit—the good conscience by the resurrection of Jesus Christ raised by the glory of the Father, and dwelling in the newness of “this life.” By faith we see the old man, and everything that could apply to him, buried by baptism in the grave of Christ, “in whom” we are risen through faith of the operation of God that raised up Jesus. Our business is with life—His life, and we ascend with Him.

13. To you hath He forgiven all trespasses who were dead in them, and the uncircumcision of your flesh, and quickened you in His risen life. That have ordinances to say to you! Ordinances which were ordained for the flesh and for trespasses and sins. Ordinances are the dead works under the law, from which your conscience is purged by the blood of Christ. They no longer serve any purpose. But we here come to a more obscure expression, evident however in considering the nature and order of the dispensation now laid aside. There are special warnings against two evils—reintroduction of ordinances as a principle of religion, and adopting the patronage of angels. Both of these had place from God in the dispensation that had vanished away.

The Jewish people received the law by the dispensation of angels. (Acts 7:53) It had been committed to them in this prior order of things. The world to come, of which Israel will be the head, will not be subject to them, but to the Son.

This inferior agency, and all that was subject to it by the will of God, had never any place to the church, save, as angels are to minister to the heirs of salvation, a place of service instead of superiority. Ordinances take altogether a secondary place to the church, they being in the kingdom. They were once the connecting link with God. Christ is so now. When, therefore, God in His wisdom sent Christ the Son into the world, it was to take all things to Himself, and bring the world back to God under Himself. He now sits at the right hand of power. All handwriting of ordinances which was against us was nailed to His cross, and all authority overthrown but His. These things were thrown out into the world, the place of the excommunicate. And they become rudiments of the world, beggarly elements. Satan has taken advantage of the honor in which they once stood by the divine appointment, and has corrupted the souls which he could not overthrow by violence, by the re-introduction of those things which render the faith of Christ of no effect. Angels too were applied to as mediators, all which things so easily in false humility lay hold of the fleshly mind, which looks into things it has not seen, and judges of God by it.

It is most needful to see that God, in the spiritual institution of the church, had provided helps and the joints and bands under the Head, thus showing the guard which the institution of the body of Christ in its character in the church and administration was against this dangerous relapse; and in its positive force, when held to, in having nourishment ministered, and knit together, and increasing with the increase of God (see Greek).

If ye are then dead in Christ to the elements of that which is of this world, why do ye found your ways upon ordinances And what did the rules of the law do but prohibit things which God hath given to be received with thanksgiving for our needs, and which perish with the using, distorting thus the gracious purposes of God.

All variety of argument is answered by the single word, "It is not the way of God in Christ." He that is dead hath been justified from sin. (Rom. 6; see margin) Risen, ascended, glorified in Him. Presented thus in His life, ascension, and glory. We ourselves are within reach of all things in Him.

Chapter 3:1-11. The beginning of this chapter lays the foundation of heavenly and divine practice.

Every believer by grace, risen in Christ and before God in Him—in the perfectness of His risen life and Christ in them, is called (faith working by love) to be exercised—to walk in the way of this divine life, to bring by Him all that was contrary to that life into death, to make a dead body of it, so that life should find place. "If (or since) ye are risen in Him, set your affections on things above, and not on things on the earth."

It is said to believers (in chap. 2:20), ye are dead from the rudiments of the world (whatever virtue these may pretend to), and are risen in Him, and, risen in Him, are now in the condition of receiving a real and effective grace. Few feel the enemy to God which the mere flesh (and its motions) is, —its contrariety to Him, its judgment, its doom. As the deeper evil of the sins of the flesh, with covetousness, which is the worship of another god, came first in the list of all that was in the body of sin on the cross (and for such the wrath of God cometh on the children of unbelief), but mortified in the risen life that is in God.

These also must follow their communications among the saints about these things, and the mischiefs of the spirit of man, under the power of the flesh, and might even find occasion and do show themselves in the human spirit about the things of God.

The fullness and closeness of the word in some places is so great that it is by nothing but dwelling long on it by the Spirit, and believing the words as they stand, that will lead us to a just apprehension of the gracious purposes of God in them. And such a dwelling on them must be by the soul going back to those original deep actings of God, on which the call to holiness and the ways of life are founded.

To what power in the soul in the power of God would you say—“Mortify therefore”?

The conflict on the old ground is displaced. It is no double or separate power, it is the power of God in the soul in connection with Himself before whom in Christ, in the fullness of Christ for us, we stand, being presented before God in Him risen, and not only risen but ascended, by which is access, and also for every occasion that the soul in faith can be exposed to, and therefore glorified.

This is the only moral standing of the Christian, or the way of it, “Mortify therefore.”

We now advance to the relationship one with another, the fellowship being so put before us that the reality can only be in the fullness of that fellowship, can only be perfect in the fullness of condition in God. (1 John 1:7) “Lie not one to another, for ye are members one of another.” Put off the old man, put on the new man; and in the measure of acquaintance with it, after the image of Him that created him—Christ.

In this character of the new man, there can be none of the difference that exists from race and circumstances among men. Every member is a member of Christ Himself, and in obligation of conformity to this character. There can be no distinction in this; Christ is the whole, and in all diversities in those that are His alike.

12, 13. We now get a further exhortation on the ground of this portion in Christ. Put on as holy and beloved, the bowels of the compassion of Christ, and lowliness, meekness, long-suffering. The ground of mutual forgiveness and forbearing one another is on the ground of the standing of the settled forgiveness of the believer, not as in the prayers given to the apostles before the grace of the death of Christ was known to them; the motive proposed in the one being the previous forgiveness of trespasses by themselves, the other looked for on the ground of an acceptance by grace already existing.

14. We are now introduced to the highest step—over all these superinduce CHARITY.

Charity is the quality of God Himself, in divine grace (1 John 4), or rather God Himself.

In the first measure of charity we love God, because He first loved us. Every motive as to another has self in it; but the full measure is love perfected in us (not to us, as the received translation). It would mean God’s condition in the soul, the bond of perfectness to all and upon all occasions. And we are told it is the capacity to testify that God so loved the world that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. The former measures the qualities of the new man in Christ, and the measure of Christ in Him He that abideth in this, abideth in God, and God in him Therefore, said

the apostle, “superinduce charity, which is the bond of perfectness.”

15. How well can the apostle now exhort them with the words, “Let the peace of Christ” (which is the better reading) “rule in your hearts; for now it is in the perfectness of church-condition, for it is in this you are called in one body; and be ye thankful.” This is a peace that may grow. I know that My Father loveth Me, because I do those things that please Him. Let no man deceive you; he that worketh righteousness is righteous, as (after the same manner) Christ is righteous.

The degree is the degree of being like Him. So will your fellowship too be perfected, which can alone be by a walk in the light, as God is in the light. (1 John 2:5)

16, 17. We have in these two verses the blessed character of the intercourse for the growth of the saints, and the soul's worship with the perfectness of conscience in word and deed, giving thanks to God who is our Father by Christ. What are the disjecta membra by the side of this? Surely it is a device of Satan that they melt away again and be lost in the world.

18. Chapter 4:1. At this place in the epistle we enter on the exercise of common life in the body; namely, among those who are the subjects of all this blessing. One has but to say, “Let men try.” Let such as know the Lord put themselves under the word of the Lord, in obedience to the Lord. It is to walk by faith; for He is not here, but seen in faith over those that walk on earth and in the midst of earthly things and in the relationships of nature under Him. Those relationships are not left to the best care which men are used to give to them, for their own objects in some measure, sometimes of the fear of God, but in ignorance of the ways of God; but there, is a way under the Lord, with reward in the kingdom in which these are, when it is manifested in power, as is expressly said at the end of this chapter; namely, that such as do these things to the Lord shall of the Lord receive the reward of the inheritance.

It is the authority of the Lord they obey, and therefore to be done to Him as in the person of those to whom they obey in their respective duties. Masters are cautioned.

2. Nothing should be left behind us in the Word; God is to be waited for, as well as to be waited on, for the teaching we are to receive.

We shall ever be vouchsafed more light and understanding of the things of the Lord by the Spirit in the measure in which we are in subjection to His authority. For it was always in the measure of this that He revealed the hidden things of His teaching, and will still by the Spirit, as He gave the Holy Ghost at first to them that obeyed Him.

It would seem very simple to say or to hear, “Continue (constant) in prayer, and watching in the same with thanksgiving.” In hearing it, how often our souls would fail in the thought of what we should pray for in such a manner. It is not merely the praying of individuals, as necessity or difficulty arises to themselves. There must always be felt the need of getting something from God, on whom we are depending as the giver, and that need, felt in the soul, making all our requests known to God in prayer and supplication with thanksgiving; that is, in blessing God for the way made for us to His presence, and the love that has embraced us. But as God acquaints us with His counsels for the church, the need of the saints is the truth twice set before us in this epistle; so also twice in different degrees in the Ephesians. Surely the value of the prize, and the way to it, would, to the conscious soul, be ever suggestive of entreaty.

In the Corinthians it was on the subject of that epistle.

In the epistle to the Thessalonians it is that they may be found worthy by the confession of their calling—individual prayer (that is, for ourselves). Besides, we may say the requests for all we are charged with will be for ourselves in that dependence that brings forth God to help; and this will be greatly, in the knowledge of the grace of God in truth, confession, till we reach the needed revelation of recovery and power, and also for our usefulness in service.

Watching in prayer seems an extension of the thought of perseverance; watching unto it would be to turn every occasion into a position of dependence on God. The apostle suggests a subject to their petition for himself in his service to the Lord.

In conclusion of the spiritual portion of the epistle, the apostle charges them to walk wisely to them that are without, commending Christ by their walk; they have to learn wisdom for the practice of their position as confessing the Lord in the world which knows Him not. As to “redeeming the time” (Eph. 5:16), it is added, “because the days are evil,” it would be saving the time to good ends, which in the world is used to evil. He closes with a charge that their words should not be idle, but in love, and seasoned with that salt that must be in themselves.

Epaphras is again mentioned with the character we find given him by the apostle in the former part of the epistle, and we have what his prayer is for the Colossians, that they may stand of full age and fulfilled in all the will of God.

It is exceedingly to be remarked, that the apostle is anxious to keep up fellowship in the confession of the UNITY OF THE BODY, by engaging the interest of the several assemblies, one in another, desiring that the epistles to those two churches should be mutually communicated.

In the circumstance of his being a prisoner, and his work suspended, they had much to remember him about. He concludes with “Grace (favor and the free mercies of God) be with you. Amen.”

On the Revelation

The glory which shows itself to us at the opening of the Gospel by John, is both entitled and described there very simply. It is called “the glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father,” and borne by one who is described as “full of grace and truth.”

And that gospel is the journey of that glory in this evil world of ours, and a display of the work which it was always at, so to speak. Upon whatever scene the Son of the Father there enters, He is seen to shine in that glory which brought life and peace to sinners.

Accordingly, none but sinners discern it. It was a glory that could be seen only by the eye or heart of a convicted sinner. It was full of grace, and could not, therefore, suit itself to any other. But such ever found it to their joy and blessing. Andrew, who follows Jesus as the Lamb of God, gets entrance and dwells in the place of that glory, while even the mother, knowing the Lord not as a sinner, but as one who would have him honorable before men, is kept apart. (1:39; 2:4) So the Rabbi who seeks him as a teacher, is kept back, while the woman and the Samaritans, who learn their sin, and that He was indeed the Savior, get His company with them for two days (3, 4). And it is so afterward with his kindred in the flesh, and with a convicted adulteress. They know him not, save as one whom they sought to exalt in the world; and he would have them remove from him—while she enjoys the unspeakable preciousness of finding herself alone in his company; and all between them is reconciliation and kindness. (7, 8)

Other instances of this character show themselves in the Lord's public ministry through that gospel, down to the end of the twelfth chapter, where that ministry closes. And so, when we see him afterward in secret with his own (13-17), it is still “the glory of the Only Begotten of the Father” that is shining before us; his discourse to them is full of the Father—how he had come from the Father to reveal Him to them—how the Comforter would soon come to make that revelation effectual to their souls—how he was going away to get mansions for them in the Father's house, and that he would return to take them there. So full is this glory still of its own proper light and power, and so diligent about its due and appointed work.

And at the very end we see it still. The glory is moving upwards, returning to the place from whence it had descended, and has sinners in its train, conducting them along with itself. Jesus rises; and Peter and John follow Him. His path is theirs. They all leave this earth together. The Only Begotten of the Father is on his way home, taking the younger of the family with him, and we lose sight of them on the upward journey. (21:19, 20)

Such, I judge, to be the glory that is seen in the Gospel by John—such its journey across this world, such the spoils it gathered, and such its end and home.

But, as soon as we open the Apocalypse by John, it is another glory we see. It is not a revelation of Jesus Christ which the Father gave him; so that he could again say, “He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father;” or, “Whatsoever I speak, therefore, even as the Father saith unto Me, so I speak” (John 12, 14); but it is a revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave to him. It is the glory,

not of the bosom of the Father (John 1:11), but of the throne of God. (Rev. 1:14) It is the effulgence, not of Him who lay in the one place, but of Him who is to inherit the other. And just on this glory being introduced to us, the saints, in a little ascription of praise, tell us, as it were, that they had already learned the lesson which the gospel had been teaching them, the value of the ministry of the Son of the Father, and that they stood now in the conscious washing of His blood, and in the dignity of kings and priests unto God and his Father. (Rev. 1:5,6)

And having thus learned the lesson of the former glory, they were prepared for the lesson of this second glory. Such is the holy order of the soul in getting the knowledge of God and of His ways. Such divine knowledge is from glory to glory, from one revelation to another. And being instructed in the glory of “the only begotten of the Father,” the saints may well stand before this glory of “the Prince of the kings of the earth,” of Him who is coming forth as “the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the Almighty.” If the bosom have comforted us, may I say, the throne may now elevate us—if we stand in grace, we may learn judgment.

Accordingly, this book gives us the actings of the throne of God. There are judgments—voices and thunders, seals, trumpets and vials—all ordered by the power of the throne which judges right, and which is preparing for the righteous kingdom, at the time of which, the heavenly seed of God, in embodied glory, descends as the golden city or the Lamb’s wife.

Such is the path of the glory here. It is a descending path. And such are the links between the Gospel and the Apocalypse of the beloved Disciple. In the one, he leads us by the light of the glory of grace out of the world, first to the knowledge, and then to the house, of the Father—in the other, he leads us, already in heaven or in the Father’s house, forth from that, first to the scene of judgment (chap. 4), and then to the scene of our inheritance and dominion. (chap. 21)

Christ will look at the Bride with delight, when thus manifested in glorious beauty as the Golden or Holy City. But still it is herself that will be His chiefest object. The heart well and always knows this, when there is true and pure affection. And we have the expression of this on the return of the Prodigal. (Luke 15) For the Father had fallen on himself in secret, and then brought him forth and presented him in the house, clothed in beauty and honor. But his heart had been the most deeply touched at the beginning. For, as another has said, “glory is but the consequence of love, and the source is always the sweeter. The favor out of which a benefit flows is dearer than the benefit itself.”

The opening of this wondrous book gives us its title and character. “The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him.” For it will be found, I judge, to be a revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ in such characters of glory and power as He derives from God, or a revelation of Him in the exercise of judicial authority. And, as two exercises of judicial authority awaited Him after He had ascended to God, so, accordingly, this book has two parts.

1-3. These chapters give us the first part. The Lord is here exercising judgment in the church, or among the lights of the sanctuary. This is called “the things which are.”

4-22. These chapters give us the second part. The Lord is here exercising judgment in the earth (first by agencies, and then personally), and thus preparing it for His kingdom. This is called “the things which shall be hereafter.”

This is the general order of the book. It also contains both a preface and a conclusion.

In the preface, we first learn that this wondrous book deals with “the Word of God,” and “the testimony of Jesus Christ;” that is, God’s counsels made known by Jesus Christ. Then we are told the manner in which Jesus Christ ministers this testimony to the churches; and blessing is then pronounced on him who acts righteously by this book, by either reading or hearing it, and by keeping the things which are written in it. After this, the seven churches in Asia are called to listen; and, after a benediction on them, the Lord Jesus Christ is announced as the one who is about to come “with clouds,” or in the solemnities of judgment (Dan. 7:13; Matt. 24:30; 26:64), a coming quite according to the judicial character of the Book, and which is to make the kindreds of the earth wail because of Him, and them which pierced Him, to see Him to their confusion.

But in the midst of such an announcement of the Lord as even this, the saints have two happy utterances put into their lips. On His being here revealed as “the faithful witness, the first-begotten from the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth,” they praise Him as the one who had loved them; and again, when His coming in the clouds, as for judgment, is announced, they invite His glory with full confidence still, and say, “Even so, come.” For they have thoroughly learned that they may have boldness even in a day of judgment. (1 John 4:17)

Then, when these utterances of the saints pass by, the Lord reveals himself as the “First and the Last,” a title which he frequently takes in this book, the very title, too, that he so constantly assumes when judging the idols of Babylon in Isaiah (see Isa. 40-48); all this still assuring us, that He is now about to speak in judgment again.

In the mouth, indeed, of every witness here, we learn that this book is a revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ, which God, not the Father, gives him, or in judgment, not in grace. But this is only here at the close of the volume of the New Testament; for we may observe, that the Lord has ever sought, so to speak, to publish His name in grace, before He does so in judgment. In one way or other He will and must make Himself known, for that is His glory; but he seeks the rather to be known in goodness than in judgment, if men will hear.

We have this variously illustrated. To Egypt, for instance, the Lord made himself known in Joseph, the witness of His goodness; for by Joseph He filled Egypt’s storehouses with all kinds of wealth. But Egypt forgot Joseph. A king arose there, who persecuted Joseph’s people, and said of his God, “Who is the Lord, that I should obey Him?” Then the Lord had to publish His name in that land in judgment, saying to the king, “In this thou shalt know that I am the Lord, behold I will smite with the rod.” He was now to be made known not in Joseph, but in plagues. So in Israel afterward. The Lord Jesus was offered to them as “the chief corner stone,” the “sure foundation,” the one in whom they should find salvation and strength. But being rejected as such, He was to be revealed to them as “the head stone of the corner,” in the power and judgment of an exalted stone, which was to fall and grind to powder.

And so in the world now. This present dispensation is publishing God in grace. He is beseeching men to be reconciled. But they who will not thus know Him in the great salvation, must know Him by and bye in judgment. (2 Thess. 1:8) If the blood of the Lamb be despised, the wrath of the Lamb must be met. (Revs. 6:16) The same “Lord,” who is “full of grace and truth” now, will by and bye send the sword out of his mouth to execute righteousness. (Rev. 19:15)

And this is the difference between the Gospel and the Revelation by John. The Gospel publishes the name of the Lord in grace, the Revelation in judgment; the one flows from the Father, the other from God.

Now, according to all this, when we pass the preface, and get into the body of the Book, it is the Lord, the Son of Man, in the place of judgment that we see. (See 1:9-20) For these verses introduce the first scene which the book discloses. John sees the Lord, as Son of Man, prepared to judge the sanctuary. He does not show Himself to John as the Priest at the Golden Altar, with his censer and burning incense, but at the Candlestick with the Golden Snuffers; as though He were inquiring (and that for the last time), whether or not the Lamps of the Sanctuary would burn worthy of the place, or whether He should not be compelled soon to remove them. It is the Son of Man with garments down to the foot, and golden girdle about His loins, with head and hair white as wool, eyes of flame, feet of brass, and voice as of many waters; in His hand holding the seven stars, and in His mouth the two-edged sword, and walking in the brightness and power of the midday sun, among the Seven Candlesticks. All this was an expression of judgment, judgment of the house of God. John shall hear himself personally and individually addressed with the wonted words of God's sweet love to us, "Fear not;" but still this is a vision that may well make the stoutest of the children of men to fall as dead.

It is to be observed, for the comfort of our souls, that, in restoring the heart of John to full ease in the presence of the glory, the Lord does not remind him of their intimacy in the days of his flesh; how he had lain in His bosom, how he had been with Him on the holy mount and in the garden, and how he had committed His mother to His special care—but He simply says, "I am He that liveth and was dead." For our title to confidence before God, our ability to face the glory, and to stand before it at ease and in liberty, rests not at all on any special grace which may be in us, or on any personal privilege conferred, or any peculiar place or excellence, but only and altogether on the preciousness of the blood of the Lamb, or on the death and resurrection of Jesus, which is the common property (as through boundless grace we may call it) of all believers.

The place in which the Lord is thus seen by John was not his natural place. He had been raised from the dead, and was now ascended into heaven, there to dwell for an age as Mediator between God and men, the Advocate with the Father, and the Lord too, the Son over His own house, the Head over all things to the church.

He had received gifts for men, and was dispensing apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, and evangelists from His glory, for the perfecting of the saints, for the edifying of the body here, as Lord to, and of, the church. But his place and action here are not the necessary attributes even of this his lordship. As, though Moses was king in Jeshurun, it was not natural to him in that character to call on Levi to draw the sword and slay the thousands of the people. Jesus the Lord is here seen on the earth, and arrayed in judgment and vengeance. For he had been disturbed. It was like his action in the days of Babel or Sodom. He had either to go down and see if things were according to the cry that had gone up, or to go down to confound and to scatter. (Gen. 11; 18) It was also like the God of Israel afterward, who, while on the Mount with his servant Moses, giving him the shadows of Christ, "the shadows of good things to come," occupied there as it were with that which naturally was his in the riches of his goodness, is disturbed by Israel's apostasy at the foot of the Mount, and has to tell Moses to go down, and visit the people who were corrupting

themselves there. (Ex. 32) So here; the priest was to be in his temple in the heavens, waiting daily (as we may speak), in his natural grace, on the defiled feet of his saints, or giving the gifts still, that he might both feed and trim the candlesticks. The Lord was on high, Head over all things to the church, ordering everything for her blessing and profit. But, now, the corrupters again at the foot of the mount have disturbed Him, and He comes down again to see if indeed it be according to the cry of it, and if so, to confound and to scatter again.

Another character of judgment had gone on previously. I mean, the judgment of the churches within their own borders; the Lord, as the Priest, being then still in heaven. Thus Corinth had been judged. "For this cause many are sick and weakly among you, and many sleep." This was the chastening of the Lord of the church. (1 Cor. 11:32) But here, it is the Son of Man descended to the earth (the place for Jesus as Son of Man) with a threat to remove, and not with grace to correct and purify. The difference between these judgments appears to be the same as the judgments on Uzzah or Shelomith's son by the hand of the Lord and His congregation, and the judgment of Jerusalem by the hand of the Gentile. The first class of judgments was for correction and purity of the house of God, and for the keeping of the people still at home. The second was for their removal out of His sight. Delay there was, in thus bringing the Destroyer of the Gentiles on his way against God's city. Prophet after prophet had risen early and warned the people, and Jeremiah had wept and prayed and preached, even after Nebuchadnezzar had sat down at the gates. But when he entered, he entered with a new character of judgment. It was for the removal of Jerusalem; as here, the Son of Man has come (after the like delay and patience), but it is for the removal of the candlesticks if they repent not.

This I judge to be the place in the history of the church which we reach here. This place and action of the Lord do not naturally, so to speak, suit him as the priest. But the church's corrupt state puts him into it. Just as His coming in the latter day with vengeance on the world, and on His apostate Israel, is not His natural coming. At first He came offering peace and the kingdom. His heavenly heralds said, "Peace on earth!" But the unbelief of Israel, and the confederacy of Jews and Gentiles, which prevailed to cast Him out from the earth, has so changed His course, that He is now to return to the rebellious citizens in the power of "a day of vengeance." But that is His unnatural course, "His strange work," as Scripture calls it. Israel's and the earth's sin alone account for it. Just as here, the corruption of the church changes the place and action of the Lord; and, instead of seeing Him with the towel and the water in the heavenly temple, or with His hands filled with gifts to give out from the glory on high, we see Him arrayed in judgment, taking to Him His righteous power to remove the candlestick if it repent not.

And the sight of Him in such a character overwhelms even John. It must—it could not but do so. For this is the Lord marking iniquities; and before Him, in such a place, who could stand? It is not the Lord talking with His own, as a traveling friend, or as a happy guest, or as a gracious Master, as once He did when He rose from the dead. But it is the Lord, awakened by sin at the foot of the hill, coming down to see if all were even according to the cry that had gone up. And who could stand when He was thus angry?

Isaiah, in his day, saw Him in such a place. The doors and posts were shaken, and the house filled with smoke, for the Lord was about to put judgment on the house that was called by His name; and the prophet, seeing himself in that house, trembles and learns his uncleanness. And the Lord

restores him, as here He restores John; though, like the Prophet of Israel, John, falls as dead. But the Lord, by the seraphim and the coal from the altar, taking away his iniquity restores Isaiah; as here, the revelation of Him who was dead and is alive again, and alive too for evermore, restores John; for that carries the restoring virtue with it. The death and resurrection of Jesus gives the sinner his full confidence; taking the sentence of death from him, to lay it on one able to bear it. And so, from this time forth, let John (our brother) be called through this book to what visions and judgments he may, he is not again disturbed. He is twice overwhelmed, it is true; but it is by the holy delights of visions of joy and glory, and not by the storms and lightning of judgment. And, according to such an introduction as this, we find our Lord in the following scene. (2). It is the Lord in "the house of God," challenging the churches to answer for themselves. He had before set them in blessing, and now He looks for fruit. It is as though he had heard a report of their unfaithfulness, and was now saying to them, "How is this that I hear of thee? Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward." He had already communicated with them through the apostles; but now He does through the Angels. Paul had addressed them as in the pastoral grace of Christ; John now addresses them as from the judicial authority of Christ. The Apostle had fed them and disciplined them as in the place of dependence; but now these epistles challenge them as in the place of responsibility.

And one striking, though it may be minute, feature of this difference in the mind of the Lord, when addressing the churches through the apostle and through the angel, the one being gracious, the other judicial, appears in this.

In olden times, under the dispensation of the law, God was constantly regarded as the Searcher of the heart, the Trier of the reins of the children of men; and, then He did so, in order to reward according to every man's work (see 1 Chron. 28:9; Psa. 7:9; Jer. 17:10). But, by the apostle, God is revealed as the Searcher of the heart with another intent. "He that searcheth the hearts, knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit." That is, He is not searching the heart, in order to reward the works, or even to refine as gold is refined; but, in His search of the heart, He finds out the exercises of the spirit. This is what He considers there; that is what detains and engages Him. It is not a search ending in the detection of evil, but good-of good to be owned according to Himself, and not of evil to be judged and punished. (Rom. 8:27)

But in this book we have Him again as the Searcher of the reins and the hearts, for the ends and purposes that He was so under the law. "All the churches shall know that I am He that searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works." (Rev. 2:23)

These are the principal passages in the New Testament, presenting God in this character of the Searcher of the heart; and this comparison of them helps still to show us the Lord in judgment in this book of the Revelation, and that He has changed His aspect, now addressing the Churches through the angel, from what it was when addressing them through the apostles. He has returned now to take His place, such as it was when He was under the law, the Exacter of righteousness, the Assayer of the heart, that He might render according to every man's work done there, and not to find out the breathings of His own Spirit there; to bless and comfort accordingly. And the moment they are thus addressed, they are found wanting. As candlesticks bound to shine to the praise of Him who had set them in His sanctuary, they are now visited; and the common result of all such visitations of God's stewards may tell us the end of the candlesticks also. For the crisis or

judgment has always found man unready. Whether planted in innocence, in a sphere of providence, or under a ministration of grace, man has been found unequal even to hold a blessing. "Adam, where art thou?" got this answer, "I heard Thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." The vineyard of Israel afterward should have yielded its fruit to Him who had planted and dressed it; but when He came, it was only the wild grape that He found; and so it is now with the candlesticks in the house of God. They had been duly prepared by God's care. They were nothing less than golden candlesticks—churches fed by the Spirit, blessed with blessing from "God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ," made fully furnished and well-ordered lights in the sanctuary. But now that visitation is made in due season too, and the Son of Man finds something unsuited to the holy place. These seven churches (the sevenfold or perfect expression of the church) are challenged by the Son of Man with these words, "I know thy works;" but the sevenfold light is but dim and uncertain. This steward of God's glory is but unfaithful also; and so, by and bye, the same inquisition will be made of the "earthly gods" —the Gentile powers, to whom the Lord has committed the sword; and they will then, in like manner as Adam, Israel, or the candlesticks, be found wanting; and they will have to fall as men, and die like one of the princes. (Psa. 82) All the stewards are thus found wanting, when weighed in the balance; and the Lord is justified in His sayings, and clear when He judges.

These seven churches are the places of this judgment. There were, it is true, other congregations of the Lord at the time; but the seven are enough to exhibit the judgment—for seven is completeness. So some of them may be found, by this judgment or visitation, in a better condition than others; but still the Son of man sees the whole thing different from what it ought to be: one was not judged in the other, but each was responsible for itself; and thus some maintained their purity longer than others. But still the whole tone of this visitation bears with it a notice of what the end speedily was to be, as in our clay we see it; for Philadelphia and Smyrna are now as fully removed candlesticks as Sardis or Pergamos.

These challenges of the churches by the Son of Man lead us to see that all was nearly over, that there was but a step between such rebukes and their removal. And surely we do not, in our day, need to be told of the disturbance which has taken place in the "house of God." We learn that Adam lost Eden; and the present groans of creation tell us so. We learn, that Israel lost Canaan; and their present wanderings over the earth tell us so. And how do we see the sanctuary? Are we not witnesses to ourselves, that we have been no more able to hold the blessing which was ours, than Adam could hold Eden, or Israel, Canaan The candlestick that was set for the rebuking of all else as darkness, and for being itself the embodied and well-ordered light of the world, is not now at Ephesus or Sardis, or anywhere else.

We may try our ways, most surely, by all that is here said to the churches; but this does not amount to the Son of Man owning us as His only light in our place. And our first duty, therefore, both in grace and wisdom, is, to be humbled because of this; for, though we may have much, in fragments, that belongs to the candlestick, yet all that does not give us the standing and privilege of the candlestick, entitling us to set aside as darkness, and as not of the sanctuary, all that is not of ourselves.

When our fidelity to the Lord became the question, we were found wanting, as any other steward. This book will, at the end, show us that the question of the Lord's fidelity to us will be answered in

the other way. For as the Lamb's wife, the church will then be found to survive all the judgments, though here, at the beginning, she could not, as the candlestick, stand the righteous challenge of the Lord. And this is man; and this is God always. Shame and ruin mark our end; honor and peace and everlasting truth and love, the end of the Lord.

And in this shame and ruin, I believe our three chapters end. The perfect order of the seven lights of the house of God is gone, and gone too, not to be restored; and, according to this, the prophet is at once called to see other things and other places, to witness other scenes (but still a scene of judgment, as we shall find), not that of the priestly Son of Man in his temple, but that of God and the Lamb in the earth. But this judgment is delayed till all the foreknown family have come in. For "God's long-suffering is salvation" (2 Peter 3:15). "The fullness of the Gentiles" must come in, and all be brought to the knowledge of the Son of God (Rom. 11:25); and, therefore, before we are led, in our prophet, to behold this second scene of judgment, or the judgment of the earth, we are given, I believe, a sight of the church (now gathering from all nations) in Heaven, under the symbols of the living creatures and crowned elders round the throne; so that the ascension of the saints into the air had taken place at some untold moment, between the times of our third and fourth chapters.

Our ascension into the air will lead us to the Lord, and then, with him, to the Father. (John 14:1-4) But it is not these results we get here. It is not the saints either in the Lord's presence, or in the mansions of the Father's house, that we see here; but the church before the throne of "God Almighty," of Him "who was, and is, and is to come," for whose pleasure all things were created. This scene we get here. It is not the children before the Father, but the church in dignity before the throne. It may be a scene in the Father's house, in anticipation of the kingdom now about to be assumed; but it is not simply and merely a view of that house in its abstract form. But how perfect is the wisdom of God in appointing all the seasons for revealing His mind and purposes! A view of the Father's house in its simplest form, as the home of the children, would not have been in character here; for this is the book, not of consolations for the children, but of judgments by which God and the Lamb are asserting their holy rights, vindicating their own praise, and delivering the long usurped and corrupted inheritance out of the hands of its destroyers. The Gospel by John conducts us to the Father's house; Our path there ends, as the path of children, in that home of love. But this Apocalypse by John gives us the action that clears the earth for the kingdom and the glory, and gets the golden city ready; and our path here ends, as the path of heirs, in that place of glory. For both are ours—the joys of children and the dignity of heirs; the house of the Father, and the throne of the Son.

Here, then, when taken into vision of heavenly things, it is the throne of God, with its due attendants, and not the Father's house with the children, that we see. It is the throne of God Almighty, Creator, and Ruler of all things; around which is, therefore, thrown the holy pledge of the earth's covenanted security; and it is the place, too, from which the subsequent action of the book, or the judgment of the earth, flows; and, therefore, lightnings, and thunders, and voices (the symbols of those judgments) issue from it.

The thrones, crowns, and white raiment, strongly intimate that these elders symbolize the redeemed. And the living creatures do the same, only in another aspect. And the giving forth the same object, under different symbols and in different aspects, was common in the shadows of the

law, to the style and language of which this Revelation by John so much conforms itself. For instance, the same person stands before us in the sanctuary of old, expressed under different aspects in the symbols of the Golden Altar, the Golden Table, and the Golden Candlestick.

But, as to this wondrous subject of the Living Creatures or the Cherubim, I would observe a little more particularly.

Wherever we see them throughout Scripture, they are always attendants on the throne of God—always reflecting, by their action or attitude, the mind and ways of Him who sits there.

Thus: They were seen at the gate of Eden, with a flaming sword; because then the Lord was expressing His own unrepenting righteousness, driving the sinner out of His place.

Thus, also, they are seen over the mercy-seat, in the Holiest, with fixed, delighted gaze, inquiring into the secrets of that throne of grace, because the Lord was there, expressing His work in Jesus, the fixedness of His purpose, and joy in the gospel of His dear Son. (Ex. 25:20; 1 Peter 1:12)

Thus, also, they are seen with unfolded wing under the God of Israel (Ezek. 1-10); because then the Lord of Israel was about to leave His sanctuary, the apostasy of His people having disturbed His rest in Jerusalem. And they are there, also, seen reaching out their hands to take fire to cast over the city; for there the Lord had commanded the judgment for its sins.

Thus, also, as here, they are seen round the throne, still attending on it, to celebrate the praise of Him who sits there, and do His will and learn His mind; still, therefore, reflecting His mind and ways.

But, in this last place of the Cherubim, we observe a distinction of great importance. Hitherto, or in the first three instances, they were angelic, because the law had been ordained by angels (Gal. 3:19); with delight the angels inquired into the mysteries of Christ (1 Peter 1:12); and the angels waited on the Lord of Israel. (Isa. 6:2) But the Cherubim, or attendants on the throne, have now become human; because “the world to come” is to be made subject to man, and not to angels (Heb. 2:5), and this throne, in Revelation 4, is the throne of judgment preparing the earth for the kingdom, and which is by and bye (with new and changed attributes) to preside over “the world to come.”

But this is glorious and wonderful. Poor sinners redeemed by blood are destined, through grace, to take the cherubic dignity and joy, in which angels, unfallen angels, once stood—the angels themselves falling back, as it were, and opening their ranks to let redeemed sinners in, and then to take their own place around them, as well as around the throne itself. (7:11) Angels are thus passed by; and the seed of Abraham are taken up; and it is blessed to know that angels themselves take delight in this. They desire to look into this mystery. “God manifest in flesh” is seen of them. (1 Tim. 3:16) Their own joy is enhanced by all this; for by it they have learned more of the shining and gracious ways of Him who created them, and on whom they, as we, depend. Beggars from the dung-hill are set, as among princes, round the throne; and the living creatures and the crowned elders accordingly, never in the whole action of this wondrous book, move out of heaven, but there abide, either in the intelligence of the mind of God, in authority under the throne, or in the holy office of leading the joy of creation. (See 5, 6, 7, 11, 15, 19) They abide in their sphere on high, while the action proceeds on earth.

And there is another distinction touching these Cherubim or living creatures, which I must notice. In Ezekiel, they are accompanied by wheels, but here with crowned and enthroned elders. In the Prophet, one spirit animates them and the wheels. As here, they sing in holy concert with the elders, and with them ever act as with one mind. But still, it is significant, that there, their companions are wheels; while here, they are crowned and seated elders. For, in those days of Ezekiel, the throne, whose purpose they express, was about to remove itself from the sanctuary, and wheels were suited to it; but in the day anticipated by this vision, the throne is at rest, with the church, in her royal and priestly glories, around it, and crowned and seated elders are suited to it.

And, indeed, it is much to be observed, though it may draw us aside for a moment, that it is the Father who is now preparing a Sabbath for Himself, and not simply God the Creator. The Seventh Day was the Creator's Sabbath; the kingdom will be the Father's. The Creator had engaged His energy of old, and His works were the reflection of His eternal power and godhead. All was then good in His sight. In all He delighted, and by all He was glorified. But in the Sabbath of the kingdom, He will survey richer and deeper reflections of Himself. All His excellencies will be displayed; the work of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, of our God in His grace and salvation, will then be the fairer and fuller witness of Him, than the heavens and the earth of old. And if all things in the creation of old were needed to give Him His full glory and satisfaction then; so, in the Father's kingdom, all of us, beloved, must yield our contribution. We may be little, a small unit, in the account of redemption; but we contribute to the survey of the great Redeemer's work. Then let us not doubt our place in that system; but, by faith, take it as simply as any flower in Eden would have blossomed, to its great Creator's delight and praise. Grace is planting the second garden; and we are there not to our own glory, but to His, who works as much to His own praise and delight, and as much alone, in redemption, as He did in creation.

But, this only by the way.

Such as I have said, I judge to be the throne, with its attributes and attendants. It is the throne of the Creator and Upholder of all things, from which are to go forth the judgments which are to clear the earth of its corrupters and destroyers.

The earth has evidently now become the object of attention in heaven. The whole of this chapter, as well as the following one, indicates this; and very strikingly so, the feature of the rainbow round the throne-because the rainbow is the symbol of that covenant which God has made with the earth, the pledge to it that it shall abide before Him.

But this being so, the earth and its history and destinies now becoming the immediate object of thought and concern in heaven, it would seem, even from this alone, that the church or heavenly people from among the Gentiles, must previously have been gathered in and taken home, as I have already suggested. Because, until that is done, the earth is not the object of attention in heaven. The bringing in of the elect, who are to be conformed to the image of the Son, and to share his heavenly joy and throne, is the object that forms and orders the concern of heaven now. There is general providence here, no doubt-but earth is not the great animating object in heaven, but the gathering of sinners out of it, the washing of their feet daily when thus gathered, and the filling up of the number of those heirs of salvation. But now when we have reached Revelation 4, and when we look in at the door opened in heaven, we find the earth directly and immediately awakening thought and action there, and (as we might from this expect), the church already there.

For when “the fullness of the Gentiles” shall come in, Israel will be thought of again; when the heavens are filled, the earth will be the scene of divine attention, and finally of divine husbandry and preparation again.

But the throne being thus seen, and God’s glory and pleasure, as Creator and Governor of all things, being thus celebrated, the question arises, “Who can He seat on this throne with Himself?” “Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord, or who shall stand in His holy place?”

The earth and its fullness is the Lord’s by this title of creation here celebrated, and owned in that 24th Psalm. But it was His pleasure of old to set His image over those works of His hand. Adam was given dominion, but Adam lost his place and forfeited his kingdom. Who, then, shall reassume the dignity, and again ascend the hill of the Lord? Who is he whom the Lord God can reinstate in Adam’s forfeited lordship? That now becomes the question; and, accordingly, it is raised in the fifth chapter, immediately after the exhibition of the supreme throne in the fourth. And the answer to it from every region is this, “The Lamb that was slain, the Lion of the tribe of Judah.” He who sat on the throne gives that answer, by letting the book pass from his hand into the hand of the Lamb. The seven Spirits are seen as centered in the Lamb, intimating that the administration of the kingdom is now to be lodged in His hand.

The living creatures and elders join in giving this glory to Him, by singing their song of gladness in the prospect of the earth being soon the scene of their glory. The hosts of angels join in giving it, by now willingly transferring all strength and glory and faculty for dominion, into the hand of the Lamb. The angels now empty themselves. In previous dispensations they had been the ministers of power; as one of them says, “I stand in the presence of God.” The law was ordained by angels; they were all ministering spirits. The prophet’s servant saw the mountain filled with chariots and horses. It was an angel that went through Egypt; and an angel that stood over Jerusalem with a drawn sword. Angels accompanied the Lord in his visit to Abraham, and revealed and executed God’s purpose towards Lot in Sodom. The chariots of God were twenty thousand—even thousands of angels. But now they empty themselves and lay their honors at the feet of the Lamb, and ascribe all that was once theirs executively to the Lamb. But they might easily do this; for a greater than they, even the Lamb Himself, the Lord of angels, had shown them the way to this self-emptying. He had been in the form of God, thinking it not robbery to be equal with God, but He made Himself of no reputation; He emptied Himself; He laid aside His glory, and took on Him another form altogether. So that angels, His creatures, may well follow Him. And then, finally, every creature in heaven, on earth, under the earth, and such as are in the sea, in their order and measure, join in giving it, by uniting the name of the Lamb with that of the Creator and Lord: and they all at once feel, as though their groans were already turned into praises; for, as soon as Adam fell, creation was sensitive of the curse, and became a prisoner of hope (Rom. 8:22); but now that the Lamb takes the book, she becomes equally sensitive of deliverance, and glories in the liberty of the children of God—of course by anticipation, as the church had just anticipated their reign. Thus is this question settled in heaven. The title of the Lamb to take dominion in the earth is owned and verified in the very place, where alone all power and dominion or office could righteously be had, the presence of the throne in heaven, for “power belongeth to God.” Messiah owns that in the 62nd Psalm; and here He again owns it by taking the book out of His hand; for that is an action which confesses, on the part of the Lamb, that powers are ordained of God, that the Lord of heaven is the fountain of office.

Thus it is from heaven and from the Ancient of Days, that the Son of Man takes dominion, or the nobleman receives his kingdom. (Dan. 7; Luke 19) Jesus would not take power from the god of this world (Matt. 4:9); nor would He take it from the heated desire of the people. (John 6:15) He waits to take it (for there alone it could be righteously received) from the hand of the God of heaven and earth, from whom Adam of old received it. And, as the Lamb here owned God on the throne to be the source of power, so God on the throne owns the Lamb to be His ordinance of power. This action of taking the book has this concord of sweet sounds in it; for the Lamb goes up to receive it, and the Lord allows it to pass from His hand. God's glory as supreme and only potentate is thus vindicated, and he commits power in the earth again to the hand of man, as fully sanctioning it there, and all the exercise of it, as of old He did in Adam, delighting again in this other image and likeness of Himself. And this governs all the subsequent action of this wondrous book; for the title of the kingdom being thus approved in the due place and form, it only remains to clothe that title with possession. The inheritance is the Lamb's by purchase of blood. That blood sealed Him as the fully obedient one, and, therefore, God could thus highly exalt Him (Phil. 3); and that blood has also reconciled all things in heaven and earth (Col. 1); and the inheritance being, therefore, thus purchased, he has now only to redeem, it-as we read "the redemption of the purchased possession." His blood, as the Lamb slain, had given Him title to it; His strength, as the Lion of Judah, must now give Him possession of it.

The extended virtue of this same precious blood of Jesus is here blessedly declared. It had already redeemed the saints out of all nations and kindreds, and seated them in heaven, as kings and priests unto God; but it is now also owned as giving the Lamb, who shed it, title to the inheritance, and, consequently, title to lead these His redeemed people into their reign over the earth. It had already redeemed them from the world, and now would soon seat them in dominion over the world.

For it is by His blood, the Lamb here prevails, to take the book, or the title to the inheritance. The "Lion of the tribe of Judah" is seen in the person of "the Lamb that was slain." His blood was His title. His blood made Him the purchaser of the inheritance; He is now its redeemer, as the prevailing Lion of Judah. And, consequently, as the Lamb, He is the spring and fountain of all the resulting glories of the kingdom. Extensive virtues of the blood of Jesus! It has been the object of faith—the ground of worship—the title of security—the bond of covenants—from the beginning. By it Abel was an accepted worshipper, and even Adam himself a believing reconciled sinner. By it Abraham had the covenant of promise made with him. By it the people of the Lord dwelt safe while the sword of judgment passed over. By it the veil of the temple was rent—all distance between God and sinners removed. By it the trumpet of the jubilee might give forth its gladdening note; for on the day of atonement they were to sound it. But why say more about it, than, again, on this beautiful fifth chapter to observe, that, by it the saints, already redeemed from earth and seated in heaven, now look to return as kings over the earth, in the train and honor of that slain Lamb whose blood, but whose blood only, has all this prevalence in it.

Thus, there is no blessing or dignity, nothing of either grace or glory, which this blood cannot command for us poor sinners; but there is no other price for anything, no other ground or title for blessing but itself. It does everything, and does it all alone. Adam lost both himself and his estate; he became a sinner in his own person, and also an exile from Eden. But the blood of Jesus, God's Lamb that was slain, restores all- "Thou hast redeemed us;" and again, "We shall reign on the

earth.”

In Israel, there was the ordinance of redeeming the inheritance, as well as the heir or person. (Levs. 25) If either an Israelite or his possession had been sold, it was both his kinsman’s duty and right to ransom him and it. Now Jesus has approved Himself our kinsman in both ways. The Son of God became the Son of Man, and thus showed his kinsman-nature. He died to purchase us and our inheritance by blood, and thus showed his kinsman-love. And in this book of the Revelation we get Him, I judge, perfecting His acts as such kinsman, and redeeming our inheritance out of the hands of its corruptors. The kinsman in Israel had a title to redeem the inheritance; but then he had to do it on condition of discharging the debt that was on it. Jesus has paid a full and more than adequate value, as is here owned; for the book or title to the redeemed possession passes into His hand. But the usurper of the inheritance is still to be removed; the enemies to be made the kinsman’s footstool; and, whether the action be that of God or that of the Lamb Himself, the character of the action is equally clear and certain. The action is the redemption of the inheritance, flowing from the Lamb’s acknowledged title. The book taken by the Lamb is His title-deed. He has already been the Purchaser of the inheritance, He is now to be the Redeemer. And that this is not a book of instructions to John as the Prophet of the church, or anything but this title-deed that concerns the church’s inheritance of the earth, appears to me from several considerations.

1. Because it lay in the hand of God Almighty, the Creator of all things, before the Lamb receives it.

Because it is taken by Him, as the Lamb slain, and as the Lion of Judah, characters of purchase and strength.

Because, on the taking of it, the church sings in prospect of her dominion over the earth-the angels who had been previously ministers of power in the earth, then transfer all to the Lamb-and creation ends her groans in praises.

These witnesses establish, in my mind, the character of the book which the Lamb takes. And the book of the Revelation is in concord with this. It is the history of the redemption of the inheritance. I mean, of course, the second part of it, after the third chapter. It occupies the same place in the history of the acts of the Lord in the New Testament, as the book of Joshua does of the acts of the Lord in the Old. It records the manner of redeeming the inheritance, as that did. And without His acts, as recorded in Joshua, the Lord’s ways, in old times, would have been imperfect. He had redeemed the heir out of Egypt by the hand of Moses; educated and trained him in the wilderness; and thus prepared him for rest in Canaan. But He had still to redeem Canaan out of the hand of the Amorite; and this act of His is recorded in Joshua. Then, but not till then, the Lord went through the whole course of His mercy and strength. And so without this book of the Revelation, the record of the Lord’s acts would, in like manner, have been incomplete. The Gospels and the Epistles tell us, like the books of Moses, of the redemption of the heir and of his education in the wilderness of this present evil world; but now it is this closing book of the Revelation that tells us of the redemption of the inheritance; and thus it properly closes and completes the perfect acts of the Lord in behalf of the church of God.

And let me further observe upon the ordinance of the Jubilee under the law, that if no kinsman were found able or willing to redeem the inheritance, it returned to the heir in the Jubilee. The Lord

of Israel thus kept in His own hand the means of restoring all things. He acted as Lord of the soil; and said, the land was His. (See Lev. 25:23) He created, as it were, a tenancy for forty-nine years, and after the traffic of the occupiers had disturbed everything, in the fiftieth year He returned to the land, and then settled it anew on His family, according to His own mind.

And so with the earth, of which the land of Israel was the sample. Man may take it into his own hand for a time, and by his selfishness and iniquities disturb God's order in it. But a day is coming, the promised and expected Jubilee, the time of "the restitution of all things;" and then, the earth shall be brought back to God again, and He will re-settle it in His family according to His own holy and righteous principles.

But "the day of vengeance" is united with "the year of the redeemed." (Isa. 63:4; 34:8; 61:2) And, accordingly, the redemption of the inheritance is conducted by judgments, or vengeance on the enemies of the heir of it, its usurpers, and corrupters; and, therefore, from henceforth, in this book, until the inheritance is redeemed, until the kingdom is brought in, it is judgment that is taking its course. (6-19) It is Joshua's or David's sword again. It may be seals that are opened, trumpets blown, vials emptied; but all is judgment on the enemy, preparing the inheritance for the Lamb and the church; all is action for the redeeming of it, and bringing it into the hand of Him into whose hand the title-deed of it, as we have seen it, has already passed.

Thus it is henceforth a book of judgments, as it has been hitherto; only judgments in another sphere and for another end; not of the candlesticks, but of the earth and its corrupters. Judgment had begun at the house of God, and now ends with those who would not obey the gospel. One enemy may appear after another, the Beast and the False Prophet, the Dragon and the great Whore, or the kings of the earth, but it is only that each, in his season, may meet the judgment of the Lord. So there may be sorrow after sorrow. The woman may have to fly into the wilderness, the remnant of her seed to feel the rage of the Dragon, those who refuse to take the mark of the Beast to know and exercise the patience of the saints, and the two witnesses to lie slain in the street of the great city, but all this sorrow is only leading on to the rest of the kingdom, or to the descent of the golden city. The inheritance is thus redeemed by judgment out of the hand of its usurpers, and then the righteous nation that have kept the truth enter, and the Lamb takes the throne.

But in all this action, I judge the church has no place, but that the saints have been taken to meet their Lord in the air, as I have already suggested, before it begins. This scene is one of judgment, and they have been removed, like Enoch, to another altogether; and I would now suggest a few reasons on which I ground this conclusion, as I did before, for my conclusion on the character of the sealed book.

1. The saints are seen round the throne in heaven, as I have already noticed, in the fourth chapter, and throughout the book onward from that, they are never seen but there—and this leads me to judge that the church has been removed from the earth at some untold moment between the times of the third and fourth chapters, as I have already said.

2. At the opening of this action (chap. 6), the same signs are given, as had before been given by the Lord Himself to His Christian-Jewish, Remnant (Matt. 24), respecting the end of the world; and as in all that prophecy, the church is not contemplated, so she is not contemplated here, but that it

is the faithful Jewish election who are engaged in the action, as they only are considered in that prophecy of Matthew 24

3. It is a scene of judgment, as I have already noticed, and the calling of the church is that of Enoch to be taken out of it, and not like Noah, preserved in it. (See 1 Thess. 4 vs.; 2 Thess. 2) The church had her judgment previously in 2, 3.

4. Besides—the saints are to judge the world, as well as to reign in the kingdom.

From such considerations, I do conclude, that the church is not mixed up in the scene which now lies before us. They have been taken into their more immediate inheritance, which is in heaven (1 Peter 1:4; before these judgments on the corrupters of the earth, the mystic Amorites of Canaan, begin. But I do not particularly notice these chapters. Indeed I do not believe that we are competent to speak of them with authority. We may draw much warning and exhortation from them which we should lay deeply to heart, in order that we may stand in any evil day that may arise (as arise it may) to try and sift us. But of the scenes themselves, I would not speak with authority. The Lord in them is clad with zeal as a cloak; but the end is “redemption.” For, however gloomy the way may be, this is the end of it, the end that we reach in this book. The action was the judgment of the corrupters of the earth; and the result is, the holy occupation of it by the Lord and His saints. The wars of our Joshua end in victory and the kingdom. (20:1-6) “I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given unto them.”

Of course, if I speak of the action of the Lord Jesus in this book being like that of Joshua, I am quite aware that He Himself is not personally manifested in the exercise of judging the nations, till chapter 19. But from chapter 6 the judicial visitation of the earth had been going on, though till chapter 19 Jesus was hidden. It is this judicial character which leads me to liken the book to Joshua—these judgments leading, like the wars of that book, to the possession of the earth by the true Inheritor. And in Egypt there were judgments, first from a hidden, and then a manifested, God. All the plagues were poured out while as yet the Lord was hidden, using the hand of Aaron in the ashes of a furnace, or the rod of Moses. But at the destruction of the firstborn, He Himself went through the land; and, at the overthrow of the nation at the Red Sea, He looked through the cloud. And so in this book. The Lamb is hidden first, and then manifested; but His hand and His power, whether hidden or manifested, are dealing out not grace and gifts, but chastenings and judgments.

But before I hasten to the result of all this action I would further observe, that in the progress of the action itself, we see, I believe, the deliverance of Jewish remnants from amid the corruption and judgment. Some of them suffer for righteousness even unto death, and then ascend to heaven to take their place before the throne; and some are hid in God’s city of refuge through the judgment, sealed or measured for final security, and for a place on the earth or footstool. But in both ways, they are separated from the corruptions and the judgments around them, and, like Rahab, are safe in the Lord, whom they own in the midst of the apostate nation. And I also see, in the progress of this action, the occasional joy of the family in heaven. (See 5, 7, 11, 14, 15, 19) Heaven, surely, is a place of continuous joy. There the saints hunger no more, neither thirst any more; the Lamb feeds and refreshes them forever. But still they may be sensible of seasons and occasions of rapture. And this appears to be intimated to us in these passages. The joy of the heavenly family and their songs are, every now and then, awakened afresh, when some new display of grace, or some new prospect of glory, opens before them. Just as with the heavenly hosts before—for,

when the foundations of the earth were laid, they sang together anew, and, still louder than before, shouted for joy.

And again, in the epistle to the Ephesians, we learned that the church was teaching the heavenly powers a lesson of God's wisdom (Eph. 3:13); but here, we see the angels practicing, as it were, the lesson they had thus previously learned. The church leads the joy, and the angels take it up. They follow the living creatures and the crowned elders in their praise in chapter 5; and again, when the redeemed celebrate "salvation," they, as having learned the lesson, say "Amen." (Chapter 7)

Thus much I will observe on the action of these chapters, but particularly of their contents I would not speak. We gather great moral principles and warnings from them, which we can abundantly use; but I doubt that details are intended to be spoken confidently of, till the time comes. Of them, therefore, I would not speak.

Passing, then, beyond chapter 18, we first listen to a song over the fall and judgment of the Woman, and then praise is heard at the immediate prospect of the marriage of the Lamb and of the kingdom. For the wife has now made herself ready (19), by which expression, I understand this—that the saints, or redeemed, have till now been in heaven, as children of the Father's house; but that now, they are embodied to shine together in the glories of the golden city, which is the Lamb's wife. (21:9) He has now presented her to Himself a glorious church. (Eph. 5) The saints are now ready to be manifested in the Son's kingdom, as they had till now been hidden, as children, in the Father's house. The manifestation of the Lord Jesus Christ then takes place after this marriage in heaven. And in this manifestation, we see Him putting on all the glories he had acquired previously (just to compare human things with divine), as on great public occasions we see persons of distinction arraying themselves with all their honors suitable to the moment.

These displayed glories of our blessed Lord are the names He bears; and they are various, being, as I have said, the glories He has already acquired, or such as now belong to Him. And they are, also, here brought forth in the order of time in which they had been earned.

"He was called Faithful and True." This honor he acquired by his ministry while on earth, in all things then approving himself faithful to him who had appointed him, and thus earning this title of the Faithful and True.

"A name written, which no man knew but himself." This honor he entered into when, having ended his faithful and true service here, he ascended the heavens, and was both glorified with the glory which he had with the Father before the world was, and became the Head of the church, the First-born of that family who have also names which none know but they who receive them.

"His name is called the Word of God." This title is his in judicial power, when, having left the heavens, he comes out with the sword of judgment to execute righteousness on the wicked confederacy, as the Word of God. (See Heb. 4:12)

"A name written King of kings, and Lord of lords." This is the last honor he bears. This he will acquire and put on when, having finished the judgments as the Word of God, he will sit down in the peaceful and complete honors of his kingdom, all nations owning him Lord, all royal powers and thrones bowing to his supremacy.

Thus, his names or honors are here unrolled in due order before us. He appears with many crowns. It is a great occasion, the re-appearing of that Man whom the world had refused—his second advent: and how changed! At his first coming, he disrobed himself; for he was coming in grace, coming for sin. But now he arrays himself as fully as he then emptied himself; for he is coming in glory. At his first appearing, he had no name, no reputation (see Phil. 2); now he has every name, every expression of dignity and praise in heaven and earth. It was only “Jesus” then, the name both of contempt and salvation—yea, of contempt because of salvation, for our salvation was purchased by his shame and death. But now it is a name above every name.

Such is the preparation for the taking of the kingdom or the inheritance. It is as the sword of David first, and then the throne of Solomon, as we read here: “They lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.” (Chapter 20:4) The shout in heaven was now realized on earth: “The Lord God Omnipotent reigneth!”

But there is progress in this work of judgment which thus attends the second advent.

The binding of Satan in the bottomless pit (connected with the overthrow of the Beast and the false Prophet) may be called the morning judgment, or the judgment of the quick, ushering in, as it were, the millennial day or the kingdom. Then, at the close of that day, Satan being let loose from the pit to raise the last mischief in the world, the Great White Throne is erected, before which proceeds the evening judgment, or the judgment of the dead, closing, as it will, the millennial day or the kingdom. And the day of the Lord being then over, the kingdom will be delivered up, and the new heavens and the new earth will appear, the saints exchanging the kingdom for “God all in all,” or their millennial for their eternal joy, and Satan the bottomless pit for the lake of fire, or his millennial for his eternal doom. (20:7, 21)

Of all this our Prophet is given a passing sight, and then he is called up to another vision. He had before seen the Bride prepared in heaven (19); and now, he is called to see her descend out of heaven (21:2); and by and bye, he will be called, in order to see herself as descended. (21:9) But now, while descending, and he is looking at her, a voice accompanies the descent, saying: “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.”

This voice interprets the results of the descending city. This voice is as if a friend, in the secret of it, were to explain to us the meaning of a procession that might be passing before us. “Behold!” it says to John, calling his attention; and then it shows him the descending city as the witness that God was now restoring Himself to man— “The tabernacle of God is with men,” and thus, that all their sorrow should cease. But this result might not be in all its fullness at once, or during the thousand years; but the descent of the city, now at the opening of that kingdom, was the pledge of all this restoration of God to man, and of the consequent ceasing of sorrow, and death, and tears. And so, this friendly voice now interprets it. The former things were now passing away, that state of things in which God and man had been separated, and during which, accordingly, there had been lamentation, and weeping, and death.

The Lord from the throne then verifies all this voice from heaven, and adds His own word: "Behold I make all things new." And when he had thus spoken, he addresses John, giving him to know, that when this came to pass, all would be done; adding, moreover, such warnings and encouragements as may be listened to by all from that moment to the end, being delivered by the Lord in the consciousness of the solemn sanction which the end imparts to all things—as it is written, "O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end."

Thus this vision of the descending city, and this audience from the voices from heaven and the throne pass by, and our seer is carried to a great and high mountain, that he might see this city herself, the Bride, the Lamb's wife. (21:9; 22:6)

One of these angels, who had carried the seven last plagues, is John's conductor now; and in his presence he measures the city; and that being the sign of security (11:1, 2), he thereby gives us a pledge, that there is no agency of destruction against it.

The church, as the candlestick, may be shattered; but as the Lamb's wife, she shall live; and this golden city is this Bride of the Lamb, the church of God now manifested in her perfectness. She has length, and breadth, and height equal, with twelve foundations, and twelve gates, her wall great and high, and her street of pure gold. Various all this, but all shining and costly, expressing her to be the one that is perfect in holy beauty. And she is not only thus perfect in herself, but she has her dignities as well as her beauty. She is the habitation of the glory of God, the place of the throne, a sanctuary too, as well as a palace, having a presence within her, which makes the whole scene a temple. Thus is she the suited dwelling-place of icings and priests; and being thus in herself the beautiful one, and bearing with her this honor of the royal priesthood, all that goes forth from her, or enters into her, or dwells there, is according to these things. Light is shed from her, that the nations may walk therein; water from the river of life flows from her, bearing leaves with it, that the nations may be healed thereby; and all that goes in is purity; and all who dwell within are in joy and dignity, having no need of candle or even light of the sun, being also in the conscious dignity of their everlasting kingdom; and nothing must touch such a habitation of holiness, and gladness, and glory, but the very honor of the kings of the earth. They may bring up their glory and honor unto it, but nothing less than that can approach it.

The features of this holy city, here delineated, become so many tests (as we may observe, for it is profitable for our souls) whereby to try the condition of our own hearts towards heaven, and to ask ourselves, Is it the heaven of God that we indeed desire? Thus this place is stable—it has foundations. Are we satisfied with it forever, or would we fain, in the waywardness of the affections, still have change? This place is a sanctuary, or place of constant worship and communion. Is that according to the heaven which we desire? It is the region of light from the Lamb. Are our souls even now delighting and basking in that element, or do we love the light, and wisdom, and beauty of men? It is the place of holy government, where all is peace. Do we love purity now; and are the workings of unclean nature an offense and sorrow to us? And it is a bosom of rich and generous benevolence, for it is ever giving forth what it has, its light, its leaves, and its waters, for the refreshing and strengthening of others. Are our hearts cultivating like affections? Are we desiring and watching, that we live not for ourselves, but in the enlarged charities of the gospel which thus will exercise themselves to perfection in that happy place?

The answer of our souls to these things will show the measure of our present sympathy, in spirit, with this heaven here revealed to us. And, thus, this divine description of the holy Jerusalem becomes not merely food for the hopes of the saint, but trial of the heart of the saint, that we may be guided both happily and safely onward. And we may surely say, this is indeed a heaven of holy happiness, a heaven worthy of God its builder.

All is thus pure and shining within and around her, and she yields forth streams of light and life that all may be gladdened and blest by her. This is the manifestation of the church. In this present dispensation, the church is but forming, like Eve for Adam, but when the time of the kingdom comes, and Adam awakes, then will his Eve be presented to him, the associate of his joy and kingdom, the saints will be shown all fitly framed together, the church presented to Himself, a glorious church without spot, as here, in the place of blessing and government. Surely all this is beautiful, as is everything of our God, in its season. The incarnation and ministry of the Lord had been the manifestation of the Father and the Son the present age is the manifestation of the Holy Ghost—and the age that we look for, and into which this vision of the golden city introduces us, will be the manifestation of the church. For all is perfection in the ways of God's wisdom, as in the ways of His love. He tells out to us one secret after another, bringing each in due season out of His treasures. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!"

But this only as we pass on. I was tracing the character of that holy city which has now been disclosed to us, and observing that everything in it told us that it was the symbol of the church in her perfectness and manifestation in glory, or the saints in their dominion and honor. And I would again, as connected with this, recur to the difference between the gospel and the revelation by John. The gospel closes by taking the children to the Father's house, or hiding them in heaven. (21:22) The revelation, by leading them down from heaven into the place of dominion over the earth, or manifesting them as the golden city. It is not the mansions in the Father's house which, at the end of the revelation, we look into, but the place of the sanctuary, and the palace, the residence of the kings and priests unto God and his Christ. It is not the children in their home, but the saints in their glory whom we see. And all this is in full character. For the Gospel by John had been, throughout, training the children for the Father; but this revelation by him had been getting the inheritance and glory ready for the saints. It is a further stage in the history of the heavenly family. It is not that they have left the joy of the mansions in the Father's house, which the Lord has now gone to prepare for them (John 14:2); but they are to receive the glory of the inheritance in addition; and that is what is here, in figure, presented to us.

And this day of the descent of the golden city is the promised day of power, the day for the shutting up of the influence of hell upon the earth, for the binding of Satan in the pit, and for the opening of the influence of heaven upon the earth by this descent of the city of God, and (as we may say in a larger sense) by the setting up of that mystic ladder on which the angels of God are to pass from heaven to earth, and back to heaven again. And the throne of God, seen in this city, has a new attribute. At the beginning, it was the throne of God; and the Lamb only came up to it, to take the book from the hand of him who sat there. But now, the Lamb has ascended it. It is now "the throne of God and the Lamb." The Lamb has now got up to the hill of the Lord, and is now standing in the holy place.

The action of this book was preparing the throne for the Lamb. It was not that of the Son on high preparing mansions in heaven for the children, but it was the Lord on high (or God in the supreme place, for him) coming forth in the power of one judgment after another, to make His enemies His footstool; and then to erect His kingdom, and lead His saints into it. And accordingly, the kingdom is here displayed, as I have observed, in all its holy order and righteous authority. It is the Golden City we get, the symbol of righteousness and power united in government—the church with the enthroned Lamb descending out of heaven, to take association with the earth, ruling it and yet blessing it, presiding over it in righteousness, and yet dispensing to it the water of life and the light of the glory, of the very fountains of which she had now become the scene and the dwelling-place.

Such is the end of the second part of this book of judgments. Through the terrible judgments of seals, trumpets, and vials, we have been led to the blessing of the earth under the light and life that were in the golden city, the throne of God and the Lamb. And as we had a preface to the book in its place, so now we have a conclusion. (22:6-21)

Here we first listen to the angel, who had attended John, attesting the full truth of all that has passed; and then, we listen to the Lord pledging His speedy coming, and a blessing (as in the preface) on those who should righteously use this book. We then find that the hearing and seeing of these excellent things so wrought for a moment on the mind of John, that he falls down and worships the angel, as he had done before. (19:10) But on both these occasions he had been receiving some overwhelming vision. In chapter 19 he had just seen the marriage of the Lamb in heaven, and now the golden city in her glory and beauty; and his engaged and overpowered affections, awakened by such visions (as with the Queen of Sheba on seeing King Solomon), must account to us for these worshippings of the angel. But the angel rebukes him, as Peter did Cornelius in such a case; and then instructs him in one particular touching this book, which is strikingly different from the instructions given to the Jewish prophet on a like occasion. (Dan. 8:26; 12. 4-9) Daniel had seen and heard wonders, but was told to seal them, till the time of the end, because the vision was yet to be for many days; but here our prophet is told to publish these things which he had seen and heard, because the time did not wait, but was at hand. This marks the mind of the Spirit so differently in the Jewish prophet, and in John, who was standing in our dispensation addressing the saints. And, according to this, the Lord at once again breaks in with an announcement of His speedy coming, and that, too, with the rewards of righteousness, revealing Himself again, as He had done at the beginning, in His supreme place, as “the Alpha and Omega.”

After this, the attending angel returns to His own proper theme, promising a blessing in righteousness on those who obey, and setting aside all the workers of evil. For this is the theme of the book, a book which does not say, “Blessed is the man whose iniquities are forgiven and whose sins are covered,” but pronounces blessing on the righteous, and doom on all evil-doers. For it is not a book of ministering grace, but of executing righteousness—it is not sympathies or consolations that we find in it, but judgments, as we have been seeing throughout. It is the place of Ezekiel which the Lord fills here, as it was that of Jeremiah which He had occupied in the gospel. In the gospel or in His ministry, through the cities and villages of the land, He was the sorrowing, sympathizing prophet; so that some said, “It is Jeremias;” but here He stands, the Son of Man, like Ezekiel, in the place of judgment, in the Spirit, saying, “He that heareth, let him hear, and He that forbeareth let him forbear”—“he that is filthy let him be filthy still, and he that is holy let him be holy

still.” There was no tear on the eye of Ezekiel, though rivers of waters ran down the cheeks of Jeremiah. All is so perfect in its time. The Lord knew the sympathies of the one, as He walked in the land and saw the moral ruins of Zion, and He can now know the righteousness of the other, as He stands above all that defiled ruin, and apart from it all in judgment.

After this, the Lord reveals Himself as “the Bright and Morning Star.” The church then invites Him to come, and invites others, who would “hear,” to join her in this; and then those who were “athirst,” having some affections towards her Lord just stirred, to come up to the full measure of her desire; and lastly, through the largeness of her heart, “whosoever would,” in whatsoever mind or state they might be, to come and drink of the living waters with her. Thus was her soul divinely moved upward and around her. But this was an interruption of the more orderly progress of the book (like 1:6) on Jesus being revealed. But we should be prepared for such interruptions. We should not expect that the Lord could be revealed, without the church being moved, as in these places. Praise must fill her, if His grace be revealed, as there (1:6) —desire must move her, if His person or glory be revealed, as here. And we should all, beloved, be cultivating that longing of heart after Him, that will lead us to take a ready part in such raptures of the Spirit in the Bride as these.

But still this was an interruption; and, therefore, when it passes, the Lord resumes the more proper theme of the book, and threatens plagues to him who unrighteously adds to it, and loss of life and glory to him who unrighteously takes from it. This, however, must not be allowed to close all. “Surely I come quickly” is heard again—words which had now broken forth from the Lord three times during this conclusion. For His heart was fuller of that than of any thought, and He would fill ours with it also. All was either to yield to that, or issue in it. Judgment must be executed; but judgment is His strange work Affliction of the righteous must be gone through, but He never willingly afflicts. All is imperfect till Jesus appears. His own heart is upon this, and this is the last thought that He would leave upon ours. And the saint responds, “Come, Lord Jesus” —that the Lord may know, that this is His people’s desire and point of hope, as it is His.

Here, Jesus the Lord, and His ministering angel close their testimony. The apostle, then, in his turn, takes his leave of the saints, saying, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.” In the love of the Spirit He commends them to that which is their only provision for the way, till the journey be ended. Till He come, come when He may, bringing His glory with Him, they must stand in His grace. For the Lord gives both, and grace leads to glory. The wilderness is now proving that He has riches and stores of the one for us, and Canaan will, by and bye, prove that He has riches and stores of the other for all who love Him in this thankless and evil world.

Fragment: I Am

“I am that I am,” was the glorious name under which God introduced Himself to Israel. God over all—none by searching could find Him out: He would be God, and take His own way: and He would have mercy on whom He would have mercy, and would have compassion on whom He would have compassion. God is God.

“By the grace of God, I am what I am,” was Paul’s joy; it is mine: may it be thine, too. But, then, how different the force of the sentence when applied to Him and when applied to me. Compare word with word and you will see this only the more forcibly. And yet in both applications, the finger points out to reality, and what is is owned, as being AS IT IS.

“God is God.”

“And I am a poor sinner and nothing at all. But Jesus Christ is my all in all.”

Never, until we get to reality—never, until we let things be as they are, can we possibly have rest.

And the beauty of the gospel is, that it puts God as God; and myself, just as I am, blessedly together, and appropriates all that He is to me, and identifies all that I am with Him according to the worth of the person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by the Spirit of God and of Christ.

What Is the Church? Her Power, Hopes, Calling, Present Position, and Occupation

“Scripture speaks of our place, our privileges, our responsibilities.”

It is a solemn thing, when we come to think what the church really is. It is all blessed when we think of her privileges; but looking at her as Christ’s representative on earth is most solemn—an “epistle of Christ.” As the tables of stone represented what God demanded of man, so should the church, and in an equal sense, be, in the world, the revelation of what God is to man—an exhibition of God’s grace and power to man and in man.

When I speak of the “kingdom” it is a different thing. We there get the display of power and government, not union and fellowship. Even the testimony of the kingdom comes necessarily to be quite a distinct thing. I should distinguish altogether “the gospel of the kingdom” and “the kingdom” from what we are accustomed to call “the gospel and the church.” Paul taught the kingdom, and he taught the gospel, and he taught the church; but he never taught them as the same thing.

There is one revelation—God is going to take to Himself His great power, and to reign. There is another truth—there is to be a bride and body of the King. Again, certain things setting out the grace of God are necessary for the soul to be saved. These three things are, very plainly, quite distinct.

From the moment Israel was called as a people, God had evidently the thought of having a king. Man’s way of setting about it was quite wrong.

Up to the time of Samuel, priesthood was, morally, the regular point of association between the people and God. But the priests were unfaithful, and then the Lord wrote Ichabod upon all that had been Israel’s glory. The link between God and the people was broken. The ark was taken by the Philistines. The priests were slain. He delivered His strength into captivity, and the Philistines were in the mount of God.

This was the sign given to Saul. (1 Sam. 10) He found people going up to Bethel. (vs. 3) There were people that had faith in the God of Bethel (that is, that God would never leave His unchangeable promise to Jacob). Everything else might be gone; but God’s connection with Israel could not be broken up. This became the resting-place of faith. God could not fail. Secondly, he was to go to the mount of God (vs. 5); and there was the garrison of the Philistines—the power of the enemies of the Lord in the place where God’s altar ought to have been, and thus power against those who were acting in faith. Still, Bethel could be visited with a tabret and pipe; faith could take up the joy that was proper for the people who had Jehovah for their God. There was also the spirit of prophecy given to him. (vs. 6) But neither of the signs did Saul understand, though clear and instructive to the eye of faith.

David was the opposite of this, and was the type of Christ as king.

After the king is brought in there is a change in the position of the priesthood; it ceases to be the habitual link of connection between the people and God. When Eli is set aside (1 Sam. 2:35) God says, "I will raise me up a faithful priest,... and he shall walk," not before me, but "before mine anointed forever." There I get a royal person (another link between God and the people) set up above priesthood So that Solomon was quite right in thrusting out Abiathar (1 Kings 2:27)

When Solomon dedicated the temple, and the priests could not stand to minister because the glory of the Lord had filled the house of God, the king praised God and blessed the people.

At length THE KING was presented in humiliation in the person of Christ.

John Baptist comes (Matt. 3) and says, "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.... He that cometh after me is mightier than I,... whose fan is in His hand.... He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

John is rejected; and then (after he is cast into prison) Christ takes up the same testimony. (Matt. 4) "From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.... And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness." The power of God was with Him in testimony, and was seen.

The disciples—the King having been rejected—are given to know "the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven," which to the multitude are parables. (Chapter 13) And they have God with them.

The apostles were to go on (and they went on) preaching the kingdom.

The kingdom is still to be set up; that is, the power of heaven in the person of Jesus Christ. He shall take to Him His great power, and reign. It will be set up in heaven. He must go to a far country to receive a kingdom, and to return. (Luke 19:11,12) He has gone up on high; but He has not yet been sent in in the power of the kingdom.

It will be a "world to come," not merely a state of Judaism, the kingdom of the "Son of Man;" not merely the Jews and their Messiah. (Dan. 2; 7) Heaven will be, in the highest sense, the seat of the kingdom; but it is still the kingdom.

There is another revelation—we are to reign in the kingdom. I get "joint-heirs," and those who are to "reign with Him," and those who are to "sit on thrones; "but it is still the kingdom (largely extended, a wider sphere; but I am still traveling in the circuit of the kingdom).

The destruction of Jerusalem was the setting it aside in judicial power; but still we can preach the kingdom of God. There will be the effect of the actual employment of power in setting things to right. At present it is rather in testimony than in power. The effect of the power of Christ in "the world to come" will be to set aside the power of Satan.

In all this we have only the kingdom.

There is another ministry that goes out altogether on another principle. In Paul's ministry I get that which is beyond the reach of dispensations. I have here what man is (not merely "sinners of the Gentiles," or Jews). He may prove it, as regards the Gentiles, in one way, and demonstrate it, as regards the Jews, in another; but what he proves and demonstrates is this, that man, as man, is at

enmity with God. If we begin at Jerusalem, we begin with a testimony to Jerusalem. In Paul's ministry, Jews and Gentiles alike are known only as "children of wrath." We get him preaching the gospel. "to every creature under heaven."

But Paul was not simply a minister of the gospel; he was a minister also of the church, to "fulfill" (fully to preach) "the Word of God."

We read (Col. 1:12): "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son; in whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins; who is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature; —for by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be 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 He is the Head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; that in all things He might have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell; and having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself; by Him, I say, whether they be things in earth or things in heaven. And you, that were sometime alienated, and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled, in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in His sight" —and now as to the ministry— "if ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister; who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body's sake, which is the church; whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfill the Word of God."

In the testimony about the church, I find (not the kingdom, nor the salvation of individuals, merely; but) that there is a body for Him who is the King, associated and connected with Him in His Headship over all things. There is a certain special thing which the Lord has reconciled.

Paul deduces everything, as to the church, from Christ's Headship of the body, and the flowing down from Him of all He has to minister. How is the accomplishment of this? "By one Spirit are ye all baptized into one body." (1 Cor. 12:13)

Turn to Ephesians 1:19: "And what is the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the Head over all things to the church, WHICH IS HIS BODY, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all." In this passage there is the Headship of the body, and He is "Head over all things to the church."

As to the way and power of the unity of the body of saints formed on earth with Christ the Head in heaven, it is by the Holy Ghost "sent down from heaven," making them one body.

As a consequence, when Paul speaks of apostles and prophets, he looks at them in this light, and never as appointed by Christ on earth. He says, "If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: how that by revelation He made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) which in other ages Was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit," (Eph. 3:2-5). As to the very existence of these holy apostles and prophets— "Wherefore He saith, When He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that He ascended, what is it but that He also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things) 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," (Chapter 4). His thought about apostles is of something that flows from the exalted Head. He knows no man after the flesh.

By one Spirit baptized into one body, we have the Head and the body united together—the Head at the right hand of God in heaven, united to the members, formed into a body down here on earth by the power of the Holy Ghost. Scripture calls that "the church."

There is a word in Matthew 16 that is sometimes overlooked. The Lord says there to Peter, "Upon this rock will I build My church." There had been the revelation by the Father to Peter of the person of Christ, as "the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him (on the confession of this), "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock will I build My church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven." Christ is going to build His church; and, besides this, He gives the keys to Peter. The keys of the kingdom are a distinct thing from Christ's building His church.

The church is that body which the Holy Ghost forms into unity, as connected with, and united to, the Lord Jesus Christ, its Head, sitting at the right hand of the Father in heaven; and that which the Holy Ghost so unites to Him is the only thing in Scripture called "the church" (that is, specially such).

It may be added that this is a question which, at the present moment, is running through almost every country in Europe. There are endless theories about it; but this is the question, "What is the church?" Some say it is "visible," others "invisible;" some, that there will be a church by-and-by, but there is none now; that there is no church on earth (there may be churches), but, when all are assembled in heaven, there will be a church. Now, whilst it is perfectly clear that, when Christ leaves the Father's throne to take the church unto Himself, it will form a glorious body in heaven; yet, plainly, whilst sitting at the right hand of God, the only thing He owns as the church is the body down here. Until He rises up from His seat on high, He is working, and ordering, and acting, always (while hid in God) by the Holy Ghost; and the Holy Ghost is down here. That which He owns as the church, is where the Holy Ghost is, until it is united to Himself in glory.

There is no difficulty if we turn to Scripture. Where did Paul look at the church? "By one Spirit are ye all baptized into one body," where? On earth, and not only in heaven. Certainly, gifts of healing were not in heaven. Nor are the "joints and bands" in heaven. None of its ministries are in heaven.

It will be in heaven eventually, no doubt, but it is now on earth.

This is a great point to get our souls simple and clear upon.

As to her “power.” In Scripture it is not the power of the church, but the power that works in us—the power of God working in the church. “Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be glory in the church.” The operation of the power of the Lord is necessarily limited by the moral condition of the church; (He may bear with it, have patience towards it, but) God will never publicly act, so as to sanction what He disapproves.

And with regard to power in public testimony, whilst the church was no doubt the vessel of it (there was a certain measure of power in the testimony of the kingdom then, for which you would look in vain now), still it was the power of the Son of Man. Where it is merely the saving of a soul, or the ministry of the church, one does not look for the same sort of power. (God is sovereign, and works as He pleases) The church was a vessel of power, and miracles were a testimony to the power of Christ, as the risen Son of Man. But when I think of the saving of souls, I look rather for that operation of the Spirit of God through the gospel. And when I look at the church, I look to the Head, to supply what its need demands. While the church carried externally the character of Christ before the world, she was chartered with power—the power of Christ. That which Christ is to supply can never fail. Christ and His power, and His acting in power, can never fail. He must nourish the church withal, according to its need.

But if God is acting in and towards persons, there must be truth in His actings; He cannot act in the power of grace contrary to the moral condition of the church, any more than He can act towards an individual contrary to his state before Himself. We must get our souls down into the consciousness of where we are, before we get the blessing suited to our condition. Where are we? is the question. He never alters His mind. But the church’s responsibility never alters His grace. Christ is exactly what it wants now (otherwise my faith cannot get on); as exactly now what we want for the church now, as when in the days of the apostles it was adorned with every kind of miracle. But He will not act in the same way. Christ will never give up His thoughts about the church; and, if we are acting on our thoughts, and He acts on His, He will make sad work with what we have set up. “He that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.” If Christ begins to gather, He will scatter that which is not gathered in the power of unity with Himself. As with a card-house, the first wind of God’s Spirit blows it all about. This may be very astonishing, very humbling, still it does not discourage (far from it!) those that look for God’s actings. You are sure to get bad roads when the spring comes, and the frost breaks up. Let the church be what it may, Christ is not altered. Her power is her weakness—her spirit of dependence, in never getting out of the place of constant, simple, unmingled dependence. (2 Cor. 12:10)

The “hope” of the church, as such, is identified with, and founded on, the relationship in, which it is placed as united to the Lord Jesus Christ in heaven. It is true, she is here as a pilgrim on earth, but, at the same time, she is the Bride on earth united to her Head in heaven, seated in heaven in Him, she waits to be there. The one proper hope of the church has no more to do with the world than Christ has (John 17:16), who is in heaven. She will see things set right in the kingdom, but that is not her hope; her hope is the Lord Jesus Christ in heaven, where she knows Him. Where did Paul know Christ? In the heavenly glory. And Paul knew the church to be one with Christ there.

There may be the change of the body, in order to the accomplishment of the glory, but there is nothing, as to its own position, but sitting in heavenly places, with Christ, because it is now sitting in heavenly places in Christ. To be along with Christ is our one hope.

“That where I am, there ye may be also.” In the Epistle to the Thessalonians the apostle says, “Then shall we ever be with the Lord.” And what follows? Nothing! A great many things may be happening; but the Church’s hope is to be with Him where He is, and like Him, when she sees Him as He is.

As to the “calling.” The heavenly calling (though embraced) does not at all fill up the thought. It does not, in itself, convey the thought of the church: We might as a set of individuals be called up, and be caught up, into heaven, and have a heavenly portion as the brethren of Christ, without knowing that we were the body and bride of Christ. The “hope” of the church is its marriage with the Bridegroom, and that is in heaven; we may come forth from heaven, for the kingdom and the glory, but our place is in heaven, in the unity with Christ as one with Him. We are builded together for the habitation of God through the Spirit; that is the calling of the church down here.

As to “present position and occupation,” there is one thing makes a great difference. When the Spirit of God was working in the beginning of the gospel, the testimony had the aspect of power, and produced a sensible and visible result, there was an ostensible gathering. The central energy had the fullness of the truth, though there might be feebleness at the extremity of the rays. But there is nothing of this sort now. The sheep of God are scattered. The camp has got wrong. The consequence of this is, all manner of degrees of knowledge. The very principle of unity has a separative tendency. A man must now settle himself upon the center of truth. If my soul is not prepared to look to Christ, and to gather with Christ, and to take His judgment, I shall be cast into the uncertain condition of the differing judgment of every saint I meet with in the day’s walk. Where Christ is the common object, there will be a coalescing power. I find the church of God, in a unity which attaches itself to Christ alone, as the one sole center.

The “occupation” of the church ought to be constant, incessant reference to its Head. If its Head is not its first thought (and that is shown in thinking of its Head, and filling itself into all the thoughts, and mind, and affections of its Head), it cannot act for Him. This is its grand occupation. “We will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the Word.” I must get through the crowd of Satan’s power, and I must get beyond the crowd to my Head, who is the only source of power. We should seek that kind of communion with the saints, which living in spirit with the Head gives. We should get all who hear to join in the cry. (Rev. 22:17) So should the Church have its own light, that all that is outside would be shut out. The apostle was living in a world of his own—he was filled with ideas of his own, but they were God’s ideas, and he had power. It is not knowing the scene I have to act in that gives me power; we get no strength from the contemplation of that; but intercourse and living communion with the Head. We should get near enough to Christ to enjoy Him, and to know Him truly, and to gather up all that is like Him. If not separated by affection from the world, we shall be separated by discipline in the world. He will vex our souls to get us separate, if in spirit and in heart we are not separate. “Because thou servedst not the Lord thy God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart.... therefore thou shalt serve thine enemies, which the Lord thy God shall send against thee.”

I feel the importance of definitely apprehending the relationship in which the Lord has set us. Hence would flow that rigid obedience (and obedience is the only thing in which a Christian should be rigid) which would keep us from latitudinarianism, and that nearness to Christ which would keep us from sectarianism (the most natural weed of the human heart; for sectarianism is getting an interest in a little circle round ourselves; and it would give us a feeling and interest in the whole church of God; for Christ can love nothing less.

Faith's Clue in Sin's Confusions

Into creation sin has brought confusion of every sort—confusion of thought, confusion of fact; but the Christian has a key of interpretation to it all. He has the secret with him by which he interprets everything. He sees the confusion, he goes through it all, he feels it, but he cannot set things right. There are aching hearts he cannot touch, there are wrongs he cannot meddle with; yet, in the midst of all this labyrinth of evil, he knows the end of God.

My joy, my life, my crown!

My heart was meaning all the day,

Somewhat it fain would say;

And still it runneth up and down

With only this, my joy, my life, my crown.

Integrity

The world's integrity is, like every other thing belonging to fallen man, a mere hollow system of selfishness, though it may be polished over by the decorum and civilities of society. The source from which true integrity must spring, is love to God, and this love can only spring from an assurance that our guilt has been pardoned, and our sins have been washed away in the blood of Jesus.

Never act above your faith, nor below your conscience.

Self-Contrivances

"I have seemed to see a need of everything God gives me, and want nothing that He denies me. There is no dispensation, though afflictive, but, either in it or after it, the Comforter teaches me that I could not have done without it. Whether it be taken from me or given to me, sooner or later, God quiets me in Himself without it."

"I think the Lord deals kindly with me to make me believe for my mercies before I have them. The less reason has to work on, the more freely faith casts itself on the faithfulness of God. I find that while faith is steady, nothing can disquiet me; and when faith totters, nothing can establish me. If I tumble out amongst means and creatures, I am presently lost, and can come to no end; but if I receive help from above, to stay myself on God, and leave Him to work in His own way and time, I am at rest, and can sit down and sleep in a promise when a thousand rise up against me: therefore my way is not to cast beforehand, but to work with God by the day. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

"Self-contrivances are the effects of unbelief."

The Dispersed Among the Gentiles: Esther

In the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, on which I have already meditated, we saw the captives brought back to Jerusalem, there to await the coming of the Messiah, that it might be known, whether Israel would accept the Messenger and Savior whom God would send to them. In this book of Esther, we are in a very different scene. The Jews are among the Gentiles still.

We will look at it in its succession of ten chapters; and in the action recorded, we shall find the Lord God working wondrously, but secretly. The Jews themselves.

The Gentile, or the Power.

The great Adversary.

Chapters 1 and 2

The book opens by presenting to us a sight of the Gentile now in power. It is, however, the Persian and not the Chaldean; “the breast of silver,” not “the head of gold,” in the great Image which Nebuchadnezzar saw. We are here reading rather the second than the first chapter in the history of the Gentile in supremacy in the earth. We see him in the progress rather than at the commencement of his career; but, morally, he is the same. Moab-like, his taste remains in him, his scent is not changed. All the haughtiness that declared itself in Nebuchadnezzar reappears in Ahasuerus. No spirit or fruit of repentance—no learning of himself—or of what becomes him as a creature, is seen in this man of the earth. The lie of the serpent, which formed man at the beginning, is working as earnestly as ever. The old desire to be as God, utters itself in the Persian now, as it had afore in the Chaldean. The one had built his royal city, and looked at it in pride, and said, “Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty?” The other now makes a feast, and for one hundred and eighty days, shows to the princes and nobles the whole power of his realm, “the riches of his glorious kingdom, and the honor of his excellent majesty.”

Nay more; for the Persian exceedeth. There is a bold affecting to be as God in Persia, which we did not see in Babylon. We notice this in three distinguished Persian ordinances.

1. No one was to appear in the royal presence unbidden. In such a case, had this ordinance of the realm been violated, life and death would hang on the pleasure of the king.
2. No one was to be sad before the king; his face or presence was to be accepted of all his people as the spring and power of joy and gladness.
3. No decree of his realm could be canceled: it stood forever.

These are assumptions indeed. This exceeds, in the way of man showing himself to be as God; and know we not, that this spirit will work till the Gentile has perfected his iniquity? But the hand of God begins to work its wonders now, in the midst of all the festivity and pride which opens the book. The joy of the royal banquet was interrupted; a stain defaces the fair form of all this magnificence. The Gentile Queen refuses to serve the occasion, or be a tributary to this day of public rejoicing; and this leads to the manifesting of the Jew, and of ultimately making that people principal in the action, and eminent in the earth, beyond all thought or calculation.

It was a small beginning, poor and mean in its character and material. Vashti's temper, which goaded her to a course of conduct which jeopardized her life, was the “little fire” which kindled this “how great a matter.” It is a miserable, despicable circumstance. What can be meaner? The temper, we may say, of an imperious woman! And yet, God, by it, works results, then known to Himself in counsel, but the accomplishment of which shall be seen in the coming day of Jewish glory.

“Deep in unfathomable mines

Of never-failing skill,
He treasures up His bright designs,
And works His sovereign will."

Vashti is deposed. She is disclaimed as the wife of the Persian; and another more worthy is to be sought for to take her place.

Now, the question may arise, How far can one of the Jews take advantage of such an occasion? Does holiness avail itself of corruption? Can the people of God forget their Nazaritism, their separation to Him? And yet, Esther consents to go before the king at this time, as in company with all the daughters of his uncircumcised subjects!

This may amaze us, if we judge of things by any light less pure and intense than that which is of God. The moral sense of mere man—the verdict of legal ordinances—the voice of Mount Sinai itself—will not do at times. We must walk in the light as God is in the light. We must know "the times," like Issachar of old, ere we can rightly say, "what Israel ought to do."

Did not some of Bethlehem-Judah take wives of the daughters of Moab, and that, too, without rebuke? Did not Joseph, in his marriage, deviate from the holiness of Abraham, and Moses from the ordinances of the law? Was not Rahab, though a daughter of the uncircumcised, adopted of Judah, and became conspicuous in the ancestry, after the flesh, of David's Lord? And did not Sampson take to wife a woman of Timnath, that belonged to the Philistines?

The people of God were not in due order on the occasions of those strange events; and this is their moral vindication. The light of divine wisdom in divine dispensation becomes the judge, rather than ordinances. The Jews were now in the dispersion. Joseph, if we please so to express it, is in Egypt again, Moses in Midian, and the sons of Bethlehem-Judah in Moab; and Esther is as much unrebuked for going in unto the King of Persia, as Joseph for marrying Asenath, or Moses for marrying Zipporah, or Mahlon for marrying Ruth; and each and all of them stand without reproach or judgment before God in these things, just as David did when he ate the show-bread. Nay, these things were of God, as Samson's marriage with a Philistine woman seems distinctly to be so recognized. (Judg. 14:4)

Divine counsels shall be accomplished; the fruits of grace shall be gathered; and the ordinances of righteousness, and the arrangements which suit us, were we in integrity, and in well-ordered condition, shall not interfere.

Chapter 3

The Jew, strange to say it, as we have seen, becomes important to the Power—that is, the Persian. But more so than I have as yet noticed—important to his safety as well as to his enjoyments. For Mordecai becomes his protector, as Esther had become his wife. This we see at the close of chapter 2. The King is debtor to both. In spite of all his greatness, and all the resources for happiness and strength which attached to his greatness, he is debtor to the dispersed of Judah. They are important to him. Both his heart and his head, as I may say, have to own this.

But, if the Jew be thus strangely brought into personal favor and acceptance, equally strangely is the Jew's enemy brought into high and honorable elevation, and seated in the very position which capacitated him to gratify all his enmity. An Amalekite sits next in dignity and rule to the king. Above all the princes of the nation, Haman, the Agagite, is preferred; why we are not told. No public virtue or service is recorded of him. It is, apparently, simply the royal pleasure that has done it. A stranger to the nation he was—a distant stranger; one, too, of a race now all but forgotten, we might say, once distinguished, in the day of the infancy of nations, but now all but blotted out from the page of history, superseded by others far loftier in their bearing than ever he had been; the Assyrian first, then the Chaldean, and now the Persian. And yet, there he now is before us, an Amalekite seated next to Ahasuerus the Persian; in dignity, office, and power, only second to him.

This is strange, indeed, we may say. The great enemy of Israel, when Israel was in the wilderness, reappears here in the same character, in this day of Israel in the dispersion. (See Ex. 17) It is strange; an Amalekite found nearest to the throne of Persia! The heart of the great monarch of that day turned towards him, to put him into a condition to act the old Amalekite part of defiance of God, and enmity against His people. We could not have looked for such a thing. This name, the name of Amalek, was to be put out from under heaven; and, from the days of David till now, I may say, this people had not been seen. But now they reappear, we scarcely know how; and that, too, in bloom and strength, as in a palmy hour.

This, again, I say, is strange, indeed. It is of one in resurrection; of one whose deadly wound was healed; “who was, and is not, and yet is.”

The Agagite now stands forth as the representative of the great enemy, the proud Apostate that withstands God, and His people, and His purposes. There has been such an one in every age; and he is the foreshadowing of that mighty apostate who is to fall in the day of the Lord. Nimrod, in the days of Genesis, represents him; Pharaoh, in Egypt; Amalek, in the Wilderness; Abimelech, in the time of the Judges; and Absalom, in the time of the Kings; Haman, here in the day of the dispersion; and Herod in the New Testament. Exaltation of self, infidel pride, and the defiance of the fear of God, with rooted enmity to His people, are, some or all, the marks on each of them; as such will be displayed, in a full form of daring, awful apostasy, in the person of the Beast who, with his confederates, falls in the presence of the Rider on the White Horse, in the day of the Lord, or the judgment of the quick. Prophets have told of him as “the king that is to do according to his own will;” as “Lucifer, son of the morning;” as “the Prince of Tyus,” we may say; as “the fool that says in his heart there is no God;” and variously beside. And the Apocalypse of the Apostle shows him to us in the figure of a Beast, who had his Image set up for the worship and wonder of the whole world, and his mark as a brand in the forehead of every man; whose deadly wound was healed, who was, and is not, and yet is to be.

And further, we may notice, that the purpose, as well as the person of the great adversary, stands forth in this. great Haman. He must have the blood of all the Jews. His heart will not be satisfied by the life of the one who had refused to do Him reverence. He must have the lives of the whole nation. He breathes the spirit of the enemy of Israel, who by and bye is to say, “Come and let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance.” (Psa. 83) The Amalekite and his company cast the lot, the Fur, only to determine the day on which this deed of extermination was to be perpetrated. But, as we know, the lot may be “cast into the lap,

but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.” (Prov. 16:33) And so was it here. Eleven long months, from the thirteenth day of the first month, to the thirteenth day of the twelfth month—that is, from the day when the lot was cast, to the day on which the lot decided that the slaughter of the nation should take place—are given, so that God would ripen His purposes both towards His people and their adversaries.

This has a clear, loud voice in our ears. There is no speech or language but the voice is heard. God is not even named; but it is the work of His hand, and the counsel of His bosom.

Haman finds no hindrance from the king his master. He tells the king that there is a people scattered through his dominions whom it is not his profit to let live, for their customs are diverse from all people—the secret of the world’s enmity then and still. (See Acts 16:20,21) The decree, according to the desire of Haman, goes forth from Shushan the palace; and it spreads its way in all haste to all parts of the world, the domain of the great Persian “breast of silver.” The whole nation, as the consequence of this, takes the sentence of death into themselves. The decree would have reached the returned captives, as well as the dispersion. Judaea was but a province of the Persian power in that day. But they are to learn to trust in Him who quickens the dead, who calls those things that be not, as though they were, who acts in this world, in resurrection-strength. The remnant of Israel must learn to walk in the steps of the faith of their father Abraham. It is faith that must be exercised; for “the Lord will not for awhile reveal Himself, though He thinks of them, and shelters them without displaying Himself.”

Mordecai now appears, as the representative of this Remnant, the possessor of this Abraham-like faith, in this awful hour.

The godliness of this dear and honored man begins to show itself, in his refusal to reverence the Amalekite. The common duty of worshipping only the true God, the God of Israel, would have forbidden this. And shall a Jew bow to one of that race with whom the God of the Jews had already said, that He would have war forever and ever bow to one who, instead of bowing himself to the Lord of heaven and earth, had even come forth to insult His presence and His majesty, and to cut off His people even before His face? Mordecai will jeopard his life by this refusal. But be it so. He is in the mind of his brethren Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who can say to an earlier Haman, “We are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.”

This is fine in its generation truly; but finer still from its connections. For combination constitutes excellency of character. We are “to quit ourselves like men”—and yet, “let all our things be done in charity.” In Him, who was all moral glory, as we have heard from others, there was “nothing salient”—all so perfectly combined. And in Mordecai we see this. We see “goodness,” and with that, “righteousness.” He was gracious, and tender-hearted, bringing up his orphan cousin, as though she had been his own daughter. But now, he is faithful and unbending. He will quit himself like a man now, if then he did all his things in charity. He will not bow and do reverence at the command of the king, though his life may be the penalty.

Chapters 4 and 5

The various exercises of the soul in these chapters, as we see in Esther and Mordecai, are a matter of great interest. The Hand and the Spirit of God work together so wondrously in the story of Israel, as we get it in the Psalms and in the Prophets—the Hand forming their circumstances; the Spirit, their mind—and these two things occupy a very large portion of the prophetic Word. And we get living personal illustrations of this here, in the exercises of heart through which these two distinguished saints of God are seen to pass, and the marvelous circumstances through which they are brought.

On the issue of the fatal decree, Mordecai fasts and mourns in sackcloth. But all the while, he counts upon deliverance. Such a combination is full of moral glory. Elijah gave a sample of it in his day—for he knew the rain was at hand; but he casts himself down on the earth, and puts his face between his knees, as one in “effectual fervent prayer.” (1 Kings 18; James 5:16-18) The Lord Himself gives another sample of this. He knows and testifies that He is about to raise Lazarus from sleep, the sleep of death; but He weeps as He approaches the grave. So, here, with Mordecai. He will put off his mourning. He refuses to be comforted, while the decree is out against his people, though he reckons, surely reckons, upon their deliverance some way or another. This is another of those combinations which are necessary to character or moral glory; a sample of which I have already noticed in this true Israelite, this “Israelite indeed.”

And Esther is as beautiful in her generation, as a weaker vessel. She may have to be strengthened by Mordecai, but she is tenderly, deeply, in sympathy with the burdens of her nation. She sees difficulty, and feels danger; and she speaks, for a time, from her circumstances. Nothing wrong in this. She tells Mordecai of the hazard she would run if she went into the royal presence unbidden. Nothing wrong, again I say, in thus speaking as from her circumstances, though there may be weakness. But Mordecai counsels her, as a stronger vessel; and he appears as one above both circumstances and affections, in the cause of God and His people. He sends a peremptory message to Esther, though he so loved her; and he is calm and of a firm heart in the midst of these dangers. He sits above water floods in this way; in the dear might of Him who has trod all waves for us. There is neither leaven nor honey, as I may say, in the offering he is making—he confers not with flesh and blood, nor does he look at the waters swelling. His faith is in victory—and the weaker vessel is strengthened through him. Esther decides on going in unto the king. If she perish, she perishes—but she is edified to hazard all for her people. And yet, while she thus does not “faint” under the trial, neither will she “despise” it—for she will have Mordecai and her brethren wait in an humbled, dependent spirit, so that she may receive mercy, and her way to the king’s presence be prospered.

Accordingly, at the end of the fast, which they agreed on for three days, she takes her life in her hand, and stands in the inner court of the king’s house, while the king was sitting on his royal throne. But kings’ hearts are in the hand of the Lord; and so it proves to be here. Esther obtains favor in the sight of Ahasuerus, and he holds out the golden scepter to her.

This was everything. This told of the issue of the whole matter. All hung upon the motion of the golden scepter. It was the Spirit of God, the counsel and good-pleasure, the sovereignty and grace of God, that ordered all this. The nation was already saved. The scepter had decided everything in the favor of the Jews and to the confusion of their adversaries, be they as high and mighty, as many and as subtle, as they may. God had taken the matter into His own hand—and if He be for us, who shall be against us? “Thou shalt be far from oppression,” the Lord was now saying to His Israel, “for thou shalt not fear: and from terror; for it shall not come nigh thee. Behold, they shall surely gather together, but not by me: whosoever shall gather together against thee shall fall for thy sake. Behold, I have created the smith that bloweth the coals in the fire, and that bringeth forth an instrument for his work; and I have created the waster to destroy. No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn” (Isa. 54).

Esther drew near and touched the scepter. She used the grace that had visited her; but used it reverently; and the scepter was true to itself. It awakened no hope that it was not now ready to realize. It had already spoken peace to her; and peace, and far more than peace, shall be made good to her. “What wilt thou, queen Esther,” says Ahasuerus to her, “and what is thy request? it shall be given to thee, even to the half of the kingdom.”

Very blessed this is. The scepter, again let us say, was true to itself. What a truth is conveyed in this! The promise of God, the work of the Lord Jesus, is as this scepter. These have gone before—pledges under the hand and from the mouth of our God, and eternity shall be true to them; and endless ages of glory, witnessing salvation, shall make them good. Nothing is too great for the redeeming of such pledges—as here, the half of the king's dominions are laid at the feet and disposal of Esther.

But her dealing with the opportunity thus put into her possession, is one of the most excellent and wondrous fruits of the light and energy of the Spirit, that we see in the midst of the many wonders of this book in all this workmanship of God's great hand.

Instead of asking for the half of the kingdom—instead of desiring at once the head of the great Amalekite, she requests that the king and Haman may come to a banquet of wine which she had prepared for them. Strange, indeed! Who could have counted on such an acceptance of such an unlimited pledge and promise? It brings to mind the answer of the divine Master, of Him who is “the wisdom of God,” to the Samaritan woman. She asked for the living water, and He told her to go call her husband Strange, it would appear, beyond all explanation. But, as we know, it was a ray of the purest light breaking forth from the Fountain of light. And so here. This answer of Esther was strange indeed. But it will be found to have been nothing less than the witness of the perfect wisdom of the Spirit that was now illuminating and leading her. It was the way of conducting the great adversary onward to the full ripening of his apostasy, to his attaining that mighty elevation in pride and self-satisfaction, from the which the hand of God had prepared from the beginning to cast him down. Esther, under the Spirit, was dealing with Haman, as the hand of God had once dealt with Pharaoh in Egypt. The vessel of wrath had again fitted itself for judgment; and God was again about to make His power known upon it. Haman was the Pharaoh of this day, “the man of the earth” now, “king of all the children of pride;” and he must fall from a pinnacle up to which his own lusts and the god of this world are urging his steps. Esther is the instrument in God's hand for

giving him occasion thus to fill out the full form of his apostasy. Esther shows herself wonderfully in the secret of all this. She bids Haman and the king, the second day, as well as the first—only these two together; and when this was done, the giddy height was reached from which the apostate is destined to fall.

He cannot stand all this. It is too much for him. His heart is overcharged; gratified pride has satiated it. He cannot contain himself-but corruption drives him in the way of nature; a sad verdict against nature. But so it is. It was natural, that he should expose all his glories to his wife and his friends. Flesh and blood can appreciate it; and pride must have as many courtiers and votaries as it can. And it must have its victims likewise. Mordecai still refuses to bow; and a gallows, fifty cubits high, is raised that he may be hanged thereon.

Chapters 6 and 7

Every secret thing must reach its day of manifestation. The word which Mordecai told the king about Teresh and Bigthana, the chamberlains, though hitherto forgotten or neglected, must now be remembered. The tears and the kisses, and the spikenard of the loving sinner in Luke 7, and the corresponding slights of the Pharisee, are passed in silence for a moment; but they are all brought to light ere the scene closes. For there is nothing hid that shall not come abroad. God lets nothing pass. Mordecai's act shall not always be forgotten. It shall be recognized, and that too in the very face of his great adversary—as the loving sinner's acts were all rehearsed in the hearing of her accuser. (Luke 7:36-50)

The night after Queen Esther's first banquet was a sleepless one to Ahasuerus. For, as God gives His beloved sleep, so does He at times hold the eyes waking to them, by thoughts of the head upon the bed. By sending instruction through meditations in the night-season, He deals with the hearts of the children of men. So, here with the Persian. The sleepless king calls for the records of the kingdom, the depository of the act of Mordecai, and there reads about that act which had now happened some years before. And as it is true of man, that all that he hath he will give for his life, so now, the king, on the sudden unexpected discovery of the act of Mordecai, by which his life had been preserved, deems nothing too high or honorable to be done for him. Here, however, we may pause for a moment, and consider the wonderful interweaving of circumstances which we get in this history. There is plot and underplot, wheel within wheel, as the expression is, circumstance hanging upon circumstance; and each and all formed together to work out the wonderful works of God.

There is, in this story, the marvelous re-appearance of both the Jew and the Amalekite. Strange phenomena indeed! Who would have thought it, as I have said before? The Jew and the Amalekite reproduced in the distant realms of Persia, and in divers places of favor and authority round the throne there! Then there is Vashti's temper and Esther's beauty meeting at the same moment. There is the fact of Mordecai being the one to overhear the plot against the life of the king. There is the lot deciding on a day for the slaughter of Israel, eleven months distant, so that there may be time for counsels to ripen, and changes to take place. There is the heart of the king moved to hold out the golden scepter to Esther. And now we see the king's sleeplessness, and his thoughts guided to the records of the chronicles. And now, again, we see Haman entering the court of the palace at this peculiar juncture.

What threading together of warp and woof in all this! What intertwining of circumstances, and the production of a curious texture of many colors! And yet, as we have seen and said already, God all the while unseen, unnamed!

Very blessed! Pleased with the work of His own hand, and in the counsels of His own mind, the Lord can be hid for a time, unpublished, uncelebrated. And we are called, in our way, to that which is like this. We are to prove our own work, to have rejoicing in ourselves alone, and not in another, without uttering our secrets, or gathering the regards of our fellows. And truly great this is, to work

unseen, to serve unnoticed. Deep counsels of that wisdom which knows the end from the beginning, and wondrous working of that hand which can turn even the hearts of kings as it pleases.

Haman falls. What a day may bring forth, we commonly say, who can tell? We see it to be so in his history. Zeresh and his friends have to receive, ere the second day's banquet begins, a different Haman from him whom they had greeted after the close of the first. Haman falls, and falls indeed. But over this we must tarry for a little, that we may take knowledge of the character of this great fact, so important is it in setting forth the judgment of God.

1. Haman's greatness was allowed so to flourish and ripen, that he might fall in the hour of highest pride and daring.

This is very instructive, for this has been God's way, and is so still. The builders of the Tower of Babel were allowed to go on with their work, till they made it a wonder. Nebuchadnezzar was given time to finish his great city. The Beast of the Apocalypse will prosper till the whole world wonder after him. So here, Haman is borne with till he sits on the pinnacle. Then, in the moment of proudest elevation, the judgment of God visits all these. Herod, as another such, was smitten of God, and died, as the people were listening to him, and saying, "It is the voice of a god, and not of a man." (See Psa. 37:35,36)

2. He is caught in his own trap. The honor is given to Mordecai which he had prepared for himself; and the gallows which he had prepared for Mordecai, he hangs thereon himself.

This still instructs us; for this has been God's way, and will be so still. Daniel's accusers are cast into the den which they had prepared for him; and the flame of the fire slew those men who took up the children of the captivity to cast them into the furnace. And so is it foretold of the adversaries and apostates of the last days in this world's history. "Their own iniquity shall be brought upon them" (Psa. 7; 9; 10; 35; 57; 141). Satan himself, who has the power of death, is destroyed through death.

3. He falls suddenly.

So with the last great enemy. The judgment of God is to be like a thief in the night, like the lightning that cometh out of the east and shineth to the west. "In one hour," it is said of the Apocalyptic Babylon, "is she made desolate." The judgments on the world before the flood, and on the Cities of the Plain, were such also; "like figures," with this fall of the Agagite, of a judgment still to be executed.

4. He falls completely, utterly destroyed.

So with the great enemy, and the course of this present world with him.

The children of Judas cut off (Psa. 109), the little ones of Edom dashed against the stones (Psa. 137), Haman's sons, all hanged after himself—these illustrate for our learning the utter downfall and annihilation of all that now offends; the clearing out of all by the besom of divine judgment. The "millstone" of Revelation 18 tells us this, and prophecy upon prophecy has long ago announced it.

Full of typical significance, in all the features that signalize it, is this fall of the great Amalekite. We live in such an hour of the world's history, as renders it specially significant and instructive to us. We are, day by day, seeing the Lord allowing the purposes of the world to ripen themselves, gradually to unfold their marvelous and varied attractions, and its whole system to make progress, till it again, like the Tower of Babel of old, draw down the penal visitation of heaven; and that, too, in a moment, suddenly, to do its work of judgment completely, when (blessed to tell it 1) not a trace of man's world shall remain, his pride and wantonness, with all their fruit, shall be withered and gone, and such a world as is fit for the presence of the Lord of Glory shall shine.

Chapters 8-10

We close this book with the deliverance of the Jews in the very moment when destruction was awaiting them, and with their exaltation in the kingdom, and the celebration of their joy.

Mysterious workmanship of the hand of God! The Amalekite, the great adversary, cast down in the moment of his proudest elevation, and utterly cut off; the Jew, his purposed and expected victim, when there was but a step between him and death, delivered, then favored and honored, and seated next to the throne in rank and authority!

What a history! True in every circumstance of it, typical in every circumstance of it also; significant of those last days in the history of the Jew and of the earth, of which prophets have spoken again and again, the downfall of the man of the earth, and the exaltation of God's people in His own kingdom!

Mordecai, instead of any longer being at the king's gate, now comes before the king and takes his ring, the seal of office and of authority, from his finger. Thus is the Jew translated at the end. All scripture prepares us for this; and here it is illustrated. Here the historic scriptures of the Old Testament end, and here, as in a type, the history of the earth ends.

I may say, that the leading, principal characteristics in the story of Israel are these, as we read it in the prophets:

1. The present casting off of that nation, and the hiding of the divine countenance from them; and yet, their providential preservation in the midst of the Gentiles.
2. The present election of a remnant among them, and that repentance at the last, which leads them, nationally, to the kingdom.
3. The judgment of their adversaries and oppressors, with the especial downfall of their great infidel enemy.
4. Their deliverance, exaltation, and blessing in kingdom-days, with their headship of the nations.

These are among the great things of the prophets; and these things are found in this little book of Esther. So that, again, I may say, this last Old Testament historic notice of the people of Israel pledges and typifies their present preservation all through this age of Gentile supremacy, and their glory in the last days, when the judgment of their enemies shall be accomplished.

Certain detached features of the coming millennial kingdom are likewise exhibited here. The fear of the Jews falls on their enemies, on those that were round about them; and they are restrained from all attempts to do them harm. Such had been seen in the palmy days of the nation, and such is promised by the prophets to be their portion again. Shushan, the capital of the Gentile world in that day, rejoices in the exaltation of the Jew; as all scripture tells us, the whole world will rejoice under the shadow of the throne of Israel in the time of the coming kingdom. Many of the people of the land became Jews; as we read the like thing in the prophets again and again; as, for instance,

“Many people shall go, and say, Come ye and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths; for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.” The throne that had exalted the Jew, and put down his oppressor, exercises universal dominion, laying a tribute upon the land, and upon the isles of the sea; as we know that, by and bye, the king in Zion “shall have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth.”

And here, let me add, that Ahasuerus represents power, royal authority in the earth. He then filled the throne that was supreme among the nations. He was “the power,” and represents, mystically or in a shadow, the power that will be in a divine head in the day of the kingdom. It is so, I grant, that power in the hand of this Persian is first exercised in evil; serving, as he did, the wicked designs of Haman, though now he is exalting the righteous. Still, he represents power, royal authority in the earth. Just like Solomon in Jerusalem, he did evil personally. He may have repented; but still his personal ways were evil as well as good. Nevertheless, in a general typical way, he represented power, and was the shadow of Christ on the throne of glory, that throne that is to rule the world in righteousness.

Full of mysterious beauty and meaning all this is. Those days of Ahasuerus and of Mordecai were days of Solomon and of prophecy, coming millennial days, days of the kingdom of God in the earth, and among the nations. They were as the clays of Joseph in Egypt. Mordecai in Persia was as Joseph in Egypt—the first historic book, and the last, in the Old Testament, giving us these varied but kindred notices of the kingdom that will come in upon the close and judgment of the kingdoms of the Gentiles.

The days of Purim celebrate all this. They constitute the triumph after the victory, the joy of the kingdom upon the establishment of the kingdom. The Jews took on them, according to the word of Mordecai and Esther, to make the fourteenth and the fifteenth days of the twelfth month, the month Adar, days of feasting and joy, because therein they rested from their enemies, and their mourning was turned to gladness, and light and honor. They were a kind of Passover, celebrating deliverance from the land of Persia, as that feast did from the land of Egypt; or, if we would rather have it so, Purim was another song on the Red Sea, or another song of Deborah and Barak on the fall of the Canaanite. And it rehearses the song yet to be sung on the sea of glass in Revelation 15; or again, I say, if we would rather have it so, the joy of Israel in coming kingdom-days, when they shall draw water out of the wells of salvation (Isa. 12). Indeed the 124th Psalm, and 126th Psalm, prepared as they are for future days of Israel's glory and joy, breathe the very spirit that must have animated Israel in this present day of Mordecai and Esther.

It is beautiful to trace all this, to see these rehearsals again and again, as we go on the way, waiting for the full chorus of eternal harmonies in the presence of glory by and bye. The infant church in Acts 4, in this spirit, breathes and utters the 2nd Psalm, prepared, as that Psalm is, for the day when God's king sits upon the hill of Zion, after the enemy has perished, and the kings of the earth have learned to bow before Him. The blessed God is pleased with His own works: “For thy pleasure they are and were created.” He, therefore, preserves the works of His hands as their Creator. He is pleased with the counsels of His grace and wisdom. He has, therefore, preserved to this day the nation or people of the Jews, and will preserve them till the fruit of His counsel displays itself in His kingdom. And His kingdom thus will rise on the ruins and judgment of the

nations; and Christ's world, "the world to come," shine in brightness, and purity, and blessing, after the folding up and passing away of "this present evil world."

This coming kingdom, this millennial world, is spoken of in all forms of speech by the prophets; but it has also been set forth in all forms of samples, and parcels, and specimens of it, in broken pieces of history from the beginning; as here we have seen it showing itself at the end of the book of Esther. Ordinances, prophecies, and histories, in their several ways, have been doing this service.

Ere the antediluvian saints pass away, the spirit of prophecy speaks through Lamech, and addresses, as to them, a word of promise touching the earth; that therein, in due season, there should be comfort instead of curse. (Gen. 5)

In Noah as in the new world, we see an illustration of this prophecy of Lamech's; for after the judgment of the Deluge, the earth rises again as in new or resurrection-form; and a pledge, a foreshadowing, of millennial days, is before us.

The land of Egypt, under the government of Joseph, is a "like figure." Under the law, we have a shadow of the same millennial rest in the weekly Sabbath—in the annual Feast of Tabernacles—in the Jubilee every fiftieth year.

For a moment, in the day of Joshua, when the Tribes of Israel had entered the land, kept the Passover as a circumcised people, and then ate unleavened cakes of the corn of the land, we see, in another form, the same happy mystery witnessed to us. (Josh. 5)

After this, the palmy reign of Solomon in a more extended form, in a full and rich manner, tells us the like secret.

As, indeed, I might have noticed the meeting of Jethro with the ransomed Israel on the mount of God, in wilderness-days, was (though in a different form) the foreshadowing of the same coming day of glory. (Ex. 18)

And so now, in dispersion-days, as I may speak, we have the same; as we see at the close of this book of Esther.

Prophecies upon prophecies accompany these ordinances and these histories; so that in the mouth not only of many, but of various witnesses, the kingdom that is still to be set up, and the glory that is still to be revealed, is verified to us. These are rehearsals of the great, the magnificent issue of the counsels of God, of that purpose which shall be manifested in "the dispensation of the fullness of time."

The New Testament gives us like illustrations and promises. The Transfiguration tells us of it. The Regeneration or Palingenesia tells us of it. The action in the Apocalypse first makes way for it; and then, at the end, it shines in our sight, when the holy city descends from heaven bearing the glory of God with it, and when the nations that are saved walk in the light of it.

Thus, the close of Esther finds itself in company with things from the very beginning to the very end, and all through the volume, all through the actings and sayings of God in the progress of this world's history. It is wonderful. What a witness of the writings that are to be found in Scripture!

What a proof of the breathing of the same Spirit in all the parts of it! How it tells us, that “known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world!” We fill our own place, and occupy our own moment, in this great plan.

Conclusion

Having read the books of Ezra and Nehemiah by themselves, as the story of the returned captives, and the book of Esther by itself as the story of the dispersed captives, we would now meditate on them together for a few moments. They give us, as we see, two distinct companies of captives, or two sections of the Jews. They illustrate different parts of the divine counsel and wisdom touching that people; and teach us lessons very important for our souls thoroughly to learn.

In each of these scenes, in the midst of each of these sections of the people of God, we have, so to speak, a separate platform erected for the exhibition of several or separate portions of God's ways and dealings with them.

The returned captives are brought home and left in the land, in order that they may be tested again—for to test His people, though in different ways, had been God's way from the beginning. Israel had already been tested by the gift of power. They had received a fat and good land, and been led on as from strength to strength, till they had flourished into a kingdom; a kingdom which had drawn the eyes of the kings of the earth, and was the admiration of the world.

But they had been untrue to this stewardship. They had abused the power entrusted to them, and been rebellious against the supreme rights of Him who had thus set them up, and ordained them as chief and metropolitan in the earth. And accordingly, or consequently, power, supremacy in the earth, or principal authority among the nations, was taken from them and given to the Gentiles.

Now, however, they are at home again. The captivity to which their unfaithfulness had led is over, and there is a section of the people at home in the land of their fathers again. For it is the divine purpose to test them by another test. God is about to send Messiah to them. His mission and ministry is to be in healing mercy, a proposal of the grace that brings salvation, that it may be known, whether they have an answer to the appeals of love, since they have already proved that they had no fidelity to Him who had entrusted them with power.

This is what we read in the fact of Israel's (or Judah's) return from Babylon. They are Jews again in their own land. Accordingly, as soon as they get home again, they behave themselves as Jews. They kept the ordinances—they raise the national altar—they rebuild the Temple—they keep themselves apart from the heathens—they read the Scriptures—they observe the way of the God of Israel, as far as subjection to power in the hand of the Gentile will admit it. And the God of Israel owns them. He blesses them. He shelters them. He may exercise them in faith and patience, but still He is with them. As of old, He gives them leaders and deliverers and teachers; sends to them His Prophets; and grants them days of revival, days of the new moon in the seventh month.

We know all this, indeed. This was, it is true, a kind of Reformation in their religious history. No idolatry is practiced by them after this; but other corruptions rapidly set in and worked—as not only the books of Ezra and Nehemiah themselves show us, but more particularly the prophecy of Malachi. And the opening of the New Testament scriptures confirms this—for the Gospel by Matthew lets us see clearly and fully, that the returned captives were deeply unbelieving; as untrue

to the doctrines and proposals of goodness, as their fathers had been to the stewardship of power. "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not."

This is so, indeed. And as, when they had been untrue to power, power was given over to the Gentiles, so now, since they are untrue to grace, grace is gone over to the whole world—for the gospel is preached and the salvation of God is held up in the eyes of the ends of the earth.

And strikingly consistent and beautiful this progress in the ways of divine wisdom, or of God's dispensations. All testing ends in failure, and God must act for us and not with us. This fresh trial, by the ministry of Messiah only proves, as by the mouth of another witness, that man is incorrigible and incurable. Every effort to make something of him, or to do something with him, leads him out to another exposure of himself; till he is left naked to his shame. The kingdom is not entered by a tested creature, even though grace test him. Judgment as of "reprobate silver" is the result of the process. "The bellows are burnt, the lead is consumed of the fire, the founder melteth in vain."

Yes, indeed, he must be saved by grace, and not merely tested by it. The first advent of Messiah, or the proposal of salvation, did not lead Israel into the kingdom; it has left them a judged people, scattered and peeled, unsaved and unblessed, only condemned upon a fuller conviction than ever.

We turn, however, to another scene. We are to consider another section of the people, the dispersed and not the returned. For in them is erected another platform, as I may still speak, for the illustration of God's way. We shall see them as the pledges and witnesses, not of a tested, but of a saved people, saved through sovereign grace, and led into the kingdom.

This people had not availed themselves of the opportunity they had of returning home. This is a standing witness against them. They remained among the uncircumcised. They acted the part of the Raven in Noah's ark. They seem to take up with the unclean world. They are as Gentiles, we may say; we see no feasts or ordinances, or Word of God among them. But I grant they are Jews still. And grace abounds towards them. In the midst of the Gentiles they are still kept alive—another unconsumed burning Bush. Jehovah is not seen to be acknowledging them, as He was acknowledging their brethren who had returned to Jerusalem. Still He has His eye upon them, and they are kept alive; and that, too, till the due time comes for His rising up to deal with them in a way of which all His prophets have spoken.

All this we see in Esther, that wondrous book which closes the historic volume of the Old Testament.

A Remnant is seen there. God deals with them marvelously both by His Hand and Spirit; but He is unmanifested. We have seen this, when meditating on Esther. And we further traced God's way with Israel in all those eras of their history, when they were in an informal anomalous state. As instanced in the marriage of Joseph with an Egyptian, of Moses with a daughter of Midian, and the like, and of Esther's marriage with Ahasuerus the Persian. For this was as the way of God Himself with them; when they were untrue to Him, He went over to others. Power first, as we have seen, and now grace and salvation, have gone over to others, since Israel was disobedient and unwilling. How consistent all this is! What constancy and perfection and unity in the ways of His holy wisdom! His brethren were untrue to Joseph, and cast him out. He married and became important in Egypt. His brethren were untrue to Moses and forced him away; he married and became happy in Midian. His people were untrue to Jehovah; and He gave power to the Gentiles.

His own were untrue to Messiah, rejecting, not receiving Him; and He now dispenses grace and salvation to the whole world.

Surely the Lord knows the end from the beginning. Surely His way is before Him.

“His wisdom ever waketh,

His sight is never dim,

He knows the way He taketh,

And I will walk with Him.”

Oh for grace to say this and to do it! And to walk with Him, too, along the path of His wisdom, and the ways of His dispensations, as from glory to glory, to “walk in the light as He is in the light.”

And fresh wonders still show themselves to us on these two platforms, or in the story of the Returned, and the story of the Dispersed.

As I have already observed, Malachi begins to intimate what will be the end of the returned or tested captives. All will fail, as all has failed. The New Testament scriptures affirm the intimation of Malachi.

The Evangelists make good the hints and notices of the Prophets. But Esther gives us to know what will be the dispersion, or of that portion which remained among the Gentiles. They will finally be taken up in sovereign grace, carried through “the great tribulation,” and by that road into the kingdom. In that story, or on that platform, we see the nation of the Jews, brought to the eve and on the brink of utter destruction, rescued by the wonder-working hand of God, and then seated in the high places of honor, of influence, and of authority, by the Power that rules the earth, all their enemies either judged and taken out of the way, or seeking their favor and blessing.

These are the secrets we are instructed in, in these books, or in these two scenes of various action. Man is tested and fails; the sinner is taken up in grace and saved.

And these are the secrets we have been set down to learn from the beginning; and we are destined, blessedly destined, to celebrate them forever. Man is exposed, God is displayed. Man is thoroughly made naked to his shame; God is exalted in the highest order of exaltation, and displayed in the brightest light of glory.

It was thus in the story of Adam at the very beginning. He was tested, and under the testing he failed, and destroyed himself; he was then taken up in grace, and saved through the death and resurrection of Christ; by faith in the bruised and bruising seed of the woman.

It was thus again in Israel. Israel was set under law. But the shadows of good things to come accompanied the law. Under their own covenant, under the law, Israel, like Adam, was ruined. But God acts in the midst of the self-destroyed people, the self-wrought ruin, and by ordinances and prophecies and pledges of many kinds has ever been telling them of final grace and salvation.

And now, in like manner, the gospel thoroughly exposes us, but fully, presently, perfectly, eternally, saves us. And through the ages of glory it will be told out that we are a washed people, a ransomed people, who owe everything to grace and redemption, though glorified forever.

So that these two platforms, the scene in the midst of the returned captives, and the scene in the midst of the dispersed captives, are in company with all the divine way from the beginning, and with that which is to be had in remembrance and celebrated forever. Only we marvel afresh at this new witness of the way of God, His necessary, perfect way, in a world like this.

How complete all this makes the divine historic volume of the Old Testament! That volume ends here; and we are well satisfied to have it so.

The way of the Lord Himself in this book is specially wonderful. Apparently, He is neglectful of His people. He is "silent" towards them. He does not show Himself. There is no miracle. His name, as we have all remarked, is not once named in the whole book. His people, even in all the exercises of their hearts under the most pressing circumstances, never mention Him. Surely, this is wonderful. But it is admirable as well as wonderful. It is perfect in its place and season. For during this present Gentile age, God is apart from Israel, like Joseph in Egypt, or Moses in Midian, apart from their brethren, as I have already noticed. Yea, and as many voices of the prophets have anticipated (See Psa. 74; Isa. 8:17; 45:15; 18:4; Hos. 5:15). And the Lord Jesus, speaking as the God of Israel, at the close of His ministry, says to them, "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." (Matt. 23:38, 39)

But He cares for them. Their names are in the palms of His hands. He revokes not the judgment; but He will in due time awake for their deliverance. It is Jesus asleep in the boat, winds and waves tossing it. But in the needed time He awoke, and rose for the quieting of all that which, in its anguish swelling, was raging against them.

Hail to the Lord's anointed!

Great David's greater Son!

When to the time appointed

The rolling years have run,

He comes to break oppression,

To set the Captive free,

To take away transgression,

And rule in equity.

Fragments

“The history of Rahab has sometimes encouraged me about unconverted relatives—her bringing all her family under the shelter of the scarlet line.”

“Soon our pilgrim journey will be over, and then we shall be recounting, like Moses to his father-in-law, what befell us by the way, and how the Lord delivered us.”

“Ought I not to have learned, by this time, not to expect or desire rest here? And also, how to trust simply with child-like confidence in His unceasing tender care.”

The Church, an Habitation of God Through the Spirit

There are two great ideas in this epistle as regards the saints. The grand thought all through it is the grace of God towards them; but, as regards the saints, there are these two ideas about the church: First, its hope; Second, what it is now, meanwhile.

It looks at it, on the one hand, as having a certain place in glory, and as enjoying the inheritance; and on the other there is this second point, what it is even now before it gets there. And this last gives it, in a certain sense, a higher character of communion and fellowship in blessing than is contained in the glory itself which it expects, though doubtless the other will not then cease. You will see these two things in considering the prayers of the apostle. (Chapter 1:3)

We shall be in glory before Him, children (that is the expression), to bring out the glory of His grace, who has predestinated us according to the good pleasure of His will— “holy and without blame before Him in love.” And here we have: “In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit,” before Him in glory, and God dwelling in us.

We will just consider a little, beloved friends, how it is that the church becomes thus the “habitation of God.” It is of the deepest importance to us. I said that the blessings connected with this are, in some respects, superior to what might properly be called glory. And this is important, because we find that even now this blessing is brought to us. In glory we shall be able to enjoy it better, but we have it now.

At the end of chapter 1, where the apostle has been speaking concerning God’s purpose about the saints, the thought is the “exceeding greatness of His power,” and he prays. (See vss. 18-23)

At the close of chapter 3 we have a prayer founded upon the other point I have spoken of. (See vss. 14-21) The character of this prayer is higher, and it goes further than the former.

There are two titles given to God in this epistle. In the one, He is called the “God” of our Lord Jesus Christ, because Christ is looked at there as glorified Man, who has been down here, suffered, died, and been raised again. In the other, He is called the “FATHER” of our Lord Jesus Christ, because Christ is not thus looked at as the risen and glorified Man, but as the Son of God.

Now the prayer in chapter 1 is founded upon the first of these titles (vs. 17), and is connected with the glory of the risen Man. In chapter 3 the apostle bows his knees unto “the FATHER of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named;” and therefore he looks more at intimacy of communion, and to our being “filled into all the fullness of God.” It is not God giving us knowledge of the inheritance, but God filling us with Himself.

We find these subjects, and the distinction between them, all through. In the one, the Lord Jesus Christ is considered as Man whom God has raised from the dead, and there the church is looked at as “the fullness of Him that filleth all in all.” In the other, as the Son of the Father, in the power and unity of that relationship, and so of the divine nature; this latter point being more especially connected with our being an “habitation of God through the Spirit.”

There are two points in this expression, beloved friends; one, that of our being the “habitation of God;” and the other, that that is “through the Spirit.” He is not speaking of our dwelling with God (although that is true), but of our being “an habitation of God.” He says, “Ye are builded together.” And this is evidently a different thing. It is a different thing our having glory together with Him, and God’s dwelling in us; that is, I repeat, evidently a most peculiar and special blessing.

God came down to talk with man (Gen. 3) —man already fallen— “and they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day.” But God then had no “habitation” on earth.

God’s Spirit had dealt in power in various ways in the history of man; but the moment the people are called out, it is: “The Lord is my strength and song, and He is become my salvation: He is my God, and I will prepare Him an habitation,” (Ex. 15:2). This is the first thing we find in the song of Moses.

David had the same thought. (2 Sam. 8) He would not dwell in an house of cedar whilst the ark of God dwelt within curtains. But the Lord answers him, and says, “I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle.”

“But Solomon built Him an house.” Having settled His people in the land, the “habitation of God” was built—afterward called a worldly sanctuary with carnal ordinances (Heb. 9:1,10), but it was the “habitation of God.”

And then, when the Lord Jesus came into the world, this truth applied properly to His person. He says, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” He is regarded as the temple of God. Therefore God was then dwelling (in Him) with man, in the midst of the sorrow and evil into which man was fallen.

Well, here it is the church. (vs. 22)

Beloved friends, it is touching to see the place which God takes (referring to the passage I have quoted about David’s thought of building a house) according to the state of His people. God always takes the place that suits His people. A most marvelous thought, but a most gracious thought on His part. If His people are enslaved under burdens, as in Egypt, He becomes their Redeemer. If they are a journeying people, and in tents, He dwells there Himself. He takes the same place as His people, for He is to be the center of their blessing, and leads them by the cloud. This He did up to Solomon’s time. When Joshua comes in and has to fight with the Canaanites, He presents Himself as “Captain of the Lord’s host.” (Josh. 5) When the people are settled (settled as far as they could be) under Solomon in fullness of peace and in blessing, God builds a settled house. And God dwells among them. Whatever the circumstances His people are in, God takes a place suited to them.

The place that God takes to dwell in now (until His people come into the rest) is, properly speaking, a tent or tabernacle. It is just, surely, as blessed, but, so to speak, more moveable. In glory it will not be so. While we are on our journey it is a tabernacle, not a temple; but still God dwells among men. His own grace has built an “habitation” for Himself. I am speaking, let us remember, not at all of that place of glory into which we are to come before God, but of that other thing, that God will come and dwell down here upon the earth. When Jesus was in the world,

God's presence was there. And it was that which was the center of all' blessing. They gathered around Him Well now, it is the same thing with regard to the church; God dwells upon the earth, in the church, as a "habitation," though not visibly, not in manifested glory.

And this comes to be of the last possible importance. If it is really true that God dwells on the earth in a "habitation," evidently the "habitation" wherein He dwells must be of the greatest importance. And this remains always true. Failure though there may be, still the church is His dwelling-place. Until Christ came, or at any rate until Lo-ammi was pronounced upon Israel at the Babylonish captivity, God dwelt there, and the blessing of the people and the guilt of the people was in respect of God's dwelling. If it was a question of idolatry, "They have set," He says, "their altars by my altar." So when He is going to judge the people in Ezekiel, He goes on and shows the prophet what they were doing in the temple. It might be the ancients of the house of Israel in the chambers of imagery, or women weeping for Tammuz, or the men at the door of the temple of the Lord between the porch and the altar, with their backs towards the temple of the Lord, and their faces towards the east, worshipping the sun; but it was in the temple. That was the place to which sin referred itself.

Having stated this general truth, I would just see here how this "habitation" is brought about.

All the first chapter of the epistle, as also the beginning of the second, is taken up with the other point of which I spoke; that is, that God has raised up Christ from the dead; as it is said, "According to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ, when..." God is here stepping in in power (not merely as a Judge having satisfaction, but stepping in in his own power for the accomplishment of His purposes) to deal with man, looked at as under the consequences of sin. It is not only man in evil that is looked at in this epistle, responsible to God, and having to find that which meets His state in the cross (we see that in Hebrews and elsewhere; it is not specially treated of here), it is God acting in His own power for the deliverance of man. Christ takes this place. He descends into the lower parts of the earth, making Himself responsible for the consequences of sin. He comes down from the throne of God in the perfectness of divine love, humbles Himself, takes upon Him the consequences of sin, and comes down into the consequences of sin, where man had brought himself. Marvelous and blessed truth! Where we were looked at as sinners "dead in trespasses and sins," Christ has come down: He put Himself there. Alas! the judgment of those who reject Christ! they will find the full consequences of sin in themselves. But that is where faith first sees the full consequences of sin—in Christ. Sin was fully matured (man had behaved lawlessly without law, the law had been broken, Christ slighted and rejected), and He then enters into this place, and goes under the full power of the consequences of sin. We see Him brought down into the weakness of man under the power of death—Satan's power (though He could not be holden of it), and under the wrath of God—into the "dust of death."

All that which the heart of Christ felt and suffered is told out wonderfully in the Psalms; whether it be from the hiding of God's countenance, or from His enemies surrounding Him, or from Satan's power, or from God's waves and billows going over him, all is freely expressed there. Occasionally we find this breaking forth in the gospels; but it is more especially given in the Psalms. What the gospels present to us, generally speaking, is the perfect walk of Christ—of Him who, by virtue of His living by the Father, and His perfect obedience and love, was always towards man what man needed in order to approach God. All that man could see, while His thoughts about that which

pressed upon Him were hidden within His own heart. "I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" Constantly His soul was straitened; whilst, if you look at Him among men, they were not straitened in Him; all was grace and love still. He showed forth the great principle of the offering up of Himself as man to God. He had power to take that place, and He took it. Though without sin, He suffered the consequences of sin, even to the "dust of death;" He went down into it. But there He could not remain.

Having thus perfectly glorified God, it then became a question what God should do for Him. And we read, "He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places." "He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things." Having descended in the perfectness of love and obedience to the dust of death, He went thence back to the throne of God, and is set above all. And thus, whatever exercise of heart there may be, or whatever the evil and rebellion of unconverted man, faith knows perfectly that from the throne of God down to the uttermost consequences of sin, and from the uttermost consequences of sin up to the throne of God, Christ fills all things. There is not one thing to the eye of faith, from the throne of God to the dust of death, and from that up to the highest point of glory, that is not filled with the redemption power of Christ. The love of God has come down into the place of the sin and ruin of man; and faith rests in that love, and in the full accomplishment of redemption, as shown out in that He who went down into the dust of death is now at the right hand of the throne of God. "He that descended." Woe be to those who reject this! But that is what faith knows about the work of Christ. He has gone down into the dust of death, and the "exceeding greatness of God's power has raised Him from the dead."

That is the redemption power of God. The results, it is true, will be brought out afterward. God is waiting, and souls are being gathered unto Christ; but that is the redemption, in the power of which we stand.

Well, now, the consequence of that is seen in this second chapter— "You hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins;" and then, too (because God has done it for us in Christ), "and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." The great result of this salvation will be our being with Christ in the glory by-and-by; but even now by faith we can see ourselves "in Christ Jesus" (not "with" Him, as has been observed) there. I know that the redemption power which has visited me, touched me, and taken me up, when I was "dead in trespasses and sins," I know that that has not stopped short of the throne of God itself. It has united me to Him who is at the right hand of God, and has therefore placed me there "in" Him, as having the same life, the same righteousness—God's righteousness now, and hereafter the same joy, and the same glory.

This would have been true if there were but one saint. But there is a further thing. The apostle goes on to show that, looked at according to the largeness of the purpose of God, Jew and Gentile (whatever the distinction between them and that of God "in the flesh") were on one broad platform of ruin. "Among whom we all had our conversation in times past, in the lust of our flesh." Having taken that ground, he says, "Remember where you are;" "He is our peace," (See vss. 14-17). "Peace" having been made, the dealings of God with man down here, on the ground of redemption, are begun.

Christ sat down on the throne of God, having completed the work—the peace being made, redemption accomplished. He could not go further than the throne of God. He has carried the “wave sheaf,” the first-fruits of redemption power, in His own person up to the throne of God.

Well, on that the “peace” that is “preached” is based. And here I would just for a moment (supposing there may be some here who have not peace) notice how it is that he preaches peace. He does not come and say to man, ‘You have to make your peace with God.’ He preaches peace. He does not preach a peace to be made, a peace that is not made; He preaches peace—a made peace. He has made peace through the blood of His cross. Having sat down at the right hand of God, the whole work being accomplished, so that He is “expecting until His enemies are made His footstool.” (Heb. 10) He comes to Jew and Gentile, no matter to whom, and preaches peace; not a progressive work, but a peace completely made. The soul may be a long while struggling under the sense of unanswered responsibility, it may cling to the law, it may mistake the work of the Spirit for the work of Christ, be looking for results in itself (we naturally look to our own righteousness, and even the saints often mistake holiness for the ground of peace), and the like—all that may take place in the soul, but it does not at all touch the perfectness of the work of Christ, or alter the strain of what Christ preaches, as being at the right hand of God. Blessed thought! It is simple enough, and there is nothing more suitable; for, as we shall see (without the thought of holiness having anything to do with the ground of peace), holiness flows forth as the consequence of peace. Wherever there is simplicity of faith there is peace. That is the first point—perfect peace, independent of anything in ourselves; no matter what we were, Jew or Gentile, despised or honorable in the earth, it is a peace that has been brought to us in Christ.

The next thing (and that as a consequence) is, that “through Him we both have an access by one Spirit unto the Father” (vs. 18).

“Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners,” (vss. 19-22) Christ having wrought this redemption, having ascended to God, having sat down at the right hand of God, having gathered us together, makes us thus gathered together “an habitation of God through the Spirit.” It is not God merely acting in certain men, it is God dwelling in the church down here, as gathered through the word of the gospel. The church is the place of God’s presence on the earth. He has set us in redemption, and He comes and dwells in us. When the church was gathered together with one accord in one place, at Pentecost, the Holy Ghost came down and dwelt there, the result of the accomplished work of Jesus. And this is a real thing. I am not speaking now, merely of gifts, but of the presence of God Himself.

Now it is quite clear that the presence of God down here must be of the last importance. His “habitation” is that which He possesses, which belongs to Him, and there nothing that does not recognize the fullness of this blessed cost of salvation can be. It is those who are His redeemed ones, brought together by the peace which Christ preaches—those who have, through Christ, access by one Spirit unto the Father, that come to be the place where God dwells.

There are many places in which the Spirit of God could act. We find the expression, “the eyes of the Lord” (2 Chron. 16:9), “the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him” “If we turn to certain dealings of God as assuring the work He established by His Spirit, for instance, the laying the foundation of the temple by Zerubbabel (Zech. 3, 4), we there find mention of these “eyes of the

Lord.” So in Ezekiel’s throne (chap. 1:18; 10:12)—the operations of God in His governing power in the world. So too Rev. 5:6. All this is the activity of the energy of the Spirit of God; it might act in glorious power, or it might act in silent energy, but in all it is the activity of energy of the Spirit of God going out and dealing in the world. And that is quite another thing. I am not speaking of that. We are “an habitation of God through the Spirit.” In grace to us it may be a tabernacle, but still it is “an habitation of God”—the place where He dwells, where He lives, so to speak, where He has taken up His abode, where He can have around Him the things that suit His presence, that in which He delights. Beloved friends, this is what we are, we may have dishonored it, but that is just what we are made, and in this world—the place where God dwells.

Now to take a simple example of the effect of this—I said a simple example, and yet it is a very important one—let us look at the case of Ananias and Sapphira. (Acts 5) That was not a question of gift. Peter said, “Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost?” God was there; there was no gift exercised at all; and Ananias and Sapphira fell down dead. They had had the folly and madness not to understand that God was there, and therefore when they came and brought only part of the possession—lying to God (it was not to Peter and John they were lying), God showed the indignation of His presence, and they fell down dead. There was wonderful effect in this. We read, “And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.” The fact was known that God did “in every deed” (as Solomon speaks at the dedication of the temple) “dwell with men.” It was the real presence of God—the church was there, having God dwelling in it, and acting in it, by the Holy Ghost—and He proved it; His presence sanctified the place.

Well now, beloved friends, that is always and constantly true. As I have said, we may have grieved the Spirit, dishonored the house, and been unfaithful (that, alas! is also too true), but it depends upon the redemption that is in Jesus Christ. What is the consequence of redemption? It is not merely that I have peace individually, nor yet that we are heirs together of glory, nor yet that we have access through Christ by the Spirit to the Father; besides all this, it is the ground on which God dwells down here. It is in virtue of the accomplishment of redemption by the Lord Jesus Christ, that God call come down here and make His “habitation,” that He can comfort and strengthen those who are within (not merely act in providential power without), that He can be at home in the midst of His people. This, His being at home in the midst of His people, practically sanctifies us; it involves great responsibility (His house should be according to His holiness). “Holiness becometh thy house forever,” but at the same time it becomes the source of our power and blessing.

Suppose for a moment God was here, and we were all His saints (the Lord grant it may be so), and all the saints of God that are in the world (which is not the case; God forbid that it should be), is it not quite evident that the eye, the ear, all would refer to that, the every movement, would be consequent upon God’s being there, the presence of God’s governing, and stamping its character on the whole? Again, if that were the case, supposing we could say that God was there, and all the enemies in the world were raging about us, beloved, would not the one thought be that God was there, and that that was God’s concern? He would be the strength, the help, the confidence of the soul. Yes, and that was so beautifully shown when the Jews came back to Jerusalem, and were in fear of their enemies. The first thing they built was—what? —a high wall? No; they built an altar.

God was their confidence and strength.

Well, we are “builded together for...” And see what a blessed truth is connected with this. On what ground could God come into our midst, and dwell with us? It is not on any uncertain ground. It is upon the ground of God’s perfect and entire complacency in the church—His perfect delight. It is not God’s coming down to call us, as He did Adam after the fall, in order to find out that he was lost. Neither is it God’s coming down, as He did to Sodom and Gomorrah, to see whether the cry that was gone up is such as it seems to be. Neither is it God’s coming down, as He did to Israel, to put to the test whether He can stay. He comes down on the ground, and in consequence of completed redemption-of peace being perfectly made. His presence is the witness and evidence of accomplished redemption. He says, as it were, “I have so accomplished this redemption, I am so pleased with you, so satisfied because of Jesus, that I am come to dwell with you, to make my abode with you, you are to be my ‘habitation.’” What a character does this give to the church! What manner of men ought we to be!

But then there is another thing. If we are the “habitation of God through the Spirit,” the consequence is, not merely the favor of God, but all the consequences of this favor. The Holy Ghost comes down as the witness and testimony of the fullness of the Father’s delight in Christ, and of our joy in Him “Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come,” (John 16:13-15). He ministers (I am not now talking of the instruments) to us these things. He has all “the goods” (as it is expressed in Eliezer, Gen. 24) “in His hand,” to minister the comfort and strength of what belongs to us as the Bride of Christ, the true Isaac, unto whom the Father hath given all that He hath. And that is the case in the midst of infinitive difficulty and trials (in that sense more blessed than if there were none). This is one of the present special blessings of redemption, one that we shall not know or want in glory—we shall have the full result of redemption there. But it is not merely to be brought into glory, to be at home in perfect peace in the presence of God, and with God; redemption is so perfect that, before we get into glory, God by His Spirit can come and dwell with us here, in the midst of our weakness, and because of our need.

As the apostle speaks in the Philippians: “What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretense, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice. For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.” Paul was tried, persecuted, taken as a prisoner to Rome, and they were going on preaching Christ of envy and strife, supposing to add affliction to his bonds. Well, all this (he says) will “turn to my salvation.” His soul thus being fed and nourished by the Spirit, everything in which he found trial and exercise of heart became but the means really of working out of him that which was contrary to God, in order that his sympathy might have free course, and his soul joy only in Christ.

Again, beloved friends, in speaking of the sympathy of the Spirit of God with the saints, and in the saints, amidst a groaning creation (Rom. 8), he says, “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities,” (vs. 26). Here I find the Holy Ghost taking notice of certain trials, sorrows, weaknesses, difficulties, and the like; of everything, in short, that can press upon the heart of the saint, and that even when it cannot be uttered, and “groaning” is its only expression. It is the groaning of the Spirit of God in such a poor feeble heart, that it does not know how to express it. But it is said, “And He that searcheth the hearts knoweth,” (vs. 26). That is what He has found there, “the mind of the

Spirit.” It is not merely that human feelings are brought out, but that the things (the very trials and sorrows) that would have produced human feelings have now produced, if I may so say, divine feelings—feelings “according to God,” which go up to God, and which God can answer; so that they become the means by which He pours into the heart all the fullness of His consolation, not perhaps taking them away, but showing that He Himself is the sufficient blessing of the soul, because He dwells with it, and makes Himself the portion of it. Now, if we look at the way in which this meets us where we are, and what we are, this is how it works. He comes down into all our circumstances, and for a poor trifle of affliction, I get to find (not the thing set aside, but) God Himself taking the place of our sorrow. In the prayer in chapter 3 the apostle loses himself, as it were; and no wonder. After he has said, “I bow my knees unto the FATHER of our Lord Jesus Christ,” he adds, “that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love [that is what God is—the divine nature], may be able to comprehend with all saints [taking in the whole unity in which the Holy Ghost dwells] what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height.” He has now got into the infinitude of all God’s thoughts and purposes of blessing, and he cannot say of what. Just as the groanings could not be uttered, so the thought cannot be uttered. It is God that has come in, and Christ fills all things, according to the power of redemption, from the throne of God down to the dust of death, and from the dust of death up to the throne of God. Having all things, and filling all things, he says, here I am placed in the midst of this infinitude. And then he adds, “And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.” He could go to no place, but there he found infinite love and infinite power—the love that brought Christ down, and the power that took Christ up again.

This meets all the exercises of the heart. If brought down even (as Christ came down) into the dust of death, the Holy Ghost comes down to the poor man who feels this power of death in his soul, and dwells in Him, and carries him up, by the knowledge of redemption, into all the fullness of God Himself.

Well that, beloved, is the result of the dwelling of the Holy Ghost down here, consequent upon redemption accomplished by Christ. The Holy Ghost can come and bring peace to our souls; and the effect of that peace to our souls is to make us pass through all the evil around “according to the power of God.” When the apostle speaks to Timothy, he says, “Be thou a partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God.”

Where shall we stop? The soul rejoices in that which must be the joy and gladness of the heart that knows God has come down to dwell in it, the immutable blessedness of God’s presence. Then, whatever the circumstances in which we are placed, if they be only those of sorrow and trial, what is the consequence? God ministers of the fullness of the sympathy of His love to our souls; and thus they become, so to speak, as a door, or a chink, to let in God. All the riches—“the unsearchable riches of Christ”—are ours. And Christ fills everything. There is not anything we can think of, but we find there of the fullness of Christ. If we think of death, we see Christ there; of sin, we do not know what sin is fully, until we see Christ “made sin;” of God, it is only in Christ we can know God; of man, it is only in Christ we can see man raised to the height of his blessing; peace, it is through Christ we know the peace of God; life, Christ is our life; glory, it is all in Christ. There is not anything, no matter what we think of, whether in creation or above it, or between God and man, but we must think of Christ in it all. He is the “head of His body the church, which is the

fullness of Him that filleth all in all.” We can turn our thoughts to no one thing in which we do not find the fullness of Christ, and by the power of the Holy Ghost our souls are brought into the joy of this fullness, as that to which we are, through living union with Him, everlastingly and perfectly united.

There is another point which I have not touched upon, the practical effect of this. What would the effect be on our souls if we really felt we were “builded together,”? if we felt that in the whole world Christians were in truth the dwelling-place of God? What a thought should we have to act upon as to everything. That by which the church of God has been corrupted, ordinances and the like would disappear as clouds before the presence of the sun. And what thoughts of glory should we have; what thoughts of holiness; what peace as to practical circumstances; what jealousy of grieving the Holy Ghost; what love towards all saints; what joy; what confidence; how we should bear the mocking of all our enemies (Isa. 37:22,23); how live and act among men as “sons” and “heirs” of God! What power for everything in short would be ours, if we remembered the completeness, the peace-giving completeness of redemption, and could really say that God was dwelling with us.

This is our portion; and whatever our weakness and infirmity (and, alas! it is very great), whatever our failure, still it remains true. Though we grieve the Spirit, and weaken the consciousness of our joy, still God is with us. The Holy Spirit dwells among us.

May the Lord give us to know, and to own, what this presence of God in the earth is, and that with men, by reason of the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.

Anchorage Within the Veil

The apostle had spoken, at the close of the preceding chapter, of “the first principles of the oracles of God,” and here again he says, “Leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection: not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this will we do, if God permit.” (vs. 1-3)

We must remember to whom he was writing—persons who, though now professing to be, and, as he says (vs. 9), really Christians, were those who had been familiar with the doctrines of the law before they were Christians at all, who had heard about Messiah, expected Messiah (another word for Christ), and had had their thoughts therefore connected with Christ, before the Holy Ghost was sent down from heaven. But it was quite a different thing to have certain elements about Christ, and to have “the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven,” after Jesus was glorified.

The apostle alludes here to things, all of which were connected with the first principles of there being a Christ. A Pharisee held them, though not a believer at all; he believed there would be a resurrection of the dead. The great mass of Christians stop here. But the apostle says it is useless to rest here; he would have them go on unto perfection. What he calls “perfection” is not connected with practice or conduct (except, indeed, as truth sanctifies), it was the going on to a full revelation of what was in Christ; it refers entirely to doctrine.

In the next place he gives a reason why they should go on unto perfection. If they were firm in these truths, it was useless to begin them over again; if they had given them up, it was “impossible to renew them again unto repentance.”

All that belonged to the Jewish system, belonged to the old world; when Christ comes again it will be different. (Chapter 2:5) It is in that sense he speaks of “the powers (the same word as miracles) of the world to come.” The power of Christ will entirely deliver from the dominion of Satan, and these miracles were samples of that. A Jew, who had rejected Christ in humiliation, might be converted, and own a glorified Christ (unto whom these powers of the world to come bore testimony). There was a glorified Jesus to be presented to those who had rejected Jesus when here. “But then,” he says, “it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted of the good Word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance, seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame”—if they reject these “powers” of the Holy Ghost, consequent upon the glorification of the Messiah—if they have seen and felt “the powers” of “the Holy Ghost, come down from heaven,” from Jesus glorified, and then turn away, there is no other doctrine to be preached, there is no restoring them again unto repentance.

He is considering the case of Hebrews turning back from the profession of Christianity to Judaism—that to which there was (save for faith) every inducement. They had no longer a visible

Messiah, or temple, or sacrifices, or altar; they had given up all these, and (there was joy, no doubt, in believing) they had nothing tangible in their stead. Confirmatory of the gospel, there were these powers of “the Holy Ghost come down,” but there was no Christ, in a third condition, yet to be presented. As a nation they had crucified Him once; now (he says) that He is glorified, and that there have been these proofs brought in, are you going to crucify Him again?

There was no third condition. “The earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God; but that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned;” all the rain that could come from heaven was spent upon this ground, and it remained just as it was, it brought forth thorns and briers.

Being “partakers of the Holy Ghost” is not being converted, but just what Simon Magus hoped to obtain. (Acts 8:18,19) With him it was no question of conversion; he wanted to buy this preternaturally exercised power. Saul was “amongst the prophets.” (1 Sam. 10:10,11) He was made a partaker (not in a New, but in an Old Testament sense) of the Holy Ghost. So Balaam, a thoroughly ungodly man. The Lord “met him,” and “put a word into his mouth.” (Num. 23)

I cannot turn back to these old elements, says the apostle, I desire to lead you on; but if you have rejected them, “it is impossible.”

And then he adds, although having put before them this terrible picture, “But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak.” (vs. 9)

There is one expression (perhaps the most difficult of the whole) which it may be well to notice in passing, that of “tasting the good Word of God.” It looks like something real. But it is just what we have in the parable—a man’s “anon with joy receiving it,” yet his having “no root in himself.” (Matt. 13:20,21) A person may have his feelings moved, (like the women who followed Christ, weeping and wailing, and to whom He said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children,”) the heart may be acted upon by certain truths just as much as the head, and there be no work of God in the conscience. Neither the natural heart or head have anything to do with it; there may be as much feeling as knowledge, and nothing of God at all.

The things to which the apostle refers, as seen in these believers, were not “the powers of the world to come,” but real fruit, meet for Him by whom the earth was dressed. “God is not unrighteous,” he says, “to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have showed toward His name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister;” I do not expect you to fall away, “and we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end.” There was the proof of life, and that which God would not disown (He never owned merely head and heart; it would be a sort of hopeless anomaly to say I own these fruits, and yet disown the persons who bore them; and he further desires for them full, undivided confidence in the Lord, and about themselves.

There are three things spoken of in Scripture—1st, “Full assurance of faith” (Heb. 10:22); 2ndly, “Full assurance of hope” (vs. 11); 3dly, “Full assurance of understanding.” (Col. 2:2) The “full assurance of faith” rests on the testimony of God. God tells me the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin, and I rest upon that testimony. There is more than this in the “full assurance of hope;” my

soul counts upon a person who has made a promise. (See vss. 12-20) Hence there is the leaning upon God (a different thing from merely believing a testimony), and, moreover, a looking "within the veil." It is founded upon what is perfectly immutable, not upon anything produced here, and which might be liable to change. Entering into that within the veil, God's throne must be shaken before my hope. Faith rests upon a testimony that has come out; but it carries me up, and hope reckons on Him who is there. The "full assurance of understanding" goes a step further. Not only have I an object on which my heart and conscience rest, but it takes up God's counsels; it "understands;" I can say, "It became God" to do this and to do that.

When speaking about "hope," we must recollect it is not in the least like human hope (as though the thing was uncertain). In ordinary language I might say, "I hope such a person will come tomorrow," when that was extremely uncertain. Not so with "hope" in divine things. All that is meant is, that the thing hoped for is not present: "If we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it," because it is certainly coming "Be not slothful." There is a certain characteristic diligence; otherwise we shall be going into the world at every step. We have the flesh and the devil (who is going about seeking to devour) to do with. Moreover, we have to come to God. Whether we look at God, the flesh, or Satan, it is always diligence that characterizes faith. The devil will be diligent if we are not. "Wherefore, the rather, my brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure." Life is shown in action. Of a man that never stirs I cannot say, "He is alive." Satan is in the path, and the thing that guards us against Satan is diligence; without it, we shall get tripped, and be beaten. Satan cannot touch the new nature (1 John 5:18); hence, temptations really come to be siftings, and show if faith be in us. "Be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises."

We have need of patience. All this sifting will purify us. Else (where there is not patience and faith), it will prove there is no real anchor within the veil, and the ship will be driven.

Then he turns to show them (while there will be temptations, and, therefore, the need of faith and patience) how strong and infallible the anchor is. "When God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, He swore by Himself, saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise." But he did not get it all at once; there was a little failure (i.e. as to Ishmael), just as he had gone down into Egypt, at the outset, when there was a famine in the land, and (while Sarah was in "the house of Pharaoh," Gen. 12:14-16) had acquired cattle, and Egyptian riches in abundance. (Hagar was an Egyptian woman) A man may get what satisfies nature, and seem to be going on very comfortably, when far off from God. But he had no altar in Egypt. Every camel and ox that came in ought to have broken his heart, and made him feel where himself and his wife were.

"Saul," we read, "tarried for Samuel seven days;" but when he saw that he came not to Gilgal, and the people were scattered from him, he offered the burnt-offering. Just when he had done, Samuel came, and said, "Thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God: thy kingdom shall not continue." (1 Sam. 13) He had not had patience. A person may go on imitating faith, and the actings of faith, for a long time.

In Jacob there was real faith in the promises (though he could not trust God about them). He used unholy means to secure them, just as one might use unholy means to do God's work; but God did not take the promise from him, but He exercised and chastened him; so that at the end he had to

say, "Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been." It is a troubled and distressing scene of exercise and sorrow.

We have need of patience. Faith is shown in the path, and God will put it to the test, while He is counted upon for power to accomplish the promises, as well as for faithfulness to secure them. And Jacob had to learn this lesson. In the end, when Joseph wants to get the blessing from his father for Manasseh instead of Ephraim, the old man crosses his hands, and says, "Not so, my son, not so." God will accomplish His purpose.

And mark further how He sustains our faith. (vss. 16-20) He put faith in Abraham still more to the test by telling him to offer up Isaac, and He then confirmed it by an oath. God exercises our patience; but while He exercises our patience, He gives "a strong consolation" to those who are exercised. Of old, the ark "went before them in the three days' journey, to search out a resting-place for them." (Num. 10:33) They were not to rest in the wilderness; still there was a little respite by the way. And there is this refreshment by the way to strengthen and cheer those who are in the way.

The great Heir is already crowned with glory and honor. (vss. 19, 20) Thus we have our hope confirmed in a manner in which Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had not. It is a heavenly hope, because it "entereth into that within the veil;" and it is a sure and steadfast hope, because of Jesus having entered already there (as our forerunner), and, moreover, by the Holy Ghost's being sent down. "Many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them"; but we have more than even that, we have "the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven," the witness of the glorification of Jesus, and "the earnest of our inheritance." Our consolation is strong. But we shall find we have "need of patience."

God's End, and Jacob's Means

In chapter 13 we find Abraham raising an altar, when separated from Lot, and in the land. There God appears to him, but not now, as at the first, to bring him into the path of faith; he is in the path of faith and brought into the place of promise, and He gives him a clearer knowledge of the extent of the promise— “Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed forever..... Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee.” Here is a great principle as to separation from the world.

We will now consider another altar—that raised by Jacob, on his recall to Beth-el, and a little compare this with God's wrestling with him, when he came out of Padan-aram. There was no altar there.

The history of Jacob is the history of one in the favor of God, but disciplined in a failing walk, and through failure, the faithfulness of God being evidenced throughout all his failures and wanderings in his attempts to bring about the blessing in a carnal way. Just the result of this is seen in his interview with Pharaoh. (Chapter 47) He goes into the presence of the great potentate of the world, and, without any hesitation, blesses him, whilst at the same time giving a very sorrowful history of his own life. There is most evident superiority in the presence of the world; but, putting himself in comparison with other saints, his own life has been a sad one—few and evil his days. The moment a saint is put in contrast with the highest potentate in the ' world, he is the superior. It is very lovely to see this lowliness, the result of his “few and evil” days. The saint may have to confess before the world, to his own shame, yet there cannot but be, where the soul is in communion with God, the consciousness of blessing.

As to Jacob's character, he was most assuredly a believer, and, what is more, a believer who valued God's promises. Esau was not. (Scripture speaks of him as a “profane person.”) Jacob valued the promises. Esau sold his birthright for a mess of pottage. But we do not find in Jacob this character of faith—confidence in God to bring about the promises. Therefore, whilst he values the promises, he uses fleshly means to obtain them; he reckons upon human policy, instead of reckoning upon God. There is blessing in the end; but God could not approve his conduct; and, in the dealing of God's government with him, with the measure with which he has meted, it is measured to him again; he is himself continually the object of similar deceit. He tells Laban, “In the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes. Thus have I been twenty years in thy house; I served thee fourteen years for thy two daughters, and six years for thy cattle: and thou hast changed my wages ten times.” (Chapter 31) Cheated about his wife, wronged as to his wages, a wanderer from his father's house, and slave to Laban, through acting in a deceitful way, instead of leaving the accomplishment of the blessing to God: in all this we discern actual discipline because of evil.

When once fairly under the rod of discipline, God chastens him, makes him feel the rod, but supports him under it. And it is thus always with “the Father of spirits.” He chastens, He disciplines;

but the moment He has put the soul under discipline, it is, as with Ephraim, “since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still.” When lying down at night, with the stones of the place for his pillow, Jacob dreams. “And behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold, the Lord stood above it, and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; and thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.” (Chapter 28)

He was always using deceitful, human means to gain his ends, as in regard to the birthright and the blessing, so too with respect to Laban’s flock. (Chapter 30)

After a certain time he finds he cannot remain with Laban, and, bidden of God to return to the land of his kindred, he steals away. Laban pursues; but God intervenes, and (if he would) he cannot do him hurt. Jacob sets up a pillar of witness. (Chapter 31)

When he fled from the face of Esau at the first, he saw a vision of angels, and was declared to be the object of God’s favor. So here, it is the same thing. At Beth-el he had set up his pillows for a pillar of memorial, and poured oil upon the top of it, and vowed a vow. Yet it is after that he goes through all this discipline.

No longer able to stay with Laban, the Lord appears to him again, and, in bidding him return to the land of his fathers, tells him, “I will be with thee.” Further, the angels of God meet him on his way, and he names the place where he has seen them, “Mahanaim,” that is, “two hosts.” (Chapter 32)

But Esau is about to meet him; and still there is the same character of unbelief. In place of remembering God’s word, “I will be with thee,” and the fact of God’s host having met him, he has recourse afresh to fleshly expedients, in order to “find grace in the eyes of,” and to “appease” “my lord Esau.” To faith, had there been four thousand men with Esau, instead of four hundred, what of that? “If God be for us, who can be against us?” Besides, what right or title had Esau? But we put ourselves under the men of the world, when we use worldly, deceitful ways in our dealings with them.

Still, the Lord meets him in mercy.

He sends over band after band of substance and servants, then children and wives first, and remains himself behind. “And Jacob was left alone.” Sad picture of a person not walking with God! Rescued from the pursuits of Laban, encouraged by the promise of God to be with him, and by the sight of God’s host at Mahanaim, all this had not put courage in him; and why? his heart was not with God. There was this fleshly principle, and God must take the matter into His own hands. If He rescues Jacob from Esau, He must have to do with Jacob Himself.

Jacob had vowed, “If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father’s house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God.” And now he says, “O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the Lord which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal

well with thee: I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast showed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands. Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children. And thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude." Still, he does not know how to trust God.

You see a person loving the Lord, valuing His promises, a saint of God, chastened continually, and yet the flesh not broken down; God must bring him to the point of wrestling with him Himself. See Peter. The Lord could say to Peter, "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven;" again, "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you;" and again (when washing Peter's feet), "Ye are clean, but not all, for He knew who should betray Him; therefore said He, Ye are not all clean." Yet, as it regards Peter, where was he? really loving the Lord, but not having the least thought of what the flesh was; and he is therefore put through sifting— "Simon, Simon, 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 strengthen thy brethren." (Luke 22:31,32) But he is sustained through the sifting— "I have prayed for thee."

Here the Lord meets Jacob alone. "There wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day"—this is not Jacob's wrestling with God in faith, as it is often said. "And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him." It is a wrestling in which all the strength of Jacob is put forth; and in the sequel, while he feels what it is to have his heart broken and his flesh withered, it can be said to him, "As a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed." He gets a blessing: God calls him "Israel." Yet God refuses to reveal His name. Is He to reveal His name as a wrestler—a position into which He has been forced, so to speak, by Jacob "Wherefore is it," He says, "that thou dost ask after My name? And he blessed him there." There is no peaceful, quiet knowledge of God's marvelous grace. He is God's strong man, through the wrestling; but God must weaken the flesh. And He will pass the soul, where the flesh is not broken, sooner or later, through this discipline.

It was a blessing to get such a name as "Israel" —most marvelous grace, and get a blessing that came to a halting saint; he halted all the days of his life; and God refused to reveal His name. Not so in the case of Abraham. "I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect," He says to Abraham. "And he left off talking with him, and God went up from Abraham." Here we find peaceful communion; and Abraham can intercede for others, instead of wrestling for himself. (Chaps. 17, 18)

After this it is we find God saying to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there; and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother." (vs. 1) Here He begins, if one may so speak, to volunteer; and He passes over what we have been considering, as if nothing had happened. 'You had to flee' (He says) 'from the face of Esau, I promised you blessing; get back to this place, and there raise an altar.'

"Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments: and let us arise and go up to Bethel:

and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and who was with me in the way which I went.” (vss. 2, 3) Rachel had carried her father’s strange gods along with her. (Chapter 31:19,30-35) Jacob remembers this now, though he had paid no attention to it before. Into what a mixed state had he got! One never knows how far we may go when we do not trust in God. But there is now the discerning of clean and unclean. That which results, after all the discipline, is the consciousness of the love and faithfulness that had followed him all the way which he went. “And they gave unto Jacob all the strange gods which were in their hand,” &c. (vss. 4, 5)

Here he is, after all the discipline, after all the trial, worshipping God, as the faithful God who had answered him in the day of his distress, and had been with him in the way he had gone. The moment God had put him under the discipline, He said, “I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest.” And Jacob says, ‘He has been with me; yes, He is the God that, while we have failed in the way, has been with us all the way.’

“And God appeared unto Jacob again, when he came out of Padan-aram, and blessed him. And God said unto him, Thy name is Jacob: thy name shall not be called any more Jacob, but Israel shall be thy name: and He called his name Israel.” (vss. 9, 10) This is a great while after the wrestling. Jacob has got rid of all his strange gods, and he is meeting God where God can reveal Himself, and give him the new name of “Israel.” He does it now as if He had never done it before. ‘I know nothing,’ He says, of the supplanter, ‘you are now strong with God.’

“And God said unto him, I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins; and the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to thee I will give it, and to thy seed after thee will I give the land. And God went up from him in the place where He talked with him.” (vss. 11-13) That is just what He had done with Abraham. He is not making him halt, not wrestling with him now. Nor does he hide His name now. That is the name,’ He says, ‘in which I can reveal myself in all peaceful confidence.’ And He goes up from him Jacob has his “Beth-el.” God had spoken to him from the top of the ladder, but now He comes down. “And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where He talked with him, even a pillar of stone: and he poured a drink-offering thereon. And Jacob called the name of the place where God spake with him, Beth-el.” (vss. 14, 15) It is not a half-fearing, half-worshipping, “How dreadful is this place.” He had been a “supplanter;” his name, as a man, was “Jacob;” but God will not give it him. “Israel” is God’s name for him. He had taken advantage of his brother Esau, a rash, unbelieving man—not at all a lovely act; but the history gives the reason; he valued his father’s blessing (prophetic blessing), yet he listened to his mother’s advice; he hearkened to her, and went and feigned to be Esau. Now that was not trusting God. He who made Isaac bless him, and say, “I have blessed him, yea, and he shall be blessed;” He who made Jacob bless the sons of Joseph, “crossing his hands” (chap. 48), was perfectly able to accomplish that which He had spoken. He has revealed Himself as “God Almighty,” and Jacob is able to name the place “the house of God.”

What results to us in instruction from all this is, that the Lord is dealing with us—not merely giving blessing in the land of Canaan, nor yet the joy consequent on that (that which he did to Abraham when separated from Lot), there is another thing, as it regards the way, our individual conduct, and individual character; namely, that thus the Lord deals with us, to chasten and break down the flesh, in order that He may manifest Himself in peaceful communion. When we are able to look at,

and weigh things, as that we have had to do with God about them, in the knowledge that He was dealing with us in His faithful love, it is done in settled peace; but every idol is put away. We may, like Peter, have real love for the Lord, and be sincere; or, like Jacob, really value the promises; but where the flesh is not judged, there must be this breaking of it down. Sometimes it may be at the very starting, sometimes on a death-bed, sometimes through circumstances in the way; but, sooner or later, the flesh must be judged, whether it is judged quietly or judged painfully. In Jacob we see confidence in the flesh, a leaning on the flesh for the attainment of God's promises, and, in the way, all sorts of discipline, though there is blessing at the end. There may be a trusting the faithfulness of God about the promises—faith in the promises, joy in the promises, and yet, in place of leaning upon the power of God for their accomplishment, a use of unholy means which entail chastisement and sorrow: “Be not deceived,” says the apostle; “God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption.” (Gal. 6:7, 8)

“I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest.” Jacob had this at the very outset; he had faith as to the end, and yet he could not count on God for the way. God's sufficiency and the good-for-nothingness of the flesh must be learned peacefully, if walking with God; painfully, if we were walking our twenty-one years in a carnal way. Jacob could not be at Beth-el in peace, until he had learned this lesson of “no confidence in the flesh.” And he never had forced home upon his conscience until then the fact of his having false gods in his company (not that he loved idols). But there we see most peaceful, most happy self-judgment before God. The means God uses are very various; but the thing must be done. He cannot be at Beth-el with His child, until He has emptied him of confidence in the flesh.

The Lord give us to trust Him, not only for the end, but also for the way.

Thine Eye, Is It Single? A Word on Serving

“If therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.” –Matt. 6:22.

If a child has been habitually heedless of its father, and taken no pains to get acquainted with his thoughts and wishes, one can readily foresee that that child, in presence of a difficulty, would be in no position to understand what would please its father. There are things God leaves in generalities for the testing of individual condition of soul. Suppose, instead of the child just referred to, the question to be one of a wife in relation to her husband; would not a wife, with the feelings and mind of a wife, be able, in all probability, without a moment's hesitancy, to know what her husband would desire, and that even though he had never expressed—a will on the subject Now you cannot escape this testing, and God, moreover, will not let His children escape it. “If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.”

As for an easy and comfortable way of knowing God's will, as one might have a receipt, for this or that, there is no such thing, of knowing it, I mean, without reference to our own state of soul.

Again: we are frequently of vastly too great importance in our own eyes, and deceive ourselves in supposing that there is a “will of God” at all, in such or such a case. He may have nothing to say to us about it. The evil is in our having set ourselves at work. God's will may be that we should quietly take a less prominent place.

Again: we are searching at times after “the will of God,” desiring to know how to act in circumstances when that we should not be found in them at all is His only will; and then, were conscience in exercise, its first effect would be to make us get out of them. Our own will has placed us there, and yet we would enjoy the comfort of having God's guidance in a self-chosen path. This is a very common case.

We may rest assured, that if near enough to God, we shall not be at a loss to know His will.

In a long and active life it may happen that God, in His love, does not always just at the moment show us His will, and this in order to make us realize our dependence when there is the disposition to do our own will. Nevertheless, “if thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.” Hence it is certain, when the whole body is not full of light, the eye is not single. You will say, “A poor consolation that.” I reply, “A rich one to those whose sole desire it is to have the eye single, and to walk with God” not, so to speak, to avoid the trouble of learning His will in an objective way, but whose desire it is to walk with God. “If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him” (John 11:9,10) Still the same principle: “He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” (John 8:12) We cannot get from under this moral law of Christianity. “For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col. 1:9,10). The connection of these things, the one with the other, is of

immense importance to the soul: we must know the Lord intimately, in order to “walk worthy” of Him; and so shall we grow in the knowledge of His will, “And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; that ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ” (Phil. 1:9,10). Finally, it is written, “He that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man” (1 Cor. 2:15).

It is, then, the “will of God,” a blessed will, that we should not be able to discern His will otherwise than according to our own spiritual state. In general, when we suppose we are judging as to circumstances, God is judging our condition. That which we have to do, is to keep near Him. He would not be good to us, were He to permit us to find out His will otherwise. It might be convenient, in the way of having a director of consciences, but we should thus be exempted from the discovery and correction of our moral condition. So that if we are seeking to know the “will of God,” apart from that, we are seeking wrongly. And this is of daily occurrence.

One Christian is in doubt, in perplexity; to another, more spiritual than he, the thing is clear as the day, he is astonished—where can there be any difficulty? there is none to him, and it ends in the discovery, that the difficulty lies altogether in the condition of soul of the former.

As to circumstances, I believe that a person may be led by them. Scripture has settled that. But this is what it calls being “held in by bit and bridle.” (Psa. 32:9) “I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go I will guide thee with mine eye,” such is the promise to, such the privilege of, him who has faith. Near enough to God, to comprehend through one look of His, God, who is faithful, has promised to direct him thus. He warns us against being “as the horse or the mule,” which have no understanding of the will, the thoughts, the desires of their master. They must be “held in by bit and bridle.” Without a doubt, even that is better than stumbling, or falling, or jostling against Him who has us in charge, but it is a sorry condition to be in. And there we see what it is to be directed by circumstances. It is merciful on the part of God, to do it; but it is very sad on ours to require it.

Here, however, we need to distinguish between forming a judgment as to what it is right for us to do in certain circumstances, and our being directed by them. He who allows himself to be directed by them is ever acting blindly as to the “will of God.” There is absolutely nothing of that which is moral in it—that which influences is from without. But it is very possible that I may have no judgment arrived at beforehand as to what I should do; I know not what circumstances may transpire, and consequently my mind is not made up. Yet so soon as the circumstances are there, I judge, with a full and divine conviction, what is the path of the “will of God,” and of the intent and power of the Spirit. This requires spirituality. It is not a being guided by circumstances, but being guided by God in circumstances, through being near enough to Him to judge at once what is right to be done when the circumstances are there.

With regard to impressions, God may suggest them, and as to fact, it is certain that He does suggest a thing to the mind; but then the suitability of that which is so suggested, and its moral character, will be as clear as the sun at noonday. When we are in prayer, God may free our hearts from certain influences, the which being removed, other and spiritual influences are allowed to have all their own place in the soul; or He makes us feel the importance of a duty which, it may be, has been entirely lost, sight of through the pre-occupation caused by some engrossing object.

This may occur between two individuals.

A person may not have sufficient spiritual discernment to find out what is right, whilst he may assent to the truth at once, when it is pointed out to him by another. Everybody is not an engineer, but a simple wagoner knows a good road when once it is made. Thus those impressions which are from God do not always remain simply impressions. But they are usually clear when of God. I have no doubt, however, that He often makes them on our minds when we are walking with Him and listening to His voice.

When you speak of obstacles raised by Satan; it is not said that God Himself has not permitted these obstacles to a right desire, obstacles occasioned through the abounding evil of circumstances around us.

A person acting without the knowledge of God's mind, is a case that ought to have no existence. The only rule that could be given is, never to act when we do not know the will of the Lord. Acting in ignorance of it we are at the mercy of circumstances; God making all turn, nevertheless, to the good of His children. But why act when we do not know God's will, is there at all times such an exceedingly pressing necessity for action? If I do a thing with the full certainty that I am doing the will of God, it is clear that an obstacle then is nothing more than a test of my faith, and ought not to stop me. We get stopped, perhaps, through lack of faith; because, if not walking sufficiently near God, in the sense of our own nothingness, we shall lack faith to accomplish that which we have faith enough to discern.

When we are doing our own will, or are careless as to our walk, God, in His mercy, may warn us through an obstacle, which arrests us if we give heed to it, while "the simple pass on and are punished." (Prov. 27:12) Where there is a good deal of activity and occupation in the work, God may allow Satan to raise up obstacles, in order that we may be kept in dependence on the Lord; but He never allows Satan to act otherwise than on the flesh. If we leave the door open, if we get away from God, Satan may harm us; otherwise it is but a trial of faith, to warn us against some danger or snare -something which would have the tendency to exalt us in our own eyes. It is a means for our correction. That is to say, God allows Satan to afflict the spirit and make the flesh suffer outwardly, that the inner man may be preserved from evil. If it is something else than this, then it is probably our "buts" and our "ifs" that are stopping us, or the results of our carelessness which has given an open door to, Satan to trouble with doubts and seeming difficulties between God and ourselves, through our not seeing more clearly. "He that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not." (1 John 5:18) In a word, the question is wholly moral.

If a question presents itself, which on first looking at we are unable to determine, we shall very often find that there would be no such question at all, were our position not a false one, had we been antecedently in a good state of soul, had a genuine spirituality kept and preserved is. All we have to do in such a case is, to humble ourselves about the whole matter. Then let us examine if Scripture does not furnish us with some principle suited for our direction; and there, it is evident, spirituality is the essential thing is all.

Do that which Jesus would have done in such or such a circumstance' has been given as a rule—an excellent one where and when it is applicable. But are we often in the circumstances in

which the Lord would have been found? It is frequently useful to ask oneself, Whence have I such a wish? or the thought of doing this or that? I have found that that in itself settles more than half the perplexing cases in which Christians find themselves involved. Two-thirds of the remainder result from our rashness or from former sins: If a thought is from God, and not of the flesh, we have only to look to God as to the manner and means of putting it in practice, and we shall soon get guidance.

There are cases where one has need of being guided not altogether apart from motives, as, for instance, where I hesitate as to a visit, or the like. A life of more fervent charity, or charity in more intelligent exercise, or called out in drawing near God, will make plain the motives of charity on the one hand or the other; and we may frequently discover that ours was only egotism.

Do you say, But what if the question be one neither of charity nor of obedience? Then I answer, You owe me a reason for acting; for if it is only your own will, you cannot make the wisdom of God bend to your will. Here again we have the source of a numerous class of difficulties which God will never solve.

In such cases He will teach us, by His grace, obedience, and make us see how much time we have lost through our own activity. "The meek will He guide in judgment, the meek will He teach His way."

Let us remember that the wisdom of God leads us in the path of the will of God. If our own wills are at work, God cannot accommodate Himself to that. This is the essential thing to discover. It is the secret of the life of Christ. I know not of any other principle on which God could act, though He pardons and makes all turn to our good.

He guides the new man which has no other will than Christ, He mortifies the old, and in this way purges us that we may bear fruit.

"Lo, I come to do Thy will, O my God; I delight to do it."

It is the place of a door-keeper to wait at the door, but in doing that he is doing his master's will.

Rest assured that God does more in us than we for Him; and what we do is only for Him, just in so far as it is Himself that works it in us.

Christ's Cross, and God's Due Time

In the last verse of this chapter we have, in fact, the summing up of the great principles and ways of God's dealings with man— "grace reigning through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord."

What the apostle has been speaking of as to God's dealings, dispensational and personal, is, all is grace. "When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." (vs. 6) "God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (vs. 8) It is grace that did everything. (vss. 15-21) "By one man's disobedience many were made sinners," and they may have gone on sinning and setting aside the authority of God; but "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." And, in the sum of the whole matter, grace reigns.

That which gave the apostle so much confidence in this was, that it was consequent upon the discussion of the whole condition of MAN, as looked at in every way and in every shape. The blessed result was not something that came in, and the discussion after; but, after the discussion of the whole condition of man (that having been gone through), GOD takes His own place, and manifests what He will be, and is, towards the sinner, in Jesus Christ. Now, that is, properly speaking, the gospel. The gospel is not what man is, or what God requires from man, but what God is, after He has thoroughly revealed what man is. When received in simplicity it leaves no possible question in the mind. It is the revelation of God, made after He has estimated all our need. The gospel, we repeat, is the revelation of what God when what man is has been fully revealed. "When we were yet without strength, IN DUE TIME Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But GOD commendeth HIS love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, CHRIST DIED FOR US."

Peace of soul is constantly hindered through our not supposing that God has taken full cognizance of what we are. The gospel begins consequent upon His having made a full estimate. He knew from the beginning what man was, and would be; but after, in His history, He had brought out and demonstrated in ways and conduct what man was under all the possible circumstances in which he could be placed—when He had demonstrated him to be entirely lost, and that He could not trust him in any way or in any measure, He says, 'I cannot trust in you, you must trust in Me.' Hence the reason there is often a long and painful conflict, because of our not being brought down in conscience to the point where the gospel begins. A man may acknowledge himself to be ungodly, but then he hopes to cease to be ungodly; and God, perhaps, lets him struggle on thus for some time, until in his own soul he is brought to the place where the gospel begins. It is not that the gospel is not simple, but that in conscience we are not in the condition where the gospel sees us. The work must be in the conscience. We read in Matthew 13 of a man hearing the Word, and anon with joy "receiving it," yet of his not having "root in himself." There is no work evidently in the conscience; it is not that he is insincere, but he has never been brought in guilty before God; "for," it is added, "when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the Word, by-and-by he is

offended" (whereas, if he knew that his own soul was lost without Christ, surely he would say with the disciples, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life!" John 6:68). It is a great deal harder to believe that we are "without strength," than that we are "ungodly." Many a soul believes the one that has not as yet been brought to believe the other. God has given us His history of the world from Adam to Christ. There was a "due time" for the death of Christ (a "due time" that is in the history of the world). So is there the "due time" of the individual heart; not that the same feelings pass through the minds of all, that each must be brought to the result given us by the history of man previously to the death of Christ.

It is true many a person admits himself to be ungodly that has not been brought to feel the full meaning of the word. It is wonderful how our moral distance from God has rendered us incapable of judging of this. If a man say that God is holy, and that he is a sinner, as judged of by his natural conscience, yet not admit that he is shut out from the presence of God, but reply, "Oh, I hope not!" he has not the power of apprehending His presence. On the one side, God is "of purer eyes than to behold iniquity;" on the other, he is a sinner; but he has no sort of conscience or consciousness that he is in the presence of God. There is not a single individual that would not put off being there. Our consciences can never naturally bear it the whole secret is, that we have never been in the presence of God. (In one sense we are always in His presence, but I speak now of being brought near in conscience) A man may be living absolutely without God, and yet be accounted a very good man after all. If he hurts his fellow-man it is another affair. In judging of right and wrong in the world, God is always shut out. There is no surer proof of the way man has cast off God, than his judgment of right and wrong; he calls "wrong" that which injures man, but the divine presence and claims are shut out. It all shows this first great truth, that men are "without God."

But there is another truth stated here—they are also "without strength." When a man is really brought to himself, it is always a question of present standing. An ungodly man will think (it is the natural thought) of meeting God sometime, of what He will be in the day of judgment. But is His presence revealed to the heart, is it His presence now that occupies it? Whilst there is merely the thought of going to God, there is another question man thinks about, how he can make up with God. He thinks the time is before him in which he can make his peace with God, though this is impossible: Jesus Christ alone could make peace. (Col. 1:20) He is either unconscious of the state he is in, or is looking to something by which he hopes, at a future day, he may be able to stand before God. He has no real thought of God but as a Judge. Now hoping for mercy so, is no more than saying (and many mean nothing but this), that God is not of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, that He can let a little pass.

As to the first point, the state of the Gentiles was thorough ungodliness. (Rom. 1) The apostle, after looking at man in every way (proud as man is of himself), brings all in guilty. But men have a natural conscience, and they are afraid to do in the light what they do in the dark. When in the outward darkness of Satan and ungodliness they "work all manner of uncleanness with greediness" (Eph. 4:17-19), worshipping stocks and stones. Christianity makes men ashamed to do in the light what they did before in the dark (the profession of it, I mean; in that sense, it is borrowed light). Being in this condition, his own lusts his springs of action—the slave of Satan and of his own lusts, gratifying his mere natural wicked inclinations, that was a clear ease. It did not become a holy God. It was plainly ungodliness.

But besides this, there was another thing. God singled out a nation, to which He showed great kindness, and gave (as His people) a rule. And then the question was, whether there was strength in man to walk by this rule. He spake the ten commandments with His own voice on mount Sinai, and added, "Cursed is the man that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them." After all the will of man was that which wrought in his heart, and he was a breaker of this law.

But this went much further. I may have my mind open to see and estimate the spirituality of the law, and not be merely a carnal Jew—where does that bring me? Into the consciousness, not merely that I have failed, and broken the law without, but of a principle within—a "law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members." (Rom. 7:23) If I am put under a law, the better that law the worse my case. It may be said, Why then did God give the law? It "was added," we are told, "because of transgressions, till the Seed should come, to whom the promise was made." (Gal. 3:19) To what end? "The law entered (perfect as it was) that the offense might abound." What could the law enter for, to man, already a sinner, and having a law in his members? The law entered that the offense might abound, that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful." (Rom. 7:13) This was the way God took to convince man that he was "without strength." And in that sense it was mercy. What is more difficult than to convince man of this. The judgment right and the affections right, still there was this law in his members, and the law, while it discovered and brought out this, imparting no strength, added to the character of the sin, for there was another thing, it made every act which was the result of this evil of our nature "transgression"—a thing done in despite of His authority. "Sin by the commandment became exceeding sinful." (Rom. 7:7) Now clearly, a thing that makes sin "exceeding sinful," is not the way to make me (a sinner) have any righteousness before God!

What is man without the law? what with? Man without the law is out of the presence of God. With, he has failed in responsibility, and is a breaker of the law. And when Jesus came, the witness of the goodness of God, he rejected Him. (John 15:24,25) Man has been tried in every way, and found utterly wanting. Wherefore? Was God ignorant of his condition? No; it was for the discovery of it to himself. God is now bringing home to his conscience that which He knew from the beginning. (Rom. 3:19)

A word here as to the triple form the law took. First, there was the perfect standard of what man ought to be; secondly, the prohibition of what man was disposed to; a positive standard of what God required, and the prohibition of that to which man was inclined; and as a third thing, an adjunct of certain ordinances and ceremonies "imposed until the time of reformation." (Heb. 9:9,10) What did God do all this for? On the one hand, to demonstrate that man was not righteous; and on the other, to point out one, who (holy and righteous) should suffer "the just for the unjust."

What did man? He took, to make out a righteousness for himself before God, the thing God had sent in to demonstrate him a sinner; and then, in order to fill up the gap in his own heart, sought to eke out his righteousness through these ceremonies, types and prefigurings of Jesus, the substitute for the sinner.

The moment there is spiritual understanding, when grace is not understood, the only effect is to make the soul miserable—it finds no strength. The more it understands the law to be what it

should be, the more it feels justly condemned, and incapable of fulfilling it, or of delivering itself from its condition. "O wretched man that I am" is its cry, and "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24)

All that is merely the question, "What is man?" Man is ungodly and without strength; and his history is summed up in the death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well now, have we been brought to the acknowledgment of the result of this history? Had we simplicity to receive by faith what God shows us man to be, we should have no thought of his being under a state of probation. For four thousand years man was under a state of probation, and as the result of the trial, no good is expected from the bad tree. The gospel is come on the ground of man's being no longer under probation of God. He has given up looking for fruit. "A sower went forth to sow," (Matt. 13). The natural thing was for Jesus to seek fruit, but there was none there; all had become verjuice.

Man having been put to the test, now God comes in.

It is quite evident that, unless it be for everlasting condemnation, we must give up the thought of appearing before God as a Judge. (Rom. 3:19,20) "Enter not into judgment with thy servant; for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified." The more I know of myself, the more I know that. The love of Christ only puts me into a darker judgment of myself. Is God to pass by judgment, as if there was no difference between good and evil? Impossible! There is just the beginning of wisdom. We cannot stand before God; what is to be done? A man must, in that sense, have done with himself. I cannot trust God in anything I ever have been, or can be; God cannot trust in me. Now, can I trust in God? What God is, was before sin. If I begin to reason, I am under law; I cannot reason about God being grace to me. If I could reckon on it, it would not be grace.

Where shall I find the revelation and testimony of what God is? In Christ.

What was this blessed witness for God here? Never anything but grace. With the Pharisees He showed that their righteousness was only the adding of the sin of hypocrisy to their other sins. But whenever a man was before Him without any pretense to righteousness, let him be the vilest of the human race—a thief, an adulteress, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, whatever else—He was grace, and nothing but grace. I want to know what the God with whom I have to do as a sinner is. And what is He Grace. Perhaps I say, "If I go to Him, I shall find Him gracious." But that is not all the testimony. Jesus came to us. "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." (1 John 4:9,10) In the coming of the Son of God I have the positive certainty of what God is to me (assuming that I believe Him to be the Son of God), I have the perfect certainty of His love. "When we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." From His mouth (if I am to take His testimony) I shall never hear anything but, "Thy sins are forgiven thee; go in peace." If I am in the truth of my sins, I shall find Christ in the truth of His grace.

God has right to be sovereign, and there is the reign of grace. (vs. 21) But God is righteous, and therefore grace is to "reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord." In the grace of God reigning, He has given His Son to be the proof of His love; but then, God is righteous, and could not introduce the sinner in his sins into His presence, and therefore He gave

His Son to bear the sins. God's righteousness is displayed in all its truth and power. The Lord Jesus died for the ungodly. He was obedient at all costs; He bore everything, and went down into the dust of death—man's hatred, God's desertion, and Satan's power. We find Him there at the cost of everything. Everything that was against us was done away. By one man's obedience many are made righteous. (Phil. 2:8)

God's righteous wrath against sin has been exhibited. Where do I learn it? In the cross of Christ. Was it in holily sparing His Son? No. I see the wrath of God against my sin executed in that cross. The judgment of God against sin, the thing I dreaded, is now my salvation. "Out of the eater has come forth meat, and out of the strong sweetness." The head of Goliath, so to speak, has been taken off with his own sword. The Lord Jesus Christ has risen again as having borne the judgment. But more, He stands in living righteousness before God. Righteousness is there forever under the eye of God.

The blood of Christ shed in death—death as the wages of sin—is ever under the eye of God. I do not say that it is ever under my eye, but it is under God's eye; He is the Judge. Never shall we feel about it as we ought; but sure I am He feels about it as He ought; He sees the blood. "When I see the blood, I will pass over." The blood is of infinite value with God. But there is another thing; He Himself is there, "Jesus Christ the Righteous;" He who has obeyed, who has accomplished all, is there. There may be chastisement from the Father (Heb. and a great deal of painful discipline for our good; but righteousness is ever there, the righteous one, in the presence of God for us.

The Holy Ghost was to convince the world of righteousness, because Jesus had gone to the Father. (John 16:7,10) Righteousness is to be found in the presence of God, and it is He who has borne my sins.

And let us remember that this cannot be a question of hope. My soul may be looking to Jesus, and hoping that He will speak a word of peace; but I do not hope that Christ will die for me, I do not hope that Christ will rise again for me, and accomplish this righteousness. I believe. It is a simple question of the value of the blood, and person, and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As to the Christian life. The first thing is to begin our conduct with God. Do not let us talk about what we shall be. If we come to God with our present in our hand, the first question is, What are you? Man is a sinner, and no present in the hand of a sinner is accepted.

Where there is really truth in the heart, the conscience takes notice of its present condition, and will never dream of putting off. It is, I have seen thee; what shall I do? Job was a godly man, but a reasoner; yet the moment he sees God he says, "I have heard of thee with the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee: wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." He sees God, and that ends the whole question.

There is another point. It is not merely the efficacy of the work as regards the past, so that I stand before God without fault; but I am there in Christ. I bless God for many means in helping me on in my walk; but as for my standing with God, were there anything whatever needed, it would be saying, I was not already perfect in Christ. Faith says, Christ has presented me in the presence of God, according to the mind of God, and I have nothing to seek. This is what the apostle means by "holding the Head." (Col. 2:19)

Another thing flows from this. As grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life in the work and person of our Lord Jesus Christ, realizing my position by virtue of being united to Him, the life in which I am one with Christ will show itself down here in my living to Christ. The principle of the Christian's position is just this. You have died with Christ; and, to be living as those who are "alive from the dead," you cannot have a single principle in common with the world. I am one with Christ (if I am a believer), and consequently, as Christ before God, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me." (Gal. 2:20) So again, "Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal body." (2 Cor. 4:10) It is not the demand of a certain amount of human righteousness, or the removal of certain evils, that hurt the conscience, and offend society. It is the living display of what Christ is before men. We should never be content when we fail to display Christ before men. As Christ is righteousness for me before God, so is He the example and standard of righteousness before men; as Christ is for me before God, so ought I to be for Christ before men. This is the way for the Christian to judge of right or wrong. We may be humbled because of failure, but we must not lower the standard.

We Have Seen the Lord

THERE is a word in the Scriptures which says, “God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord.” I would say to you, Dwell on, rest on, the acceptance of “that finished work,” and then go on to learn more and more of Him who has done the work for you.

If you look at Romans 8, and other parts of Scripture, what do you find? That you are made “sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty.” Have you ever dwelt in delight on that word— “sons of God”?—not sons of men, creatures that might perish, but “sons” of the holy, eternal, unchangeable God! It is something too great for the heart of man to conceive. “Heirs of God,” “co-heirs with Christ!” If these truths had full sway on our hearts, what would become of us? How the world would be as an idle nothing! We wait the confirmation of our pretensions before men; but we should walk in the consciousness of being in possession of that which is unfading, amidst everything that is fading, of knowing the truth when everything around is but a lie.

This chapter does not tell us of the work of the Lord Jesus, excepting what is implied by His showing His disciples His hands and His side. (vs. 20) But there is a great deal about the Lord in it, and about the affections of others being drawn out towards Him.

In looking forward to the appearing of the “morning without clouds,” what is the brightest part of it to you? Is it not the thought of being the everlasting companions of the Lamb—the following Him whithersoever He goeth?

Let me ask you to turn with me to John 16:16: “A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father.” It is very difficult to understand this (were the disciples’ thoughts), we cannot tell what He saith— “A little while, and ye shall not see Me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see Me, because I go to the Father.” The Lord then speaks of that which depended on His going to the Father. (See vss. 20-24)

I would now ask you to turn to a verse in John 14 “I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.” (vs. 18) The Lord was going to pass out of the world altogether, but at that period—when “the world seeth Me no more,” He says, “ye see Me.” We should pass on into everlasting companionship with Jesus. “He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me: and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him.” (vs. 21) I need not say that this is spoken as true to us now through the Spirit. “Judas saith unto Him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world? Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love Me, he will keep My words, and My Father will love him; and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him” (vss. 22, 23) The heart is never to be satisfied—there is a void in it that cannot be filled up—by anything, except, the presence of Jesus.

Look at the Lord’s mysterious manifestations of Himself to His church during the forty days previous to His ascension; very varied were they, and intended, I believe, to be descriptive of the

way in which, during His absence, He would manifest Himself according to the varied need of His people. Mary was in one condition, (vs. 14) the disciples with the closed doors in another, Thomas in a third; but in each condition the Lord met and satisfied them with His presence.

There is such a thing, beloved, as knowing the Lord so with us as to be able to realize that word, "Your joy no man taketh from you."

The Lord had been taken from these disciples. Mary weeps at His grave. The two are sad in going to Emmaus. All their thoughts are about this—the Lord is gone. They had hung their hearts and fortunes on Him; they had been attracted by His grace; they owned Him to be the Son of God: whatever they looked for and expected, they expected with Him. They were bankrupt, broken-hearted, dispirited. Their Lord, who was their joy, their hope, their everything, was gone! The great day of solemnities at Jerusalem passed over the grave of Jesus. What a picture of religion without life! "Ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice."

The "little while" over, their "sorrow is turned into joy." He comes back to be their everlasting companion. If you could throw yourself into the disciples' circumstances of sorrow at the loss of their Lord, and then of their proportionate joy at His return, you would learn what should be your uninterrupted known joy in having Him to be your everlasting companion. You may have trial and adversity of every description, but still the word is, "I will not leave you comfortless, I will come to you."

Just consider, besides that cherished faith which you have in the indwelling of the Spirit in you individually, there is another truth equally important; namely, that the Holy Spirit dwells in the midst of you as gathered according to that word, "Where two or three are gathered in My name, there am I in the midst of them." When so gathered, we are called on to expect the Lord in our midst. If we wanted a comment on such a passage, I would say, We find it here. What was it that brought the disciples together? Not the sense of their common bankruptcy, but their common love to Jesus. They had lost Him whom they loved, and they came to speak about Him Whether it was in the expectation of meeting Him as being really risen or not, still it was the name of Jesus which brought them there.

But there is such a thing as grieving the Spirit.

If it be true that the Lord dwells in the midst of us, and if we come together in the expectation of His presence, we should be able to say when we part, through the sense of His presence, either in joy or in searching power, "We have seen the Lord."

What was Mary waiting for In the midst of much ignorance and obscurity, her Lord was her object. She would rather have Him dead, than not have Him at all. She wept at His grave, though not questioning about the forgiveness of her sins. If you do not know the realized presence of the Lord, weep for that—that your souls are not knowing abiding fellowship with Jesus. This weeping has nothing to do as to the forgiveness of sins. Do you know the presence of the Lord with you in your assemblies? Do you know it as you walk together two by two? Do you know it, above all, in secret? Be it your unbelief, your haughtiness of spirit, or aught else, that is hindering, this is the proper reason for pouring out your soul in weeping to the Lord. You are washed, you are cleansed, you are justified, but if you have not that which is proper to a pardoned sinner—the known companionship of Jesus—weep for that!

If you meet together without being able to say afterward, to those who are at the door or absent (like Thomas), “we have seen the Lord”—weep for that! And it should be equally so in our private intercourse, or when alone—the Spirit revealing Christ to us, opening Him to the delight of our hearts, enabling us to say, “We have seen the Lord.” May we so walk that the promise of the abode of the Father and His Son Jesus Christ may be realized by us daily.

“Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him.” (John 14:23)

Balaam Hired of Balak and Used of God

It is a wonderful thing to see the way in which, through the overruling power of God, the efforts of Satan against the people of God only bring them out the more distinctly in their own place of blessing.

We find in these chapters the connection of the name of God with the power of Satan. Some of the instruments which he uses may be, and some of them may not be, conscious that it is Satan's power which actuates them. Nothing could be greater confusion than that which here passes between Balaam and Balak.

Balaam, we know, was a thoroughly wicked man. (See Rev. 2:14; 2 Peter 2:15,16; Jude 11) Nothing could exceed the wickedness and perverseness of his ways. And yet he is called a prophet, as it is said, "who loved the wages of unrighteousness, but was rebuked for his iniquity: the dumb ass, speaking with man's voice, forbade the madness of the prophet." We know that he was acquainted with, and used, enchantments (chap. 24:1); and yet when he comes to Balak he says, "Lo, I am come unto thee: have I now any power at all to say any thing? the word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak." (Chapter 22:38) Balak was looking for the power of evil against the children of Israel, God's people, and yet looking for it from God. (Chapter 23:27) There was a sort of looking to the power and intervention of God, although God was not known, and thus all was confusion.

And so in the world, even where Satan is working, and where in those who are intelligent in evil he is looked to as working, there is often a certain vague looking to God. Thus there is complete confusion -man's will being Satan's will, and yet with a certain owning of God.

Chapter 22:1-6. We see the enmity of the world against the people of God brought out, and especially against the power of the people of God. God's power was with His people, and this drew out the enmity of Satan. When the Son of God came into the world, the whole energy of Satan's power and enmity was directed against Him; so afterward against the apostles, those who had "turned the world upside down." (Acts 17:6) But God's power was with and for His people. See the song of Moses (Ex. 15:14-16)—God had redeemed his people with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm from the power and bondage of Satan, and had brought them to himself. (Ex. 19:4) When this is the case, Satan seeks to force others into an open opposition to the people of God. Their presence becomes intolerable to their enemies. But the effect of it all is to bring out God's people as being under His eye and care. The very wish that God should curse Israel only brought out the more God's distinct blessing upon them: "And he" (Balaam) "took up his parable, and said, Balak the king of Moab hath brought me from Aram, out of the mountains of the east, saying, Come, curse me Jacob, and come, defy Israel. How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed? or how shall I defy, whom the Lord hath not defied? For from the top of the rocks I see Him, and from the hills I behold Him: lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations." (Chapter 23:7-9) Here we find the effect of Satan's opposition was to bring out into the clearest manifestation that they were not of the world.

So long as Israel were living in Egypt there was nothing at all that drew out the thoughts and feelings of Balak and Balaam against them, or that made them intolerable to the world; but the chief point of this testimony to their blessing is, that they were a peculiar people, separated from all other people unto God, according to that word, "The Lord hath avouched thee this day to be His peculiar people." (Deut. 26:18)

Verse 11 and onward. Balaam at the suggestion of Balak seeks to curse Israel from "another place." He tells Balak, "Stand here by thy burnt-offering, while I go and meet yonder." He does not seem to know whom he was going to meet. It is all the most thorough and perfect confusion. He says, "While I go and meet yonder." But there the Lord meets him, and puts a word in his mouth, proving the firmness of God's purpose concerning His people. "God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent: hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good? Behold, I have received commandment to bless." Balaam would gladly have altered this testimony of God, but he says, "He hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it."

Then comes the testimony to the completeness of God's justification of His people: "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath He seen perverseness in Israel." This is not a mere abstract statement of truth. Israel had acted so failingly and unbelievably during their wilderness journey as to bring out from Moses, the meekest man upon the face of the earth, the expression, "Ye have been rebellious against the Lord from the day that I knew you." (Deut. 9:24) The result of the judgment of the man of God about them, after forty years' experience, was that they were a stiff-necked and rebellious people; but the judgment of God in reference to their justification was altogether opposite to his judgment of the moral condition of the people.

It is most important, in applying this to ourselves, to draw the distinction clearly between these two things—the judgment of the Spirit of God within us, as to the evil of the flesh, and the testimony of the Spirit, as to our being before Him in Christ. (2 Cor. 5:17) God sees all who have received pardon through faith in the blood of Christ (Rom. 3:25), "justified from all things" (Acts 13:38,39), "perfected forever" (Heb. 10:14), "meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col. 1:12), yea, more, as to His purpose in Christ, He sees them already glorified. (Rom. 8:30) Now this could not be true of all who are "the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:26), if God at any time imputed sin to them. (Rom. 4:8) "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1); and "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9) He likewise says He will remember His people's sins no more (Heb. 10:17); and "whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for His seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." (1 John 3:9)

We often find the soul forming a righteous judgment about itself, and forgetting that the ground on which it stands before God, the resting-place of faith, is what He has wrought for us in the Lord Jesus. The Spirit of God judges sin in me by virtue of its character as seen in the light of the holiness of God, but He makes me know that I am not to be judged for it, because Christ has borne the judgment for me. It is no question of examining the details of either good or evil that we find in ourselves; it is altogether a question of the efficacy and value of Christ's work, and of His acceptance. We either stand under the broad condemnation of God, sinners dead in trespasses

and sins, or are “accepted in the Beloved.” Although it is most important that we should judge ourselves, as it is said, “If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged,” (1 Cor. 11:31,32); yet this is quite a distinct thing from the judgment which God forms about us through the work of Christ. At the end of a long course of failure in the children of Israel, after their perverseness has been fully proved, God “hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath He seen perverseness in Israel.” Where the soul of a believer confounds the judgment of the Spirit within and about himself, with the judgment of God through the work of Christ for him, there can be no peace.

“The Lord his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them.” The distinguishing mark of the people of God is, that He is in them, and among them. (See 1 Cor. 14:25) The utter feebleness of the saints is shown wherever this is not the case. It is a blessed truth that God has forever saved and justified His children, but this is in order that He may “dwell among them.” (Ex. 29:45,46)

“God brought them out of Egypt; He hath as it were the strength of an unicorn”— “I dare not meddle with them” (Balaam says); “I have too much understanding of what they are to do so; they are connected with God, with His strength and power.”

“Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel: according to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought?”

According to what time? the time when Israel was faint and weak, discouraged by reason of the length of the way, and none of their enemies on the other side of Jordan conquered. Their enemies were much mightier than they (Deut. 7:1), and yet he says, “What hath God wrought! Behold, the people shall rise up as a great lion, and lift up himself as a young lion: he shall not lie down until he eat of the prey, and drink the blood of the slain.” The moment he sees them under the eye of God he says that.

“And Balak said unto Balaam, Neither curse them at all, nor bless them at all. But Balaam answered and said unto Balak, Told not I thee, saying, All that the Lord speaketh, that must I do? And Balak said unto Balaam, Come, I pray thee, I will bring thee unto another place; peradventure it will please God that thou mayest curse me them from thence. And Balak brought Balaam unto the top of Peor, that looketh toward Jeshimon.”

“And when Balaam saw that it pleased the Lord to bless Israel, he went not, as at other times, to seek for enchantments, but he set his face towards the wilderness. And Balaam lifted up his eyes, and he saw Israel abiding in his tents according to their tribes; and the Spirit of God came upon him. And he took up his parable and said,” (Chapter 24:1-9). He now begins to look at the people of God themselves, and sees Israel abiding in their tents, in their own proper loveliness. The sight of the fairness of God’s people thus is the occasion of the Spirit of God speaking as He does (vs. 5, and onwards) — “How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel! as the valleys are they spread forth.” He looks at the people of God themselves, and sees their beauty in the vision of the Almighty.

There were Israel occupied with their own foolish thoughts below, and this scene was going on above.

So is it with us, beloved friends; we are occupied with our own oftentimes foolish thoughts, the accuser is speaking against us, and yet nothing can prevail, because God works for us. I am not now speaking of God justifying us, but of much more, and that is the beauty of the order, and the never-failing source of refreshment of God's people— "All my fresh springs are in thee." God brings this out most fully through the evil desire of Balak and Balsam.

We see in these chapters man working according to Satan's will, and yet looking to the power and the intervention of God. Hence all is confusion, and it will ever be so. But the moment the children of God get into their right place before God there is no confusion, no perplexity; the path is as simple as possible.

May the Holy Spirit enable us to realize as our own that peculiar feature of the church of God, and that which is the power of their holiness, and of their comfort too— "The Lord their God is with them, and the shout of a King is among them."

Words on Service

True service begins with Christ, who is the Head; and when Christ is forgotten, then the service is defective. It has lost connection with the spring and fountain of all service, because it is from the Head that all the body, by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, increaseth. The body is of Christ, and He loves it as He loves Himself, and everyone who would serve it will best learn to do so by knowing His heart and purposes towards it. In a word, it is Christ serves, though it may be through us. We are but "joints and bands." If we are not derivative and communicative from Christ, we are useless. To be useful, my eye and heart must be on Christ, and not on the issue of my service; though, if true to Him, the end will vindicate me too, however disheartening the interval. He who judges of his service by present appearances will judge by the blossom, and not by the fruit; and, after all, the service is not for the sake of the church, but for the sake of Christ; and if He be served in the church, though the church own it not, yet Christ being served, He will own it. Now, the constant effort of Satan is to disconnect in our minds Christ from our service, and this much more than any of us perhaps have fully discovered. Whether in reading, or praying, or speaking, how seldom, if we judge ourselves, do we find that we act simply as towards Christ, and Him alone! How often may sentimentality and natural feelings affect us in our service, instead of simple love to Him!

"The work of faith." Our Lord's was this. He did not see the effects directly. If our motive for working is the effects we shall produce, this is not a work of faith. The Lord may encourage by the way, but the work is to flow from the power of communion with Himself; the love of Christ constraining, We should labor and not faint; therefore, we have need of patience. The more we understand the character of Christ's disappointments, the more holy will our labors be. We look for that which will satisfy us here, when we ought to be looking for it there. Not only ourselves, but our work is in the sight of God. The work must be carried on as if God were there, there being no allowance of anything He would not approve. It is not enough that the end we have in view be right, our way of working must be right also.

It is a miserable thing for a Christian to be acting for a testimony. God may make that which I do turn for a testimony. Whilst all the frankincense (Lev. 2:2) was burned on the altar to the Lord, those around smelled the sweet savor. But a testimony is not my object. Those who set up for a testimony will soon make a show of themselves.

Ananias and Sapphira wanted to get the character of devotedness (such as the church had) without the cost of it. Love of money really governed, modified by love of church reputation.

Are we to say, I will not act on what I do know, till thou tellest me all my course on to glory'? The Lord continually exercises His children, giving light enough to make a thing a matter of plain Christian obedience, and not showing all the happy, and blessed, and full consequences till faith acts on that: it is just a holy and excellent trial of faith. He says in principle, I am the door.' The mind may say, Where to 'The Lord answers, I am the door;' and wherever the soul finds Christ, or the will of Christ, if walking in faith, it trusts that, and the blessing follows. It soon goes in and out,

and finds pasture. Abraham went out, not knowing whither he went. It is better to trust God in doing His will than the consequences which doing His will may produce, however blessed. Nor shall he that followeth Him walk in darkness, though he may only know that in the very next footsteps Christ has gone before him.

The road from London to York is the road to York; and the road from London to Dover is the road to Dover; and they are in opposite directions. Any one that knows the country, knows that; and also knows that no measure of persuasion of my own mind that I am on the road to York will get me there, if I am tracing my way on to Dover. God may and will bear with ignorance perhaps, if in ignorance I accredit persuasion of my soul after prayer in the place of the instruction His standard, the Bible, affords: but still His standard has a voice of its own, and it is a fixed standard; and so far as I am not conformed to it, I am in the wrong, and a loser. And, moreover, every one that judges me by it can see that I am wrong and a loser, though I may not do so myself.

The Lord keep us from resting upon a religious reputation. Of all the terrible things that can befall a saint of God one of the worst is trusting in a religious reputation, especially for one engaged in ministering. How often have we seen a person laboring devotedly, diligently, blessed in his labors, gathering souls in truth to Christ, but gathering a circle round Himself. Becoming satisfied with the circle he has made, resting in the fruits produced, and not in Him who is alone the power of life, his usefulness is gone, and he himself stops short of the end.

If raging billows rise in countries around us, and the preaching of the gospel is forbidden, still all is in His hand, "who hath the key of David, who openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth." I might desire that the gospel should be preached in a certain land, and the hindrances might seem to be too many and too great, but it is my comfort to know that Christ has the key, and all the divine power of God at His disposal. None could shut out His testimony; all the powers of earth—the Pharisees, the lawyers, the chief priests, the governors, the Pilates, and the Herods could not hinder one poor sheep from hearing the voice of the Good Shepherd. So now. This is our confidence. With all the liberty with which we are blessed in this highly-favored country, I could not count upon a single year more, but for the simple promise: "I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it;" and I could go fearlessly into any country, whatever the outward circumstances, if I saw that the Lord had set before me an open door. Of course we must wait His time to have the door opened. Paul was forbidden to speak in Asia at one time, and then we find him there for three years afterward, the Lord owning his labors; so that all Asia, of which Ephesus was the capital, heard the Word of God. We must be content to lean in faith on the arm of Him who holds the key, and in our patience possess our souls; for there will always be circumstances to exercise our faith, and God will allow them to arise to prove to us that we cannot do without Him, for then it is that we find that we have no strength, and that God answers our weakness according to His own strength. If Christ has opened a door, no man, devil, or wicked spirit can shut it.

Whenever God works, the first point with Him is to secure manifestly His own glory in what He does. When unrenewed man works, or when renewed man works like an unrenewed man, God's glory is left out of the question.

The Way of the Love of Jesus

“The more perfect love is, the more entirely and without distraction will it regard its object. And this will give it, at times, a very different bearing; because its way will be determined by the condition and need of its object. Its way therefore at times may appear harsh and decisive; as when the Lord rebuked Peter (Matt. 16), as when He reproached the two disciples. (Luke 24) But this is only because love is perfect, and therefore is undistractedly considering its object. Imperfect love will show itself otherwise; more attractively at times, but far, far intrinsically, less true; because imperfect love will not in this way unmixedly consider its object, but itself. It will be set upon enjoying its object, rather more than on serving it; and this will give it a more tender and considerate bearing at times, and get for itself more credit, while perfect love has all the while forgotten itself and its enjoyments, and ordered its course and its actings in more undistracted concern and desire to have another blest and profited.

“Where do we see this perfect love but in Jesus—in God? A mother has it not, but will at times enjoy her child. But Jesus had it. He considered His disciples when He was with them, and ordered His way with them to their profit, and not to His own gratification.

“He will gratify Himself with them in that coming age, when He need no longer care for them as in a place of instruction and discipline. He will have no occasion then in the exercise of perfect love to consider only their profit, for their profit will have been brought to its accomplishment in that place of their Lord’s delight in them.”

Matthew 19:16-26

In the apparent dealings of the Lord Jesus, we sometimes find a degree of roughness (though, in spirit, always most blessed gentleness), and this especially when that which was amiable in human nature was brought before Him. Thus, when this young man came running to Him, and said, “Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?” Jesus gave the abrupt answer, “Why callest thou Me good? there is none good but one, that is, God.” Again, when Nicodemus came to Him by night, desiring to learn of Him, and professing to believe He came from God (John 3), He answered, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Again, when (Jesus having foretold His suffering many things at the hands of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes, at Jerusalem, and being killed, and raised again the third day) Peter, in the amiable feelings of human nature, said, “Be it far from Thee, Lord: this shall not be unto Thee” (Matt. 16), He immediately replied, “Get thee behind Me, Satan: thou art an offense to Me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.” That which is highly esteemed amongst men is an abomination in the sight of God. The feelings of Peter only savored of the things of men, therefore Jesus could only receive it as that which was ministered by Satan— “Get thee behind Me, Satan.”

This young man counted on some competency in himself to do that which was good. He was very amiable, very loveable (it says, in the mention made of this same incident in Mark, “Jesus beholding him, loved him”). There is much that is naturally beautiful and lovely in human nature; but there is nothing in it that tends to God, there is no will to please God in it, no righteousness in it. If such a young man had come to us, asking such a question, “What good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?” we should have considered it a most hopeful sign; but how did Jesus treat him? He just showed him that he was entirely wrong in his estimate of himself— “But if thou wilt enter into life,” he said, “keep the commandments.”

On his asking, “Which?” Jesus tests him by those which respect his conduct towards man— “Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honor thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” “Well,” says the young man, “all these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?” Jesus does not deny it, but tests him further, and says, “If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow Me.” “When the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.”

Jesus had now touched that in which his heart was concerned, and proved him to be an idolater and covetous. His riches were the treasure on which his heart was set.

If we would do that which is good, we must have a new nature. There cannot be good fruits, unless the tree is good; and if we would do that which is good, we must have a good nature. But Jesus declares, “There is none good but one, that is, God.” That word, “Do, and live,” was just brought in to prove that all are lost, to prove that none can do; and therefore it is folly to think of entering into life thus. An innocent man would not have understood the meaning of the commandments. “Thou

shalt not lust," is addressed to a sinner who has the inclination to lust. "Thou shalt not steal," is addressed to a sinner who has the inclination to steal. Jesus did not come to cultivate the good of human nature, but to SAVE the bad and the lost; therefore He tells the Pharisees, "The publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you." Matt. 21:31)

"There is none good," says Jesus of human nature (and this is His account of you, dear reader); but there is ONE good—GOD.

When summing up the sins of the Gentiles the apostle says, "God gave them over to a reprobate mind." Why? Because "they did not like to retain God in their knowledge." (Rom. 1:28) This was the root, and all the other sins were but the fruits. God does not ask for your goodness. He wants the heart, and this is what man does not like to give.

Paradise was God's being good to good people. The law was God's being righteous to bad people. But what we want is God good to bad people; and where shall we find this? In the gospel. You may object; this is favoring the wicked. So it is, "Let favor be shown to the wicked," (Isa. 26:10). Jesus came to the lost, and this was "favor shown to the wicked."

This is what Satan always tries to make us disbelieve, and what our proud hearts do not like to accredit. Satan said to Eve (in effect), "God wants to keep an apple from a man who is innocent; He is afraid you will be gods like Himself, knowing good and evil." But what has God done? He has given not simply an apple to one who is innocent, but (wondrous love!) He has given His Son for poor lost sinners. Satan always tries to tell us lies about God. Nothing could show forth the riches of His grace like this, that He has given His own Son for poor sinners. "God commendeth. His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." God is righteous and just. In what? In requiring goodness from us? No; in condemning us No! He is righteous and just in forgiving our sins-in estimating the worth of His own Son's work. (Rom. 3:24-28)

When we stand in the center of God's love, encompassed by it, we find it immeasurable.

King Uzziah Strengthened, and Strong: A Word of Admonition

Uzziah, we learn from this chapter, “sought God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding of the visions of God: and as long as he sought the Lord, God made him to prosper.” He went forth and warred, and “the Lord helped him.” “He strengthened himself exceedingly.” He built towers in Jerusalem and fortified them, and towers in the desert, and digged many wells. He had husbandmen also, and vine-dressers in the mountains, and in Carmel. Moreover he had an host of fighting men that went out to war by bands. “The whole number of the chief of the fathers of the mighty men of valor were two thousand and six hundred. And under their hand was an army, three hundred thousand and seven thousand and five hundred, that made war with mighty power, to help the king against the enemy. And Uzziah prepared for them throughout all the host shields, and spears, and helmets, and habergeons, and bows, and slings to cast stones. And he made in Jerusalem engines, invented by cunning men, to be on the towers and upon the bulwarks, to shoot arrows and great stones withal.” We need not dwell upon the description of the numerous army of king Uzziah. We will turn to God’s instruction for ourselves about it. “And his name spread far abroad; for he was marvelously helped, till he was strong. But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction.” Of all the words we find put together, there are few more remarkable than these.

One would have thought that the very object to be gained by Uzziah was to be strong. Alas! the strength we naturally covet is independence of God. Saints are found mourning over their weakness, and what do they mean? Is it not that they have no resources in themselves? We forget that all real strength is derived from the fullness that is in Jesus, otherwise we should ever be able to say with Paul, “When I am weak, then am I strong.” We need to be deprived of every resource in ourselves, that we may know our strength to be in Him. When Uzziah felt himself to be strong, God left him.

There is great danger of our putting multiplied means in the place of the Lord Himself; we may go the whole round of means, and forget that they are not the supply.

What has been the history of the church? Marvelously helped till she was strong, when she was strong her heart became lifted up. The saints at Corinth, who had multiplied resources, men, and wisdom, and the like, and whose temptation it was to think that by the exercise of this wisdom they could refute the heathen, were told by the apostle, No; it is only by the bringing in of the “wisdom of God,” that which is “foolishness with man,” and of the “strength of God,” that which is “weakness with man.” The Spirit of God shows us in the Acts, the church, few in number, marvelously helped. But how soon did the church begin to look to itself, to its own resources and greatness, instead of to the Lord. And has this no voice for ourselves? Our blessing is in taking the place of weakness, so that God may for His own name’s sake help.

There is danger in our saying or supposing that we have attained to something. It is a mark of failure when a Christian looks to his own honor and credit, instead of the honor of the Lord. The great thing is to be regardful of His name. A single eye will be occupied with Christ.

It is a very strong word in reference to a saint that we have here, "His heart was lifted up to his destruction." But there is as strong a word in the New Testament, "He that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption." If any, even a saint of God, "sow to the flesh," he will reap but a sorrowful harvest of corruption, all his time having been misspent. We need to give heed to the searching words of Scripture, not turning away the point of them from ourselves under the supposition that they cannot apply to us. This thought has been the source of much mischief in the church. That soul will prosper which trembles at God's word, and is willing to face the most searching parts of it. The saint of God can "sow to the flesh," can "walk according to the flesh," can "war after the flesh;" but the miserable end will be, that he will "of the flesh reap corruption." When Uzziah was strong (his strength being in his own resources), his heart became "lifted up," and more like Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon's heart (Dan. 4:30) than that of God's anointed king of Judah. A heart that is "lifted up" is in a dangerous state, and almost always on the eve of a fall.

Though Uzziah was God's anointed king, he was not God's anointed priest, yet would he have nothing restrained from him, and we find him "transgressing against the Lord his God," and going into the temple of the Lord to burn incense upon the altar of incense, which it appertained not unto him, but unto the priests only, the sons of Aaron, who were consecrated to burn incense, to do. Let us too beware of dealing with the Lord in unholy familiarity; a humble spirit is always a confident spirit, but a humble spirit can trust only in the blood of Jesus; it does not rush into God's presence as the man who is "lifted up in heart" does. We can only come there through the incense of the Lord Jesus, not on the credit of our own graces, or devotedness, or in fleshly fervor.

"It shall not be to thine honor from the Lord God," said Azariah the priest, as with fourscore priests, valiant men, he withstood the king. "Then Uzziah was wroth: and while he was wroth with the priests, the leprosy even rose up in his forehead before the priests in the house of the Lord."

Beloved, this history of king Uzziah is written for our admonition. "Lifting-up" of heart is always self-seeking, not God-seeking. We have (blessed be God!) liberty to enter into the holiest, for we are priests unto God, by the blood of Jesus, but it is ever through the incense of our great High Priest.

In chapter 27:6, we have no mention of Jotham's great army; he "became mighty, because he prepared his heart before the Lord his God." This is the way for the saint to grow in practical strength. Thus was it with the Thessalonians; their "work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope was in the sight of God and our Father." Jotham set the Lord always before him, and went on in an even tenour of conduct. In the eyes of man, he might not be as mighty as Uzziah, but the Holy Ghost records his name as that of one "mighty" in the eyes of God.

Watch

The flesh in the saints is as bad or worse than any flesh, therefore watch, continue in prayer, be clothed with humility. Live no more by memory than by sense, but live by faith; forgetting the things which are behind, and pressing forwards. It was not when Paul was in communion with the glory that he was in danger of being puffed up, but when he came down in the memory of it. Memory has its own work, and so has sense; but conscious present communion with God is the power and glory of the saint, and his especial privilege. Here he gets everything, for here he has God; and here he has everything safely, for he has everything in God—with God.

When Christ is working in a heart, there will be the tenderest consideration, there will be straight paths made for lame feet.

“Wherever you go endeavor to carry with you a sense of God’s presence, His holiness, and His love; it will preserve you from a thousand snares.”

“Have a word with God before you enter into conversation with them.” (James 1:5)

Satan tempts saints to unholy wrath (Luke 11:55), and they do not know and little think where they had their coal from to so heat them till Christ tells them, “Ye know not what spirit ye are of.”

Use the bridle in the quantity of your words; incline rather to sparing than using them lavishly; for “in the multitude of words there wanteth not sin.” (Prov. 10:19)

We want to have the God of peace with us, so as to have humbleness about evil, affections occupied with good.

The End of the Lord

There is no possibility of fellowship with God on any other ground than that of grace—no matter when, or where. There never was. True there have been many dealings of God to prove this; but there never could be communion between God and man except in grace. No dealing of God with sinners could have been anything but rejection, except He met them on the simple ground of grace. This principle runs through everything—God’s providential dealings, and the like; it is stamped upon all. Our hearts are never right with God unless we are standing on this ground of grace. Even in chastening us, it is the patience of God’s grace that is manifested in taking all possible pains with His children. If I as a parent meet only with that which is pleasant in my child, it is easy for me to act in the way of love and blessing towards it; but to go on patiently dealing with a disobedient and rebellious child, is the proof of a great deal more love. If in chastisement, in our desires after holiness, or in anything else, we do not realize our standing in grace, we get off the only ground of fellowship with God.

It may be difficult, at first sight, to see how God can deal in grace with a sinner; but in His dealings with Adam at the outset, this is brought out. There was no symptom of repentance in Adam. He was charging the fault on God, and on the woman— “The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.” God immediately comes in on the ground of grace, saying, “The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent’s head.” When no promise could be made to man, as man (for no promise could be made to the flesh), grace comes in, and sets us in fellowship with the “seed of the woman.”

Just as it is said of our blessed Lord, that He “grew in wisdom and in stature,” so is the Christian expected to grow in grace, and in the experience of God. Now the old man, that in us which Satan addresses, seeks to hinder us here, and therefore the dealings of the Lord apply themselves to it. Through the evil of our own nature, circumstances without come to be connected with that which is within, and thus produce conflict; then comes the secret working of God. Thus that which may be the exercises of our hearts in struggling against Satan, may become identified with the chastening of God.

Our blessed Lord Himself learned obedience by the things which He suffered. But then He began quite at a different end from ourselves. Because we are disobedient, we have to learn this lesson: in suffering, temptation, and trial (patience having in Him its perfect work), He practically learned obedience in a way in which He never could, had He not humbled Himself, and taken upon Him the form of a servant. What we want to know more of is that faith which, having made proof of the Lord’s care, can fully confide in Him for all things; as the apostle says, “I can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth me.” There is all the difference between knowing this as a principle in the beginning of our course, and the being able to say, “I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content; I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound.” Now, dear friends, we know experimentally that we have not all “learned” this, though as an abstract truth we may know it. I repeat, there is a great difference between a young Christian saying, “I can do all

things through Christ, which strengtheneth me,” and such an one as “Paul the aged” saying, “I have learned.” He could say it in practical fellowship with Christ; he had passed through all these trials, and had proved the sufficiency of the Lord’s grace in them.

What hinders the development and manifestation of holiness in the saints? The old nature remaining unmortified. Well, then, through chastening and discipline God brings us practically into fellowship with “His holiness.” He deals with our hearts, causing us, by the very conflict which He puts us into, to own, in the full consciousness of our own evil, that one is good, even God.

What was the effect of the striving against sin that these Hebrew Christians were called to? That of drawing out the evil of the flesh. The world called them to walk as the world. Satan found them as rebels in his kingdom; their temptation was to be frightened at his terrors. The Lord suffered all these trials and exercises to come upon them, that the evil nature of their hearts might be discerned in its tendencies, and that they might be matured into separation from evil, as well as matured in fellowship with God. What was it that produced this “striving against sin” Conflict with Satan and man. But it tended to the discovery of that which was within themselves.

The effect of presenting temptation to Jesus was to show that He was perfect in everything. In us it is the discovery of that in ourselves which would blunt the edge of our spiritual service, and hinder our maturity in holiness. A person may walk a good while in the fullness of fellowship with God, and evil may have no actual power, or there may be the discovery of sin, and it may be struggled against; but where there are things indulged, because we do not discern what their real tendency is, there comes in the Father’s chastening. We may look at it as the contradiction of sinners, or as the power of Satan (and so it may be), but after all it is the constant exercise of the Father’s love, in order that we may be partakers of His holiness.

Let patience, then, dear friends, have its perfect work. There is not one of our souls that does not need this. If trouble or conflict exercise us, let us see if it is not because our own wills have been crossed. We have to be patient with circumstances, doubtless, but to be patient with God’s perfect work. Elihu’s reproach to Job was, that he had chosen iniquity rather than affliction. God had His own end in his dealings with Job; He is “very pitiful, and of tender mercy.”

It is said, “Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time.” If man exalts himself, he will be humbled; when God exalts a man, there is no danger of this. Christ humbled Himself under the mighty hand of God in drinking the bitter cup which was given Him to drink, therefore God also hath highly exalted Him. If we would deliver ourselves, and get out of this path of trial, it must be by some by-path, and we shall lose blessing. We must remember it is added, that in due time God will exalt us—not a minute after the time. When He has wrought the whole purpose of His love, then He will exalt us.

Father, I Know That All My Life

Father, I know that all my life
Is portioned out for me,
And the changes that will surely come,
I do not fear to see;
But I ask Thee for a present mind
Intent on pleasing Thee.
I ask Thee for a thoughtful love
Through constant watching, wise
To meet the glad with joyful smiles,
And to wipe the weeping eyes;
And a heart at leisure from itself
To soothe and sympathize.
I would not have the restless will
That hurries to and fro,
Seeking for some great thing to do,
Or secret thing to know;
I would be treated as a child.
And guided where I go.
Wherever in the world I am,
In whatsoe'er estate,
I have a fellowship with hearts,
To keep and cultivate;
And a work of lowly love to do
For the Lord on whom I wait.
So I ask Thee for the daily strength,
To none that ask denied,

And a mind to blend with outward life
While keeping at Thy side,
Content to fill a little space,
If Thou be glorified.
And if some things I do not ask
In my cup of blessing be,
I would have my spirit filled the more
With grateful love to Thee—
And careful-less to serve Thee much,
Than to please Thee perfectly.

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