CHRISTIAN TRUTH VOLUME 19

by P. Wilson, R.G. Rule, C. Buchanan

A collection of articles and writings by P. Wilson, R.G. Rule, C. Buchanan from Christian Truth Volume 19, covering various biblical topics and Christian teaching.

95 Chapters

Table of Contents

0. Christian Truth Volume 19
1. 2 Samuel 22 and 23: David
2. An Abundance Entrance
3. Affliction
4. Aged Brother Encourages a Younger
5. Be Ye Separate: 2 Corinthians 6:15,17
6. The Birth of Jesus
7. The Bitten Israelite: Numbers 21
8. The Books of the Bible: Poetry
9. The Captives in Babylon
10. Cherith: the Brook That Dried up
11. Christ Is All: Colossians 3:11
12. Christ Our Food
13. The Cities of Refuge
14. The Completeness of the Bible
15. Current Events: Some Comments on Events
16. Demas
17. Different Conversions
18. The Eucharist: the Editor's Column
19. The Everlasting Gospel
20. Faith Never Asks "How?"
21. Father Holding the Rope
22. Fellowship
23. The Field of Boaz
24. Flesh and Faith: Their Energies From the First
25. Forever With the Lord
26. God Promising to Answer Prayer
27. God's Searching Ways
28. The Good Samaritan
29. Exhortations From Hebrews: "Let Us"
30. His Joy Is Greater Than Ours
31. Isaiah 53: Notes on Ministry
32. Ishmael
33. It Is I Be Not Afraid
34. Life and Times of Josiah: Part 1
35. Life and Times of Josiah: Part 2
36. Life and Times of Josiah: Part 3
37. Life and Times of Josiah: Part 4
38. Little Children

39. The Lord's Desire
40. Mary at the Sepulcher
41. Meditation
42. The Meeting in the Field of Boaz
43. Nebuchadnezzar
44. Nothing but Christ
45. Obedience of Love
46. Opposing the Gospel: Spirit of Judaism As Satan's Instrument
47. The Passover Plot: the Editor's Column
48. Patronage
49. Paul's Doctrine: Address 1 - Part 1
50. Paul's Doctrine: Address 1 - Part 2
51. Paul's Doctrine: Address 2 - Part 1
52. Paul's Doctrine: Address 2 - Part 2
53. Paul's Doctrine: Address 3 - Part 1
54. Paul's Doctrine: Address 3 - Part 2
55. Perfect Confidence: Deaf and Dumb Boy
56. The Proverbs: Chapter 10:11-32
57. The Proverbs: Chapter 11:1-23
58. The Proverbs: Chapter 11:24-12:14
59. The Proverbs: Chapter 12:15-13:6
60. The Proverbs: Chapter 13:7-25
61. The Proverbs: Chapter 14:1-35
62. The Proverbs: Chapter 15:1-33
63. The Proverbs: Chapter 16:1-33
64. The Proverbs: Chapter 17:1-28
65. The Proverbs: Chapter 18:1-19:7
66. The Proverbs: Chapter 19:8-29
67. The Proverbs: Chapter 9:7-10:10
68. Reciprocal Affection: Song of Solomon 4
69. The Recompense of His Love
70. Resting on the Rock
71. Revelation 11:18 and 19:5
72. Romans 12 and 1 Peter 4:10
73. Romans 6, 7, 8
74. The Saint's Dying Hour
75. Satan and His Ways
76. Seed on Good Ground
77. Service
78. The Sin Offering: Leviticus 4
79. Songs of Degrees
80. Stand Fast

81. Thanksgiving
82. There Is Nothing Better: David Flees to the Philistines
83. Threshing Floor of Ornan the Jebusite: Part 1
84. Threshing Floor of Ornan the Jebusite: Part 2
85. To a Couple Just Married
86. To Me to Live Is Christ: Philippians 1:21
87. Types of Antichrist: King Saul and Absalom
88. Unveiled Mysteries
89. Vows
90. Waiting for the Son From Heaven: 1 Thessalonians 1:10
91. Walking With God
92. A Wise and Safe Thing to Do
93. Ye Are the Salt
94. Ye Serve the Lord Christ

Chapter 0

Christian Truth Volume 19

2 Samuel 22 and 23: David

The Spirit of God has put these two chapters together in a remarkable manner. Certainly such a conjunction is not after the manner of men. Chapter 22 consists, as is well known, of portions substantially given again in the book of Psalms. Thus Psalm 18 is made here more striking because it is put along with the last words, as they are called, of David, in chapter 23.

Now a comparison of these two will reward every spiritual mind. For what is the distinctive point of chapter 22? The identification of Israel's history with David as the type of the Messiah. Nothing can be more striking to any person that would patiently and intelligently meditate on the chapter, than the remarkable way in which the grand events of the history of Israel - their deliverance f r o m Egypt, their being brought through the Red Sea, the defeat of their enemies - are all blended with the Messiah, first entering into the sorrows and troubles of the people, then brought out of them at last to be their deliverer, the head not only of Israel but of the Gentiles. Here therefore we find a course of sorrow and of suffering that ends in joy and triumph.

How different is the character of chapter 23! "These be the last words of David. David the son of Jesse said, and the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel, said, The Spirit of the LORD spake by me, and His word was in my tongue. The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me, He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God. And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds [the anticipation of the day of Jehovah Himself]; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain. Although my house be not so with God; yet He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although He make it not to grow."

Thus we find two things- the bright expectation of the kingdom, with the solemn sense that the time was not yet come. No man felt it more than David. The fact that God put into his mouth the anticipations of the Messiah that he himself knew that he in a striking manner (the most so of any man up to that day) was made the progenitor and type of the Messiah - this very fact made his own shortcomings, errors, and sins more poignantly felt. Well he knew that those failures of himself were darkly shadowed out, and retributively brought to mind, in the grief and shame and dishonor of his house. Thus we find a double current in the heart of David - his faith bright and undimmed in the joy that was coming with the true king who would surely sit upon his throne; but meanwhile his was the softened spirit, the broken and the contrite heart of a man that knew what moral humiliation means as regarded himself and all his house. What in David could be more lovely in itself, or more suited to the actual state of things, than these two facts, both made true in his soul?

And should it not be the very same thing with us now?

Is it not important to see that the sense of our failure, as well as of what we are, is never meant to interfere with the brightness of our confidence in the Lord? Conscience must be exercised

unhinderedly, and so must faith also. Grace provides for both in the believer's heart. It is excellent thus to look onward, the eye filled with the glory of the Lord Jesus, and the heart resting on His grace. But there should be the unsparing judgment of ourselves in the light, and consequently due and suited confession. Where this is, there will be the lowliness that becomes men who have no standing place but in grace. God forbid that this should be wanting in any Christian. It is hard to preserve the balance of truth, but at least it is well to desire it. Let us beware of having the appearance of one-sidedness. To be cast down with the constant sense we shame because of what we are, to hang our heads as bulrushes, is a poor testimony to the love of Christ, and to the victory God gives us through Him. But it is a worse state where the recognition of His grace is misused to enfeeble conscience and destroy sensibility as to sin, above all as to our own sins.

It is well that we should know that the path of faith is far removed from either of these two things. For we are entitled to enjoy the brightness of what Christ is and has done for us; but there is also the unfailing and never-to-be-forgotten sense of what it cost Him so to suffer for us.

David then anticipated the two things as perhaps no Old Testament saint, as far as I am aware, up to that day had ever done. It is evident too that, as he began with a very simple confidence in the Lord, so he went through a most heartbreaking process in his experience.

The kingdom is before him here. He sees clearly the judgment of the wicked. "The sons of Belial," as he says, "shall be all of them as thorns thrust away, because they cannot be taken with hands: but the man that shall touch them must be fenced with iron and the staff of a spear; and they shall be utterly burned with fire in the same place." This will never be till Jesus executes the judgment.

Chapter 2

An Abundance Entrance

Address to Young People at Chicago in 1927

2 Pet. 1:2-11

It is not my thought to comment on all of this passage, but to consider how we have an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I suppose none of us here have any ambition to come dragging into heaven - satisfied with just squeezing in. That is not characteristic of Christianity. I believe that there are cases like that though - people who do not want to go to hell - but that is not indicative of divine love being there; it is rather a fear of judgment. And it does not speak of the operations of the divine nature referred to here, which is rather the desire to have the association and companionship of the One who has bought us. He has equipped us with a nature which can only be satisfied with divine glory.

Being made "partakers of the divine nature" is not so much here the new birth but, rather, the practical result of it. How am I going to have the evidence of it in a practical way? We get it in the first part of the fourth verse. That is, if the soul lays hold on these promises which belong to it, living in the enjoyment of them, the result will be the manifestation of the divine nature. Of course, that could not be unless we had the divine nature.

As we were saying, none of us here would be satisfied just to get to heaven, but there is the desire to have an "abundant entrance." It is not a very good way for a ship to have to be dragged into port by a tug, but it is better than to go down at sea. How much more dignified for the old ship to come in under full colors. How proud the sailors are, and the captain, and with what joy they pull in after a long toilsome voyage! If we are Christians, we are going to make port. We are going to get there all right. But what kind of an entrance are we going to have?

The 11th verse says, "For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." I am sure that you would like to have that kind of an entrance. Here are the directions - the recipe for it - right here! I apprehend that the abundant entrance is not the swinging open of the doors at the end, but it is ministered all along the way.

I rather think that when one comes down to the time of facing the change from this world; that is, if he is permitted to face it consciously - if he is permitted to know that he is just about to go into the presence of the Lord - the kind of an entrance he is going to have at the end will largely depend upon the kind of an entrance he had the last year - the Christian life and experience he had been enjoying. You do not expect a Christian who has been living at a distance from the Lord - a sort of halfhearted life - you do not expect him to have an ecstasy as would the one who has lived and walked with God. The way to look forward with confidence to that change is to have operative in the soul these virtues that are spoken of in the intervening verses of our chapter.

Now the third verse: "According as His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue." Young Christian, I wonder if you excuse yourself for your shallowness on the ground that the circumstances in which you find yourself are not advantageous to the kind of a life that you would like to live. You have reasoned it out and you think that it would be different if you were living in a different position. Our verse here says, "His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness." There is not one thing lacking! We have a complete equipment. God is not going to put us into a position where we cannot live for Him and yet ask us to live for Him. No! He has given us all things necessary; right in your present position God has given you the fullest resources to live for Him. We do not have to wait until we are older, or know our Bibles better, before we begin to live for Him.

How do these "exceeding great and precious promises" make us "partakers of the divine nature"? I believe in this way: It is the entering into and enjoying these exceeding great and precious promises (what God has done, is doing, and is going to do) as realities. The result is that I am so attracted and under the power of them that other things lose their charm. So we become more "imitators of God"; being occupied with the Object that is His; that is, that which occupies the heart of God. When we really lay hold on the promises that are ours, that hope works out in the life in a practical way, and we are seen to be "partakers of the divine nature."

The latter part of that verse says, "having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." I often look over a company of our young people associated in the outside path, and think, "What a fortunate group they are! What a wonderful place they are in!" "Escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." We cannot value it too highly, dear young people. If that were true in the days of Peter, how doubly true today. "Corruption... in the world through lust"! What is lust? It is unsatisfied desires. This world is one constant succession of new desires - ever new desires.

How different with those who know the Lord Jesus Christ. How He satisfies! Divine realities give peace and quiet to the soul. What a blessed thing to be preserved from this ungodly scene. One grieves to see the pace of the young in this world - the shamelessness of the age - no restraint of any kind - turned loose to glut themselves with what this world has to offer - "wild-and-crazy age" some have said. Surely those words are not too strong! We have been graciously taken out of it. Such a worthy Object as we have found - the Christ of God! That cannot help but have a tremendous effect upon our lives. The most worthy Object of the universe - the Christ of God! To have Him brought before us again and again; His glory brought before us; to have His death brought before us on Lord's day morning; His worth repeated in our ears again and again; all that has its transforming power on our souls. What a blessed thing to escape "the corruption that is in the world through lust." How we ought to prize and value the blessed place in which we find ourselves. Could we think of a more blessed place than to be gathered to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, having the association of those who love Him in sincerity and truth; and where the Person, the work, and the word of Christ are, by the grace of God, jealously guarded and enjoyed by His people? It is a wonderful privilege.

In verses 5-7 we are told: "And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity." None of us

want to get the reputation of being lazy in material things. There is much in Scripture about being diligent in divine things. In Romans 12:11, it should read, "As to diligent zealousness, not slothful." It has nothing to do with business at all. If you see a Christian especially devoted, especially godly, you can put it down that he did not get to be that way by going on in an indifferent way. He was not indolent. So this verse says, "giving all diligence," etc. There must be purpose of heart. That is true with anything in this world wherein people succeed. People do not stumble into success. It is a matter of hard work, of having a purpose and letting that purpose form and control the soul.

There is a word in the 27th Psalm along the same line - the fourth verse: "One thing have I desired of the LORD." So far so good! It is a good thing to have right desires, but that is not all of it. "That will I seek after." That is a very needful part. You say, "I would just love to be a real devoted child of God; I do not want to live a shallow Christian life." Well, then, the last part of the verse: "That will I seek after," "Giving all diligence...."

Now verse 8: "For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." I know the Lord does not occupy us with the fruitfulness or unfruitfulness of our lives, but none of us want to be unfruitful. "If these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful." Here is the way to bear fruit, to be a fruitful branch for the Lord Jesus. He loves to feed among the lilies. The Lord finds His delight there. He gets fruit for His own soul.

Suppose we lack these things? "He that lacketh these things is, blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins." v. 9. There is a kind of government of God operative among His people. One part of this government of God is that if a Christian becomes indifferent and worldly minded, lets slip divine things, and becomes taken up with this poor world, just in a corresponding measure he loses the consciousness of the blessedness there is in Christ. He does not lose the blessedness, but the consciousness of it. It is possible for a Christian to forget that he was purged. He does not even know whether or not he is a child of God. Things just become a blank to him, and he goes on, either in utter indifference or in despair. He has forgotten he was purged. That is the government of God among His people. We want to escape that, do we not? We want to have the constant assurance in the soul that we are headed for glory. Here is the way we get it - "If these things be in you, and abound, they shall make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

"Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall." v. 10. God knows that we are going to be there, but this is the way to have constantly fresh in our souls the assurance of it - to make it sure to ourselves. Just as surely as we are careless and find ourselves involved in this world, we lose that assurance and perhaps even get into a state where we forget that we were purged from our sins. We do not have to fall. It does not bring any glory to the Lord Jesus for us to fall. It brings dishonor on Him, and on the truth, and on the Church of God.

"For if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." Is not that a glorious entrance? That is the privilege of every Christian. It is not a question of endowment, gift, or ability, but it is a question of the heart being occupied with the Christ of God - living in the enjoyment of what we have as God's people, bought with the precious blood of Christ. I believe each one of us

here is privileged to have an abundant entrance. It is put into our own hands. We all know that the ability must come from Him. We know it is a matter of grace from first to last, and none of us are going to take any credit in the matter; but may we not rather trust ourselves unreservedly to Him and claim the grace He so gladly gives that we may have the joy of an abundant entrance "into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

Chapter 3

Affliction

Affliction quickens the spirit of prayer; Jonah was asleep in the ship, but at prayer in the whale's belly.

Perhaps in a time of health and prosperity we pray in a cold and formal manner, we put no coals to the incense; we were careless about our own prayers, and how could we expect God to answer them? God sends some trial or other, to make us take hold of Him.

"They poured out a prayer when Thy chastening was upon them." Isa. 26:16. Now their prayer pierced the heavens.

In times of trouble we pray feelingly, and we never pray so fervently as when we pray feelingly.

When God puts His children in the school of affliction, He deals with them tenderly, because He does not leave them without a promise:

"God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be. tempted above that ye are able." 1 Cor. 10:13.

He will not lay a giant's burden upon a child's back; nor will He, stretch the strings of the instrument too much, lest they should break. If. God sees it good to strike with one hand, He. will support with the other; either He will make the faith stronger, or render the yoke lighter.

Chapter 4

Aged Brother Encourages a Younger

In Malachi's day, they that feared the Lord spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard and put it down in His Book. He was an interested party in such conversations. What condescending love; and He is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

So now if you were here, what a happy time we would have together over His Word, speaking of the things freely given us of God. Though we are now many miles apart, by faith we meet before one common mercy seat. Distance does not count; and He has given us pen, ink, and paper, and taught us to use them for Him, doing all heartily as to the Lord, with affections (minds) set on things above. Our citizenship, treasures, and blessings are heavenly. Now, our light afflictions are but for a moment; then, we will have that far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

How feebly we appreciate what a wealth of blessing is ours by title now: and soon. very soon, we will be in full possession, when He, our blessed Lord, sees of the travail of His soul and is satisfied.! And we too shall be satisfied when we awake in His likeness. But think of it: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ," who for our sakes became poor that we through His poverty might be made rich! Who can fathom what all this implies? What a change was His! He came down - down to where we were in our wretchedness, defilement, and rebellion-to lift us up, up to where He ever was and is, in the bosom of the Father (Phil. 2). Keeping this in full view gives us courage for the way, moral courage. We know our cause to be good. Our Leader, He to whom we look off, is the beginner and completer of the whole path of faith. He has gone over all the path, can sympathize with us in every trial, and now appears in the presence of God for us, to keep us from falling and restore us if we do. How perfect and exactly adapted to our need is our God's arrangement for us, and how could it be otherwise? Our experience works hope in us. Brighter and brighter is the word for us. The longer we journey, the brighter our mark at the end becomes - Christ in glory! The Man, Christ Jesus, in the glory of God, is waiting there to have us with Himself and like Himself. Read John 17. Then one joy will fill and satisfy His heart and ours: our joy to be there, and His to have us there - the flock He has purchased at such a cost. And now He is occupied too in washing and cleansing the Church with the washing of water by the Word. soon to present it to Himself a glorious Church, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. What a future is awaiting us, poor sinners saved by grace; and to it we are rapidly hastening. "The night is far spent, and the day is at hand." Be sober and watch unto prayer.

Think of the closing comments of that pattern saint, Paul, in 2 Timothy 4: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith" - soon the crown - and what grace! "Not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing." That takes us in. There is no feeling of disappointment here, nor thought of having served a hard Master. Ah no; it is all victory! His prize was won; so also for us.

My dear young brother, I exhort you to give the blessed Lord all you have and are, the full strength of your best days. No alabaster box is too good for Him. He is worthy of all.

Yours in Him who will soon have us with Himself where He is in that bright glory.

Chapter 5

Be Ye Separate: 2 Corinthians 6:15,17

Plausible reasons are easily found for indulging in a carnal "liberty," which leads into taking part in the works planned for the betterment of a world already condemned and soon to be destroyed, and into companionship with those who shun the offense of the cross, and who "mind earthly things."

Chapter 6

The Birth of Jesus

"Where is He that is born King of the Jews?" Matt. 2:2.

The birth of Jesus was an event as full of love as it was deep in wisdom and humiliation; but it was what Jehovah had ages before promised, and patriarchs had long looked for. When man disobeyed his Maker, and fell under Satan's power, God in boundless grace lighted up the dark and hopeless scene with the most merciful declaration, that the Seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head, thus announcing a Redeemer for fallen man, and that He should be born of a woman.

Afterward, the Lord taught Abraham that the promised Seed should be through him and his much-loved son Isaac. "In Isaac shall thy seed be called." After this it was revealed to David that the promised Seed should be of the fruit of his loins, and also that after His death and resurrection He should sit upon Israel's throne. At a later period, the prophet Isaiah was moved by the Holy Ghost to predict that the Saviour would be a virgin's son: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call

His name Immanuel." Isa. 7:14. And more than this, for he also spake of the Godhead of Christ, as well as His reigning in power as the King of the Jews, on the throne of His father David, saying, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon His kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this." Isa. 9:6, 7.

Still later, the prophet Micah was instructed to inform God's people of the locality where Jesus should be born: "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto Me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." Mic. 5:2.

From these scriptures we see that the Messiah would be born of a woman - God and man in one person-a virgin's son - born in Bethlehem - of the seed of Abraham-of the lineage of David - whose goings forth have been from everlasting-that He shall sit on the throne of His father David, and of His kingdom there shall be no end.

We can thus enter a little into the question of the wise men, "Where is He that is born King of the Jews?" In the last dispensation many were looking forward to the coming of Messiah to reign in glory. They expected the fulfillment of the prophetic scriptures concerning His kingdom, and overlooked the path of humiliation, suffering, blood shedding, and death, as Messiah's way to David's throne. They did not see that God's only way of setting man in blessing before Him was through death and resurrection. There were, however, a few that "looked for redemption in Jerusalem."

In this chapter we find three classes of character brought before us: 1) Herod; 2) the chief priests and scribes; 3) the wise men, which, by the Lord's help, it may be profitable for us to consider.

1) HEROD. Herod was king at Jerusalem; he was, therefore, exceedingly moved at the announcement that the King of the Jews was born. It touched him very closely; for he knew that if the true Messiah were come, he could no longer be king himself. Besides, the sound of God's King having come was enough to alarm the conscience and awaken fear and dread. Others felt the same. We are therefore told that, "When Herod the kin g had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him." There were no thunderings or lightnings - no threatenings - no sound of alarm - yet they were troubled. Angels had praised God and said, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." Luke 2:14. A believing man afterward exclaimed, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word: for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation." vv. 29, 30. Yet Herod and all Jerusalem were troubled.

The king's troubled state of mind led him to make inquiry. He first gathered those together whom he judged best able to give him information, and demanded of them where Christ should be born. But though their reply was correct, it did not relieve his trouble. He then made diligent inquiry of the wise men, but their reply must have only tended to confirm the fact that Messiah was really come. What could Herod do? His perplexity was great; fear and sorrow were experienced by him; but with all the amount of unquestionable evidence before him, he did not think the Messiah worth seeking. He therefore dismissed the wise men, that they should seek the young child; but it was not in the king's heart to go a step on such an errand. "Bring me word again," said the king, "that I may come and worship Him also." If I find Him, then I'll worship, thought Herod. He had no higher thought, and this was his only relief for a troubled mind. Poor Herod!

The real state of his soul was afterward made manifest; pride kindled into a flame the enmity against God and against His Christ, which dwelt in his unregenerate heart; he became "exceeding wroth," and could only vent his rage by commanding that every young child in Bethlehem, and all the coasts thereof, should be put to death, thus expecting to get rid of his troubles by killing Him who was born King of the Jews. Such is man. Such has been, and still is, the enmity of the carnal mind to the blessed Christ of God. Men hear the faithful saying, that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners"; they are exercised about the report for a while, fears lay hold on them, and they are troubled. They make inquiry -they turn to God's servants and listen to their statements on these matters - they hear them say that it is their chiefest joy to contemplate and adoringly worship the Savior of sinners. And they seek to quiet their troubled spirits by promising to themselves to worship also at some future time. But, as in Herod's case, that time never comes. Like him, their convictions are not deep, being more from the force of circumstances and the influence of others, than from personal exercise before God; they therefore think of nothing higher than worshiping before men. There is no earnest desire for forgiveness of sins - no longing for the removal of guilt - no consideration of how matters really are between their own souls and the living God; they have no concern beyond some vague ideas of worship, places of worship, forms of worship, and the like. However, this state of mind having been brought about by circumstances, it is only for circumstances to change, and they change also. Like the early dew, such superficial impressions quickly pass away; the natural enmity to Christ easily manifests itself, and they soon cry out in spirit, with the Christless crowd around, "Not this man, but Barabbas" (John 18:40).

2) The SCRIBES AND PHARISEES. There was neither trouble nor inquiry nor wrath manifested by these persons. Quiet and unconcerned, with Scripture ready upon their lips, they cared no more about the Messiah than they did about Herod. Yet they had a remarkable knowledge of Scripture. They could tell where Christ should be born. They heard the solemn announcement that the Messiah was come. They listened to the wise men's testimony, that the God of heaven and earth had commanded a star to move out of its accustomed sphere to guide them; and yet they were unmoved and unconcerned. Their knowledge of the letter of Scripture had puffed them up. In their folly they thought themselves wise, and knew not that they were miserable, blind, and naked. One might have thought that such a momentous matter as the birth of Christ would have stirred up the hardest hearts; but, no! man's motto is, "Present gratification without reference to the eternal future." These scribes were accredited by men, honored by the king; they felt that they held the key of knowledge, were masters in Israel, were greeted by the people as "Rabbi," and this was enough; for they sought only "present gratification," and cared not for "the eternal future."

It is to be feared that there are many of this class in the present day. They possess some knowledge of Scripture, can answer many questions even about the Savior, and are quiet and unconcerned when others around them are much troubled. They know not their real need. They compare themselves with the ignorant idolater, and think themselves wise. They flatter themselves that they have been born in a Christian country, had Christian forefathers, have received a religious education, and attend an orthodox ministry, and therefore are not ignorant of spiritual matters. But with all their fancied knowledge, they are "ignorant of God's righteousness." They know not that, if weighed in God's balance, they must be found wanting. They are ignorant of the fact that all their best performances are only splendid sins. They are not aware that they must be born again. They know not the gift of God. They are ignorant that the thrice Holy God cannot accept any excuse for sin, and can accredit no other standard of righteousness than His own unsullied holiness. They therefore go about to establish their own righteousness, and do not submit to the righteousness of God, even CHRIST, who is "the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth" (Rom. 10:4).

3) THE WISE MEN. Whatever were the peculiar characteristics of these men, they were in the best sense wise men. They were guided by divine light and wisdom. They had to do with God. When they saw the star move, they were assured that God was leading them; and they happily experienced that He led them to the Savior. They sought for Jesus. Nothing could hinder them. Christ Himself was the one Object of their souls, and they found Him. They owned Him as the mighty God. They worshiped him. They served Him with their substance as well as their hearts. It was to Christ they presented their gold, frankincense, and myrrh. We may also notice another thing in these wise men; they obeyed God rather than man, for being warned of God that they should not return to Herod (as he commanded), they departed into their own country another way. The account of these men is very simple and brief, but their ways stand in remarkable contrast with the other classes of character that are here clustered together.

Hitherto we have looked only at the King of the Jews, in reference to His birth; but grand and glorious as that event was, we afterward see Him in a position far more blessed for our contemplation than even that. I refer to Calvary's cross. Yes, it is the cross of Christ that is the happy meeting place between God and man. No death of the cross, there could have been no triumph over death. No death of the cross, there could have been no salvation from hell. No death

of the cross, this world would have been without one cheering ray as to the future. No death of the cross, not one sinner could have ever reached the mansions of glory. But the blessed gospel declares that Christ has died. The Scriptures most prominently set forth the eternal value of Christ's death, and our Lord taught the same thing. He said, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." John 12:24. The believer's peace with God is only through the atoning work of Christ. We are justified by His blood, sanctified by His blood; we have access into God's presence, where our High Priest is, by His blood. It is in the death of Jesus we see God's wondrous love to man so abundantly manifested. There we see that Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for it. There we see that the King of the Jews died for that nation. There we see that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. There we see God's infinite hatred of sin, and His amazing love to sinners. There Jesus bare our sins in His own body. There He was made sin for us. There His soul was made an offering for sin. There He once suffered under God's wrath, that we might receive eternal peace and blessing.

But where is the King of the Jews now? He was in Bethlehem's stable, wrapped in swaddling clothes, and worshiped by the wise men. He was recognized by a guileless Israelite as "the Son of God... the King of Israel." As the meek and lowly King, riding on an ass over the mount of Olives, He was worshiped as "the King that cometh in the name of the Lord." He was covered with a purple robe, and mocked with a crown of thorns. He was crucified with malefactors, outside the gate of Jerusalem, as "JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS." But where, I ask, is the King of the Jews now? Israel's rejected King, then, is risen-raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, and exalted to the highest heavens. But the Jews, as yet, know it not. They are still in blindness and unbelief, fulfilling the prophecy of Hosea: "For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image [pillar], and without an ephod, and without teraphim." Chap. 3:4.

God is able to cause the scales to fall from their eyes, so that a nation may be born at once. He is able to gather the outcasts of Israel, and bring them into their own land. "Afterward," says Hosea in the next verse, "shall the children of Israel return, and seek the LORD their God, and David their king; and shall fear the LORD and His goodness in the latter days." Then the Jews will be joyful in their king, who will "reign... before His ancients gloriously." And "Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit." But then it will not be on carnal grounds, but in free, sovereign grace, through the redemption work of Him who died for that nation. They will then experience the blessings of the new covenant, spoken of by Jeremiah the prophet: "After those days, saith the LORD, I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be My people... They shall all know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." (Chap. 31:33, 34.) Now, while the Lord Jesus is rejected by the nation of the Jews, God is sending His gospel into all the world, to gather out of the Gentiles a people for His name. A Jew here and there receives the gospel, as many have before; so that the Church of God is formed both of Jews and Gentiles, united in one body in Christ- one new man-made nigh to God in Christ and by His blood.

Chapter 7

The Bitten Israelite: Numbers 21

Very happy it is to be discovering the glories of Scripture, specially in days when the infidel insolence of men is challenging it. Amalek of old dared to come out and withstand the camp of Israel, though at that moment the cloud which carried the glory was resting on the camp; and, by-and-by, the great infidel confederacy of the last days will rise so high in pride and daring as to face the army of the white horsed Rider descending from heaven (Exod. 16; Rev. 19).

In like spirit is the heart of man now challenging the Book which carries the precious and mysterious glories of the wisdom of God. It is therefore good service to draw forth these glories, and let the oracles of God speak in their own excellency for the confusion of this iniquity. And one of these glories, a part of this excellency, is this; that it is found to be one breath that animates, one light that shines, one voice that is heard, in all the regions of this one divine volume. For, in a manner, Moses may be said to reappear in Paul, Isaiah in Peter, David in John, and the like. The light of the morning is the light of noonday and of evening, though, it is true, in different measures and conditions.

In turning now to the narrative which this scripture gives us, we shall see this illustrated. We find in the first instance that the Lord refuses to cancel the judgment that He had pronounced. The camp had sinned; and fiery serpents, messengers of death, were sent among them. And though Moses may pray and the people cry out in anguish of heart, the Lord will not remove these executioners of His righteous judgment. And this is His way in the gospel. The sentence of death pronounced at the beginning on sin is not reversed. That could not be. That would be the acknowledging of some mistake or infirmity, and that could not be. But God has His provisions in the face of the sentence of death. This is His way. Wonderful to tell it, He provides the sinner with an answer to His own demands in righteousness! At the beginning this was so, and so has it been again and again; so it is in this narrative.

God brought the bruised Seed of the woman into the death-stricken garden of Eden; and Adam, the self-ruined sinner, is provided for. Noah got from God the ark in the day of the flood, and Israel the sprinkled lintel in the day of the judgment of Egypt. David was told to raise an altar in the despised threshing floor of an uncircumcised Jebusite; and that altar there had virtue to quiet the sword of the angel of death that was traveling on high over the doomed city. So the blood of Calvary had virtue to rend the veil from top to bottom, and open the high heavens to the captive of sin and death.

This is one of the beautiful unities in the revealed way of God.

It is not God canceling His judgments, but providing the sinner with an answer to them. This little narrative finely and vividly exhibits this. Israel had sinned, as we have seen; and fiery serpents were sent into the midst of them. They prayed that the serpents might be taken away, but no such prayer could avail. The executioners of righteousness must remain in the camp-death must follow sin; for God had said at the beginning, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."

But the Lord commanded Moses to make a serpent of brass and set it on a pole, and then proclaim, as in the hearing of the whole camp, that every bitten Israelite who looked to that uplifted serpent should be healed and live.

This was life confronting death-a secret spring of life and healing in the midst of the powers of death - it was as the revelation of the bruised Seed of the woman in the freshly death-stricken garden of Eden. But this was not the withdrawing of the fiery serpents, as the camp had craved; it was not the canceling of the sentence which had been passed upon their sin. It was another, a different and higher thing; it was enabling the Israelite in the wilderness to triumph over that miserable estate in which he had involved himself. This is what it was. It was not simply an escape from it, but a triumph over it; for an Israelite bitten by a fiery serpent, if he but looked at the brazen serpent, might then smile at the fiery serpents, though still abroad in the camp, just as Noah, long before, on the vantage ground where grace and salvation had put him, might have smiled at the waters as they were rising round him; or as the Israelite in Egypt, under the sprinkled lintel, might have smiled at the sword of the destroying angel as he was passing through the land.

How excellent all this is! And this is still the gospel- so consistent with itself is the way of God, and shadowed in like beauty in the story of Noah in the flood, or of the Israelite in Egypt, or of the bitten man of the camp in the wilderness, who had looked at the serpent of brass. Such a one could not be bitten a second time; the sin against the Lord of the camp, which had quickened these ministers of death, had been met by the provisions of that same Lord of the camp Himself; and this was his security and his triumph. He was now in a better state than had he never been bitten. His state was then vulnerable; now it is impregnable. Then, he might have been wounded by the messenger of death; now he could not. So Adam clothed of God is beyond Adam in the nakedness of innocency - Adam the pardoned and accepted sinner, beyond Adam the upright creature.

God's riddle - "Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness" - is expounded again and again. We have seen it before, and we see it here again. And in connection with all this, giving another look at Adam, I may say, that when his lips were opened over the woman the second time, they uttered a happier word than they had uttered the first time. "She shall be called Woman" did not express a joy equal to that he had tasted when, as we further read, he "called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living." To celebrate life from God, in the face of self-wrought death, is a far higher occupation for the heart than to celebrate even the closing, crowning gift of God in creation or in providence.

Now all this which we have traced in this little narrative in Numbers 21 is again. I say, the gospel. This is as the salvation of God. Nothing that was threatened had been-canceled. All is met and answered and satisfied by the process of ruin and redemption. The blood of the everlasting covenant has given "the God of peace" to raise from the dead Jesus, as "the shepherd of the sheep." God Himself is righteously, gloriously, justified, and the sinner victoriously brought into a condition of certainty and impregnableness, and of holy, thankful defiance of all the enmity and the attempts and the resources of the old destroyer.

But there is this further feature of the gospel impressed on this little narrative. The life or healing was to be individual - the bitten Israelite must look himself to the uplifted serpent. "Every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live," said the Lord to Moses; and then the history tells us,

"If a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived" (vv. 8, 9). So it is now as between God and us personally and individually in the gospel; and we may deeply bless Him that it is so. He individualizes and separates us to Himself, to talk to us about our sins, and settles the question of eternity with us. He sits with us alone at the well 'of Sychar, or sees us, our own very selves, under the fig tree, or feels our own touch in the midst of the busy crowd, or looks up to the sycamore tree to catch our eye, or meets us alone outside the camp, or on the floor of the temple. His word in John 3 is like His word in Numbers 21: "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." A look will do it, but the look must be a personal individual act. Faith is the act of the soul in immediate dealing with God. Another cannot believe for me, nor can ordinances or human religious provisions take God's place in relation to me. I must look, and Christ must be lifted up. Blessed to tell it, He and I are to have to do one with another.

Thus it is, as reflected in this little narrative, and thus it is in the world-spread gospel. And surely these are wondrous witnesses of the way the grace and salvation of God have taken us. God did not prevent sin. Nor has He canceled the judgment which He attached to it. Nor has He simply made things again as once they were. He gets out of the ruin so m eth in g better than that which has been ruined; and He has accomplished this in a way of unsullied righteousness, and of infinite display of His own name and glory. It is redemption and resurrection-life in victory-life won by Himself from the power of death.

But I must more particularly meditate on the Lord Jesus in the Gospel by John, as in connection with this.

The moment recorded in our narrative was no time for anything but a look; and that too, a look at the uplifted serpent. It would not have done for a bitten Israelite to occupy himself with any other object. Death was before him if he did not look there. And it would have been the gracious service of any brother Israelite to have recalled him to that object, if he saw that his eye, or feared that his thoughts, were disposed to take up with any other.

It is such a part as this that the Lord Himself acts with Nicodemus in John 3. Nicodemus had come to Him as a teacher. The Lord at once turns him into another direction, and lets him know that he must come to Him as a Savior or Life-giver. Nicodemus was seeking instruction. The Lord tells him that he needed life. And then He so orders His speech with him as to withdraw him from every thought and every object but the serpent of brass lifted on the pole in the wilderness. He lets him know that he and all men, like bitten Israelites, were on their way to death, but that the brazen serpent, the Healer or Life-giver, God's salvation, was in the camp again, and that the look must again be given - must interpose again as between the bite and death, or the kingdom would be lost, and the sinner would perish.

Indeed it is according to this, or in the spirit of One who was withdrawing the eye of everyone who comes to Him from every object but the uplifted serpent, that the Lord Jesus conducts His ministry all through that Gospel by John. For He refuses to act in any character but that of a Savior. Men may come to Him in other relationships and for other ends, but He will not receive them. One may appeal to Him as a doer of wonders, another may flatter Him as a king, another may be for seating Him on a throne of judgment, another, like Nicodemus, may come to Him as a revealer of the deep mysterious lessons of heaven. But He has no welcome for such; He does not entertain approaches and appeals like these. He does not commit Himself to any or either of these. But

when a convicted sinner comes to Him, or stands before Him-when, in that way, a bitten Israelite looks to Him as the uplifted, the God-appointed, healer or quickener of man - then He answers at once; and life and salvation are imparted.

What consolation! What grace in Him! What deliverance and blessing for us! What joy to meet God in such a character, and to see Him thus, as the Jesus of John's Gospel, so jealously holding Himself before us in that character, refusing to be received in any other. His loved Nicodemus was under long and patient training ere he gave Him the look of a bitten Israelite. But he did at the end, and then did it blessedly and vigorously (see John 19).

Precious truth indeed, and precious Savior who has provided us sinners with it! The look that was preached so long ago, in the midst of the camp of Israel in the wilderness, in the day of this 21st of Numbers, the Lord Jesus, the Jehovah of Israel, and the true Serpent of brass, preaches it still and again, and with all fervency and earnestness, in the Gospel by John.

But, again, the Lord lets us further know in that same Gospel, how He welcomes that look when it is given Him, and how immediately He answers it with the healing and salvation of God. Mark this in the case of Andrew and his companion, and of Nathanael in the first chapter. See this welcome finely and heartily expressed in His most gracious dealings with the Samaritan in the fourth chapter; and again read it in His words to the woman in the eighth chapter; and listen to it in His words to Peter in the sixth, when He turns to him upon the multitude refusing to give Him that look. And we have another witness of the same in chapter 12, when He speaks of Himself again as the uplifted brazen Serpent, and exults in the thought of gathering all men to Himself in that character (see verse 32).

Now these are characteristics in the true ordinance which we could not have gotten in the typical ordinance of Numbers 21. We do not there find an Israelite, in the sweet affection as the Jesus of the Gospel of John, earnestly and carefully guiding the eye of his bitten brother to the uplifted serpent. That was an affectionate exercise of heart that was reserved for the Savior Himself to practice and exhibit. Nor do we (for we could not) find the uplifted serpent, there welcoming and encouraging the eye that turned to it. But this also was reserved for the true, the living, the divine, Healer of sinners ruined by the old fiery serpent of death. In Him we get these things. And thus, in a great sense, the half is not told us by the type; the original exceeds the fame that we had heard of it. Happy those poor sinners who stand before the brazen Serpent who is now lifted up before their eyes in John's Gospel. They get the healing of God there, and a hearty welcome likewise.

We have, however, something more. We have this same earnestness and affection in the Holy Ghost as we have seen to be in the Son. We find it in the epistle to the Galatians. How zealously is the Apostle Paul there, in the

Spirit, occupied in either keeping the eye of the Galatians on Christ crucified, or turning them back to that Object! He would alarm them by the fear of some witchery. He would challenge and rebuke them, and that sharply. He would yearn over them, and fain consent to travail in birth with them again. He would, in deepest affection, remind them of past days of blessedness, and solemnly contrast them with the present. He reasons with them also. And he tells them his own story, and the purpose of his heart touching this great Object, the crucified Christ of God, the true uplifted Serpent of brass, how he had looked at it, and meant still to gaze, to live by the faith of it, and glory

only in it.

All this is surely excellent. The Spirit in the Apostle is in company with the son of the Evangelist; and the shadow is outdone by the substance. Affections are exercised in the divine originals, which could never have been expressed in the typical ordinances.

Do we still discover a further secret, I may yet ask, when we compare this chapter in Numbers with the Gospel of John? Yes; the light that shines there, though the same light, is still brighter here. We discover this again in chapter 3.

There the Lord connects this look at the uplifted Serpent with the new birth. This had not been done in Numbers 21, though it might have been derived from it. The now eternal life might have been discovered in the Israelite who had looked at that Serpent, because he was then breathing resurrection life, which is life eternal. He was enjoying a life which had been provided for him by One who had met, in his behalf, the wounding of the old serpent who had the power of death. When he looked, he lived; and this life was a life won from death, a victorious life. In principle, it was eternal life, such as the healing power of God, the salvation of God, the risen victorious Son breathes into the elect. I say not, that every Israelite who looked was introduced to this eternal life. It is not necessary to say that, but it is the expression of it. And this, in its substance and reality, we get in John 3, and are instructed by the Lord Himself to know that faith's look at the true brazen Serpent carries eternal life with it. "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."

And this truth is taught distinctly in 1 Pet. 1 "Being born again," says the inspired Apostle, "not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever." And then he further teaches us where this word is to be found, where this seed of eternal life is to be picked up - "And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you," the gospel being, as we know, the publication of the virtue of the true Serpent of brass, the Lamb of God, the Healer of sinners destroyed by the lie of the old serpent of death.

Chapter 8

The Books of the Bible: Poetry

In Genesis the world was made by God's creative hand;

In Exodus the Hebrews marched to gain the promised land.

Leviticus contains the, law, holy and just and good.

Numbers records the tribes enrolled, all sons of Abraham's blood.

Moses in Deuteronomy records God's mighty deeds.

Then Joshua into Canaan's land the host of Israel leads.

In Judges their rebellion oft provokes the Lord to smite,

But Ruth records the faith of one well pleasing in His sight.

In First and Second Samuel, of Jesse's son we read.

Ten tribes in First and Second Kings revolted from his seed.

The First and Second Chronicles see Judah captive made.

But Ezra leads a remnant back by princely Cyrus' aid.

The city walls of Zion, Nehemiah builds again,

While Esther saves her people from plot of wicked man.

In Job we read how faith will live beneath affliction's rod,

And David's Psalms are precious songs to every child of God.

The Proverbs like a goodly string of choicest pearls appear.

Ecclesiastes teaches man how vain all things are here.

The mystic Song of Solomon exalts sweet Sharon's rose;

While Christ, the Savior and the King, the rapt Isaiah shows.

The warning Jeremiah apostate Israel scorns;

His plaintive Lamentations then their awful downfall mourns.

Ezekiel tells in wondrous words of dazzling mysteries,

While kings and empires yet to come, Daniel in vision sees.

Of judgment and of mercy, Hosea loves to tell;

Joel describes the blessed days when God with men shall dwell.

Among Tekoa's herdsmen Amos received his call,

While Obadiah prophesies of Edom's final fall.

Jonah enshrines a wondrous type of Christ, our risen Lord.

Micah pronounces Israel lost, but again restored.

Nahum declares on Nineveh just judgment shall be poured.

A view of Chaldea's coming doom Habakkuk's visions give;

Next, Zephaniah warns the Jews to turn, repent, and live.

Haggai wrote to those who saw the temple built again,

And Zechariah prophesied of Christ's triumphant reign.

Malachi was the last who touched the high prophetic chord;

Its final notes sublimely show the coming of the Lord.

Matthew and Mark and Luke and John the holy gospel wrote,

Describing how the Savior died, His life, and all He taught.

Acts proved how God the apostles owned with signs in every place.

St. Paul in Romans teaches us how man is saved by grace.

The Apostle in Corinthians instructs, exhorts, reproves.

Galatians shows that faith in Christ alone the Father loves.

Ephesians and Philippians tell what Christians ought to be;

Colossians bids us live to God and for eternity.

In Thessalonians we are taught the Lord will come from heaven.

In Timothy and Titus a bishop's rule is given.

Philemon marks a Christian's love, which only Christians know.

Hebrews reveals the gospel prefigured by the law.

James teaches, without holiness faith is but vain and dead;

St. Peter points the narrow way in which the saints are led;

John in his three epistles, on love delights to dwell.

St. Jude gives awful warning of judgment, wrath, and hell.

The Revelation prophesies of that tremendous day

When Christ - and Christ alone - shall be the trembling sinner's stay.

Chapter 9

The Captives in Babylon

The Babylonish captivity, considered as an era in the progress of divine dispensations, was most important and significant. We may well treat it as a very principal station in our journey along that path of light and wisdom which is cast up in Scripture for God's wayfaring men to tread, and tarry there for a little and look around us.

We may speak of it, generally, as the great conclusive judgment upon the people of Israel in Old Testament times; but it was preceded by a long series of other judgments of an inferior or less weighty character. And it is well to trace them shortly, that we may be moved and humbled by such a sight as they afford us of the incompetency and unfaithfulness of man under every condition of stewardship and responsibility.

These judgments began, I may say, by the retirement of Moses for forty years in the land of Midian. Israel, then in Egypt, lost their deliverer, because they knew not that by his hand God would redeem them, as we read in Acts 7:25.

After they left Egypt, and got into the wilderness on their way to Canaan, they were doomed or judged for another forty years to wander there, because they did not receive the report of the spies, but disesteemed the promised land.

When they have reached Canaan and are settled as a nation there, they are for renewed iniquity chastised again and again by the hand of their neighbors, but at length are more signally judged by being put under the tyranny of King Saul (see Hos. 13:11).

In process of time they flourish into a kingdom; God gives them the choicest of His people, the man after His own heart, to reign over them. This was one of God's gifts; Saul had been one of His judgments. The reigns of David and Solomon were the exhibition of strength and honor in Israel. But, the house of David becoming reprobate, judgment visits it by the revolt of the ten tribes.

The kingdom of the ten tribes is thus erected - erected as a judgment upon the house of David, as the kingdom of Saul had afore been raised in judgment on the nation of Israel. But that kingdom of the ten tribes proving reprobate in that day, judgment visits them (carrying Israel captive) by the king of Assyria.

The house of David, during this time, was borne with. As a dismantled thing, having but two tribes instead of twelve as its inheritance, it still provokes the anger of the Lord; and then judgment visits Judah by the hand of the Chaldean, as before judgment had visited Israel by the hand of the Assyrian. Judah is a captive in Babylon. So this, as I said, was the great conclusive judgment upon the people of God during the times of the Old Testament. The Lord God of Israel had linked His name and His glory with the house of David, and with the city of Jerusalem; and when that house had fallen and that city was spoiled, judgment in that measure and at that time had completed its work.

Our business from henceforth is with the captives of Judah and Babylon; Israel in Assyria are lost sight of. They are not kept in view by the Spirit of God. They are called "backsliding Israel," as a people whose distinctness, for the present, is lost and gone; but the prophets of God anticipate their future, and we can foresee that they will be manifested, and brought home, and set in their place again in honor and beauty.

Ere looking at the captives of Judah in Babylon, I would consider the new conditions in which all things are set by the captivity itself. The glory (the symbol of the divine presence), the Gentile, and the Jew, are all affected by it, and at once enter into new conditions.

The glory leaves the earth and goes to heaven. It had been with Israel from the days of Egypt until now. It had seated itself in the chariot-cloud, and led Israel out of Egypt and through the wilderness; and then it seated itself in the sanctuary between the cherubim. Israel was the place or people of its dwelling upon the earth. But now. as was seen by Ezekiel, it takes its leave of the earth for heaven, or for the mountain (Eze. 1-11).

The Gentiles become supreme in the time of Judah's captivity. The sword is formally and solemnly put into the hand of the Chaldean by God Himself; and subjection to him, as ordained to be chief in political or imperial authority in the world, is demanded by God for him. But the glory does not accompany the sword. Chaldea is not the seat of theocracy; divine worship is not established there.

The people of Israel become strangers on the earth. "Ichabod," the glory is departed, in a more fearful sense than ever, becomes true of them. They are ruined for the present, as a nation once set in glory, honor, strength, and independency. Judah is a captive and stranger.

Such are the new conditions into which all have now entered - the glory, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel.

But here I must notice for it is a subject full of interest and value to our souls - that there is character unfolded in each of these, by reason of their new conditions.

The glory shows itself most graciously reluctant to leave its ancient dwelling place. We learn this from the early chapters of Ezekiel; the glory is there seen in uneasy restless action, as I may say. The time had come for its leaving Jerusalem, and it feels the sorrow of such a moment. It passes and repasses between the threshold of the house, which still connected it with the temple, and the wings of the cherubim, which were waiting to bear it away; and this is a sight of deep mysterious consolation. What a secret does it carry to our hearts! The holiness, which must depart, could not cool the love which would fain, if it could, remain; and what a shadow of the Jesus of the evangelists this is! Israel could not be the rest of either the glory or Jesus. They were polluted; but the glory will linger on the threshold, and Jesus will weep, as He turns His back on the city. Nor will the glory seek any other place on the earth. It had chosen Zion for its rest; and if its rest there be disturbed, it will leave the earth; it will be faithful to Israel, though Israel grieve it and send it away. These are the perfections that give character to the glory, as I may speak, in this the day of its departure from Jerusalem - the day of Judah's captivity in Babylon.

The Gentiles, in this same day, betray a far different sight. No moral beauty distinguishes them - altogether otherwise. They become proud.

Elevation under God's hand lifts them up in their own esteem. They have no care for the sorrows of God's people, but avail themselves of their depression, and rise, all they can, upon their ruins. Ezekiel shows us, as we have already seen, the moral or the character of the departing glory, as Daniel shows us the profane haughtiness of the Gentiles in this same day. It becomes intolerable, as we know, and ends in judgment.

The people of Israel, now humbled, are exercised. Psalm 137 is a breathing which speaks a very gracious state of soul, in the midst of the captives at the waters of Babylon; and such men as Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, among the returned, and such as Esther and Mordecai, among the dispersion, tell us of a generation or a remnant in character beyond what may have been commonly known in Israel; and thus, as is common with men, prosperity did moral mischief to the Gentile at this time, while depression and trial worked healthfully for the Jew.

This interval of a captivity must, however, come to a close. The rod of the tribe of Judah could not be broken till Shiloh came (Gen. 49). To fulfill this promise, rehearsed in various ways, as it was, again and again, by the prophets, Judah must return out of captivity, and be at home, to receive, if they will, the promised Messiah - the One who, as we see in Ezekiel, had left them with such reserve and reluctance.

A return is therefore accomplished; and it is marked by much of the fruit of that healthful exercise, which I have already observed as giving character to the captives. There was nothing of the same glory as that which marked their earlier return from the land of Pharaoh. In that respect the exodus from Babylon was a thing very inferior to the exodus from Egypt. There was no rod of power to do its marvels; no mystic cloud-conductor; no mediator standing in intimacy with the Lord for the people; no supplies from the granaries in heaven. But there was the energy of faith on the journey; and spirits awake to the presence of God, His mind, His will, His glory, and His sufficiency for them.

This return, however, was not universal; nor, even as far as it is extended, was it simultaneous. There was still the dispersion, as well as the returned captives. The books of the captives - Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther, give us something of the story of each. Mordecai was of the dispersion; and of those who returned, some came at an earlier moment, like Zerubbabel; others afterward, like Ezra at one time, and Nehemiah at another.

But I would inquire, Under what warrant or authority were the captives in Babylon enabled to make a return? It will be said, and justly, that God had so purposed and promised it by the mouth of His servant Jeremiah. He had declared that, when the captivity had numbered seventy years, it should end; and, according to this, Daniel, who lived through the whole age of the captivity, but never returned to Jerusalem, made his supplication for this promised mercy, just as the seventy years were drawing near to their close. The return, we therefore fully own, is to be dated, so to speak, from the sovereignty and counsels of God. The great source of it lies there. But there was a secondary and more immediate warrant for it, the occasion of it, as we speak; and this is as clearly seen in the decree of Cyrus, the king of Persia - a decree which he passed in the very first year of his reign, or as soon as God had transferred the sword from the hand of the Chaldean into his hand.

Babylon, which had been the captor, was not given the honor of being the deliverer of Israel. This honor was reserved for another, and such another as was as distinctly named by the prophets of God, as the period of seventy years had been named.

Cyrus is mentioned in Isaiah 44 and 45; his own very name appears there, and had been there two or three hundred years ere he was born. And he is mentioned as the one who was to be the builder of the temple at Jerusalem. We cannot say that it was so, but we may suggest that he heard of this amazing fact from some of the captives; and if he did, was it not the instrument by which the Lord stirred up his spirit? And enough, and more than enough, it was to put him upon that great and generous action which he accomplished, and the record of which closes the books of Chronicles, and opens the book of Ezra.

We may rather wonder at his not doing more, if he ever had a sight of those divine oracles, than at his doing so much. We might expect that he would himself have become a proselyte; for Isaiah there lets him know that it was none other than the God of that people (who were then his subjects, and, as I may say, his captives) who had gone before him to clear his way to conquest and dominion.

But be this so or not, his decree, as we know, was the immediate cause and the full authority for their return.

Further, however, as to this great event and era, the times of the Gentiles, as the Lord Himself speaks, began with the Babylonish captivity; the Gentiles then became supreme, as we have already said, one kingdom succeeding another. And these times of the Gentiles continue still.

The return from Babylon has made no difference as to this, for that event left Gentile supremacy unaffected. But these times will end in the judgment of the Apocalyptic beast, and his confederates (Rev. 19), when the stone cut out without hands smites the image.

And we may further say, as to Israel, that this captivity worked a reformation among them. From that time to the present, "the unclean spirit," as the Lord Himself also speaks, has been "out." Idolatry has not been practiced since then; but though the Jewish house be thus emptied and swept, it is not furnished with its true wealth and ornament. Messiah has not been accepted; and, in principle, Israel have returned to Babylon, where they will remain till the day of redemption and the kingdom under the grace and power and presence of the Lord Jesus. J.G.B.

Chapter 10

Cherith: the Brook That Dried up

1 Kings 17:2-7

The prophet has been alone with God in the secret place of prayer. Then for a brief moment he witnesses the good confession in the presence of the apostate king. The future, however, holds a far greater service for Elijah; the day will come when he will not only witness for God in the presence of the king, but he will discomfit the assembled hosts of Baal, and turn the nation of Israel to the living God. But the time is not yet ripe for Carmel. The prophet is not ready to speak, the nation not ready to hear. Israel must suffer the years of famine ere they will listen to the word of God; Elijah must be trained in secret before he can speak for God. The prophet must take the lonely way of Cherith and dwell in distant Zarephath before he stands on the Mount of Carmel.

The first step that leads to Carmel in the west must be taken in another direction. "Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward" is the word of the Lord. In God's due time He will bring His servant to the very spot where He is going to use him; but He will bring him there in a right condition to be used. To become a vessel fit for the Master's use, he must dwell for a time in solitary places and travel by rough ways, therein to learn his own weakness and the mighty power of God.

Every servant of God has his Cherith before he reaches his Carmel. Joseph, on the road to universal dominion, must have his Cherith. He must pass by the way of the pit and the prison to reach the throne. Moses must have his Cherith at the backside of the desert before he becomes the leader of God's people through the wilderness. And was not the Lord Himself alone in the wilderness forty days tempted of Satan, and with the wild beasts, before He came forth in public ministry before men? Not indeed, as with ourselves, to discover our weakness and be stripped of our self-sufficience, but rather to reveal His infinite perfections, and discover to us His perfect suitability for the work which none but Himself could accomplish. The testing circumstances that were used to reveal the perfections of Christ, are needed in our case to bring to light our imperfections, that all may be judged in the presence of God, and we may thus become vessels fitted for His use.

This indeed was the first lesson that Elijah had to learn at Cherith-the lesson of the empty vessel. "Get thee hence," said the Lord, "and hide thyself." The man who is going to witness for God must learn to keep himself out of sight. In order to be preserved from making something of himself before men, he must learn his own nothingness before God. Elijah must spend three and a half years in hidden seclusion with God before he spends one day in prominence before men.

But God has other lessons for Elijah. Is he to exercise faith in the living God before Israel? Then he must first learn to live by faith from day to day in secret before God. The brook and the ravens are provided by God to meet His servant's needs, but the confidence of Elijah must be in the unseen and living God, and not in things seen - in brooks and ravens. "I have commanded," said the Lord; and faith rests in the word of the Lord.

Moreover, to enjoy God's provision the prophet must be in the place of God's appointment. The word to Elijah is, "I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there." It was not left to Elijah to choose his hiding place; he must submit to God's choice. There only would he enjoy the blessings from God.

Moreover, implicit obedience to the word of the Lord is the only path of blessing. And Elijah took this path, for we read, "He went and did according unto the word of the LORD." He went where the Lord told him to go; he did what the Lord told him to do. When the Lord says, "Go" and "do," as to the lawyer in the Gospel, unquestioning and immediate obedience is the only path of blessing.

But the brook Cherith had a yet harder and deeper lesson for the prophet the lesson of the brook that dried up. The Lord had said, "Thou shalt drink of the brook"; in obedience to the word, "he drank of the brook"; and then we read words which at first sound passing strange: "the brook dried up." The very brook that the Lord had provided, of which He had bid the prophet drink, runs dry. What can it mean? Has Elijah after all taken a wrong step, and is he in a false position? Impossible! God had said, "I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there." Was he doing the wrong thing? Far from it; had not God said, "Thou shalt drink of the brook"? Beyond all question he was in the right place; he was doing the right thing. He was in the place of God's appointment; he was obeying the word of the Lord, and yet the brook dried up.

How painful this experience, how mysterious this providence! To be in the place of God's appointment, to be acting in obedience to His express commands, and yet suddenly to be called to face the complete failure of the provision that God has made for the daily need. How testing for faith! Had not Elijah boldly said before the king that he stood before the living God? Now he is confronted with the drying brook to test the reality of his faith in the living God. Will his faith in the living God stand firm when earthly streams run dry? If God lives, what matter if the brook dries? God is greater than all the mercies He bestows. Mercies may be withdrawn, but God remains. The prophet must learn to trust in God rather than in the gifts that He gives. That the Giver is greater than His gifts is the deep lesson of the brook that dried up.

Is not the story of the brook that dried up told in a different setting when, at a later day, sickness and death invaded the quiet home life at Bethany? Two sisters bereft of their only brother came face to face with the brook that dried up. But their trial turned to the "glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby." That which brings glory to the Son carries blessing to the saints. If Lazarus was taken, Jesus the Son of God remained, taking occasion by the failure of earthly streams to reveal a fountain of love that never fails, and a source of power that has no limit. So too in the prophet's day, the brook that dried up became the occasion of unfolding greater glories of Jehovah, and richer blessings for Elijah. It was but an incident used by God to take the prophet on his journey from Cherith - the place of the failing brook to the home at Zarephath, there to discover the meal that never failed, the oil that did not waste, an d the God that raised the dead. If God allows the brook to dry up, it is because He has some better, brighter portion for His beloved servant.

Nor is it otherwise with the people of God today. We all like to have some earthly resource to draw upon; yet how often, in the ways of a Father that knows we have need of these things, we have to face the brook that dries up. In different forms it crosses our path-perhaps by bereavement, or by the breakdown of health, or by the sudden failure of some source of supply, we find ourselves

beside the brook that has dried up. It is well if, in such moments-rising above the ruin of our earthly hopes, the failure of human props-we can by faith in the living God accept all from Him. The very trial we find then to be the means God is using to unfold to us the vast resources of His heart of love, and lead our souls into deeper, richer blessing than we have ever known.

Chapter 11

Christ Is All: Colossians 3:11

When we are well grounded as to our place in Christ and the results of it, when it is consciously known and enjoyed in the soul, it is suitable to consider the portion of the saint now, and some of its corresponding consequences.

I trust we clearly see that our standing and place are in the second Adam, where He is, and not in any sense in the first. If this be not apprehended in the soul by the power of the Holy Ghost, everything else will be both vague and feeble; it is the divine platform upon which, in grace, we are set, and where we are maintained by the Spirit, in order to our enjoying and using all that is ours in Christ.

There is a double danger which it seems suitable to indicate here. First, measuring the greatness and blessedness of what we have in Christ, where He is, by any enjoyment of ours, be it ever so elevated - being in fact so one sided about it as to lead people to suppose that the possession of it depended upon the use of it or the enjoyment of it.

Second, overlooking the fact that earnestness and diligence of soul, prayerful dependence of heart upon the Lord, and counting on the energy of His Spirit, are all necessary in order that I may appropriate and use what is mine already, and thus discover the good of what is mine, like a man entitled to large estates, who never knew the value of his property until he lived on it and worked it.

It is an important thing to preserve the balance of truth in our souls, and to give every part of God's Word and revelation its divinely ordered place. Our portion, then, is Christ Himself! And what a portion!

Now while it is blessedly true that it is not in our power to forfeit the possession of our portion, or to lose it by any folly of ours, it is equally true that the realization of its blessedness, the satisfaction of enjoying it, the consciousness of our union with Him who is our portion, all depend upon ourselves. It is only by the Holy Ghost who dwells in us that we have power. If He be grieved, His witness in this respect is for the time suspended in us; in that case He witnesses against us, that the failure which we have allowed may be judged, and He be free once more to pass the glories of Christ before our souls, and occupy us with them; thus we have fellowship with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ, and thus our joy is full.

It is also important to observe that our portion is our object; that which marks Christianity specially is, that we are furnished with an Object in heaven, and a power in us and with us on the earth. Nothing of this kind was ever known under the law; it proposed no object outside of self, and it supplied no power to meet its requirements, which were backed up with condemnation and death. The new order of things tells of power at every turn-the power of God quickening, raising us up, seating us in heavenly places in Christ our portion and Object, and "working in us" (Eph. 3:20). That is to say, power surrounds us on every hand; but power equally works in us for the realization of the enjoyment of that for which power has laid hold of us.

Now, it is important to remember that neither enjoyment nor realization are our portion or object; and yet the more earnestly our souls are fixed upon Him who is both, the more we realize and enjoy. "Beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:18), secures two things to us:

First, satisfaction of heart with Him on whom the eye of the soul is steadfastly fixed.

Second, transformation into the same image, from one degree of glory to another - moral likeness to our object and portion.

Stephen in Acts 7 is a fine illustration of all this. Filled with the Spirit, he steadfastly gazed into the opened heavens, and there his eye was filled with Jesus in glory, his portion and Object! No strife or clamorous uproar, which, like a wall of fire, encircled him around, could prevail to turn his eye or heart from that blessed One who Himself filled them. No; he "looked up steadfastly into heaven." There was his place, his home, his portion; he is satisfied and at rest here on earth, from which he must shortly depart; he shares the fortunes of a rejected, crucified Christ; hatred, enmity, and violence here, are the counterpart of rest and satisfaction there; and to him too, they are the consequence of it; these he accepts, as those he enjoys. It is a wonderful scene to us, but how heaven must have looked down upon it, who can tell? But this is not all; not only does he behold, but he is like the One into whose blessed face he looks-like Him who said, "Father, forgive them"; he too says, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." Truly, it is so; "beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord," he was "transformed according to the same image from glory to glory" (J.N.D. Trans.).

There is a beautiful illustration of our subject in Lev. 7:34, where we find that the wave breast and heave shoulder of the peace offering were the appointed portion of Aaron and his sons. "The wave breast and the heave shoulder have I taken of the children of Israel from off the sacrifices of their peace offerings, and have given them unto Aaron the priest, and unto his sons, by a statute forever, from among the children of Israel." What excellent things are here for faith to feed upon!

The strength and the affections of Christ, as well as Himself in whom is our all, are the blessed portion of His people. Of old, it was said of Israel, "The LORD'S portion is His people." Now in the highest way we can say, "The LORD is my portion, saith my soul," "Christ is everything, and in all."

"My Lord, my life, my rest, my shield,

My rock, my food, my light;

Each thought of Thee doth constant yield

Unchanging, fresh delight."

I shall very briefly note some of the consequences which would follow from all this.

First, with such a portion, things here would be eclipsed. and esteemed as dung and dross. The knowledge of Christ Jesus is the most excellent of all sciences; the possession of Him, true riches. Thank God, there is an all-absorbing power in Christ, and, for the heart possessing Him, and possessed by Him, earthly themes now cease.

An incident in David's history is an apt though poor type of all this. When David returned to his own house after the death of Absalom, among the first to meet and bid him welcome was

Mephibosheth, the son of Saul. With genuine and truehearted loyalty, he carried in his very person the evidence of David's absence, while the king was as yet away (2 Sam. 19:24); but now that the king has come again to his own home in peace, Mephibosheth's cup is full; his portion was David himself; and because it is so. even the good things of David, the bounties and favor of his hand, can he let go with a willing heart. "Yea, let him take all, forasmuch as my lord the king is come again in peace unto his own house."

Second, on e other consequence is, the way in which every part of our history here is used up by us to show the good of what we have in our portion; there is not one trial too many, not one sorrow too grievous, for the heart that is possessed by Christ, to manifest the value and blessedness of Him who is our portion and our compensation in every grief and perplexity. May the Lord give us to abound and have all things, in having Himself, until we see His face, are like Him, and with Him forever!

Chapter 12

Christ Our Food

Aaron and his sons were to eat what was not burned in the fire of the meat offering. Christ was the true bread, come down from heaven to give light to the world, that we, through faith priests and kings, may eat thereof and not die. It was holy for Aaron and his sons; for who indeed ever fed on Christ but those who, sanctified by the Holy Ghost, live the life of faith, and feed on the food of faith. And is not Christ the food of our souls, sanctifying us also ever to God?

Do not our souls recognize in the meek and humble Holy One - in Him who shines as the light of human perfection and divine grace among sinful men - what feeds, nourishes, and sanctifies? Cannot our souls feel what is to be offered to God in tracing, by the sympathy of the spirit of Jesus in us, the life of Jesus toward God, and before men in the world? An example to us, He presents the impress of a man living to God, and draws us after Him; and by the attraction - Himself the force which carries on in the way He trod, while our delight and joy are in it - are not our affections occupied and assimilated in dwelling with delight on what Jesus was here below?

We admire, are humbled, and become conformed through grace. Head and source of this life in us, the display of its perfection in Him draws forth and develops its energies and lowliness in us. For who could be found in fellowship with Jesus? Humble, as one has said, He would teach us to take the lowest place, but that He is in it Himself. Blessed Master, may we at least be near to and hidden in Thee!

Chapter 13

The Cities of Refuge

The manslayer made two entries into the city of refuge -the first immediately on his committing the deed, the second after the congregation had decided that he had not shed the blood in enmity. Now these, his two residences in the same city, must have been with different feelings. During the first he may have had strong hope, from what he knew himself of the facts and of the witnesses he could produce, that the congregation would surely acquit him; but during the second all such thoughts, having more or less uneasiness in them, would have been totally dismissed; for he could read his title clear (the congregation having delivered in their verdict) to feel unqualified security. All he had to do then was to abide only in prospect, and not at all in retrospect, to be awaiting the death of the high priest, in order that he might go to his own city, and not to be calculating on the circumstances of his own conduct, and the chances, however great, that he had of full acquittal.

According to all this has been the dispensations of God. There have been two entries into the city of refuge. The first was under the first dispensation, before the great question of sin was settled, and the conscience fully satisfied; the second under the present dispensation, since the blood of Jesus has fully discharged the sinner; and a corresponding state was found under the two. There was the spirit of bondage and of fear during the first; there is the spirit of liberty now. Under the law the sinner might have had a good hope of what the end might be; he knew of many witnesses on his behalf-the day of atonement, the ashes of the heifer, and many ordinances would be forecasts of his security- but still the great question was not altogether over. But now the congregation has given in its judgment, all has been accomplished, the whole question is ended, and we are in our city, in full peace as to the past, and have only to look out in hope of the future - the spirit of liberty has been brought in instead of that of bondage and fear. The resurrection of Jesus has decided all for the sinner.

There is both the prisoner of faith and the prisoner of hope (Gal. 3). In the old dispensation, the elect were the prisoners of faith; they were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which was afterward to be revealed. Faith, or the object of faith, that is Christ, was not so revealed as to give entire liberty; but their faith kept them still in a spirit of bondage; they were rather faith's bondmen than freemen. But now the elect are no longer under a schoolmaster; Christ is revealed, and our faith brings us into liberty; we are no longer kept in fear through our faith, but are delivered by it, so as to be faith's freemen; but then we are hope's prisoners. The grace of Christ has opened the former prison, the glory of Christ will open the latter; nothing else can.

This is shadowed in the ordinance of the cities of refuge (Numb. 35:32). No money whatever could release the prisoner from that place; he must await the death of the high priest; as now it is not in the power of any present advantage to antedate the Church's portion, and deliver the saints from being an expectant; even joy in the Holy Ghost cannot do this; Jesus must come Himself, and bring His reward with Him; but till then the prison house which hope keeps remains closed; the priest must die, the present age of Jesus being in the heavens must end, and He return out of it to meet the saints in the air, ere they will cease to be expectants.

I may just observe that verse 31 gives us another striking article in this ordinance, for we may refer it to the Lord. He was made sin for us; we had been guilty of blood. Abel's blood was staining our earth; we had willfully shed it, and blood must go for blood. The Son of God took the sinner's place; therefore "refuge failed Me," no city opened her gates for Him. Who witnessed for Him? Who declared His generation? Every voice was against Him, the enemy laid to His charge undenied facts; His own forsook, and fled, and disowned Him; God forsook Him, and the heavens for three hours testified against Him. The congregation thus gave judgment against Him, and blood went for blood; no satisfaction could be taken for His life; for He was as the murderer, the willful shedder of man's blood. But His blood having thus gone for Abel's blood-that is, His atonement having fully met our guilt-the city of refuge stands always open, and the revenger cannot enter. Faith enters unpursued.

The blood of Abel is the witness for man, for Cain represents the world (1 John 3); and of the world we are all part and parcel by nature (Eph. 2), so that the sin of Cain lies against us. In other words, the blood of Jesus, the true Abel, lies at our door. Cain was conscious that no city of refuge was open to him, for he was a murderer, a willful shedder of blood; he thought everyone that found him would slay him; but the Lord took his sin into His own hand, and secured him from the revenger of blood, in due season providing other blood to go for Abel's. Of course, I do not speak of Cain personally, but mystically, as representing the sinner; and to represent this grace of God more, I may say, we have only to look to the blood of Jesus. For in one aspect of it that blood was the blood of Abel; in another, it was the blood of God's Lamb that went for Abel's. As shed by man's wicked hand, it was Abel's blood, and thus was the sin of the world; as shed by God's redeeming grace, it was the Lamb's blood, and thus was the propitiation for the world.

Thus, in the same blood of Jesus, we read the whole mystery, our sin and our salvation. Our act in the shedding of it was our sin-God's purpose in the shedding of it was our salvation. Wondrous plan of grace and of wisdom! thus in the same object to tell out such a tale, humbling to us, while it blesses us and glorifies God. It was in reference to Deut. 21:1-9 that Pilate, who knew something of Jewish ordinances, washed his hands (Matt. 27). And after Pilate had so delivered himself, as he could, from the blood of Jesus, the nation deliberately took it on themselves, and thus have they been without a city of refuge until this day; for that blood was shed willfully. Accordingly, like Cain, they are vagabonds this day; they have no city of refuge. But grace preserves them aliens, as it did Cain, in order that as Cain's family revived, as it were, in Lamech this grace, so in the latter day Israel may trust in Jesus, and thus blood go for blood - the blood of Jesus pleaded answer for the blood of Jesus shed, and their land be thus cleansed from its present stain (Joel 3).

The operation of faith, in separating the soul to communion with God, is seen also in this ordinance of the cities of refuge; for there the Nazarite was in solitude - home and kindred were in distant cities, and he was in the place of strangers, in communion with Him whose love and grace had provided that asylum for him against the hand of the avenger. There was he to dwell for a season, and his company was thoughts of Him who had so screened him.

Thoughts of His love - the root of every grace

Which finds in this poor heart a dwelling place;

The sunshine of my soul, than day more bright,

And my calm pillow of repose by night.

Thoughts of His glory - on the cross I gaze,

And there behold its sad, yet healing rays;

Beacon of hope, which, lifted up on high,

Illumes with heavenly light the tear-dimmed eye.

Thoughts of His coming-for that joyful day

In patient hope I watch, and wait, and pray;

The day draws nigh, the midnight shadows flee-

Oh, what a sunrise will that advent be!

Chapter 14

The Completeness of the Bible

From Genesis to Revelation there is a plain and perfect revelation of everything which a sinner needs to know for salvation, and the saint for conformity to Christ. All the promises are given; all the precepts are written. We are fully warned of all our dangers. There is nothing more to be known that would help us in the way to heaven. The completeness of the Bible is as full as any other gift of God. It is as comprehensive of the needs of the twentieth century as of the first.

"Blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it." Luke 11:28.

Chapter 15

Current Events: Some Comments on Events

Those who are the Lord's have the blessed hope of His soon coming to call us out of this scene to meet Him in the air and be forever with Himself in that "bright and blessed scene where sin can never come." What a prospect is ours, and how good it is to know that no prophecy has to be fulfilled before we hear the shout that will call us home to be forever with the Lord.

While our blessed Lord may come for us at any moment, we do have many scriptures that tell us of developments and events that will take place after the Lord calls His Church home. In view of these future developments, the Lord would no doubt have His own seeking to discern the signs of the times (Matt. 16:3). In this connection we might call attention to two events that recently received wide publicity.

It is quite generally known that back in 1957 six nations, all of which were many years ago a part of the Roman Empire domain, signed a treaty at Rome, forming what is known as the European Economic Community (EEC). This is primarily an economic union whose main purpose is to gradually dispense with all tariff duties between these nations, and to encourage wide economic and commercial exchange with a free flow of capital and labor between the nations involved. Christians who have some knowledge of dispensational truth know from scriptures such as Rev. 13:1-7 and 17:3-17, that the Roman Empire is to be revived, and will be comprised of ten distinct kingdoms, or countries, that will be united to form one new empire (Rev. 17:12). The six nations already in the EEC, now more generally known as the "Common Market," have a surging population of over 175,000,000 people; and in the last few years they have attained a much higher standard of living than ever before. There is much to make us believe that the formation of the Common Market and the achievements it has made are probably the first steps in the direction of the revived Roman Empire that will eventually be composed of ten nations, as mentioned above.

It was very interesting to note in March of this year that General Charles de Gaulle, who several years ago had opposed the entry of England into the Common Market, indicated that it would be advantageous to France if England were to become a member of the European Common Market. At the time we go to press, we have no way of knowing whether England will again seek membership in the EEC as she did several years ago. She very possibly will delay temporarily, as free trade with other countries might aggravate her present balance of payment problem. However, it is interesting that England is now being made welcome; and if she does sign "The Treaty of Rome" and become a member at some future date, this certainly will be a major step in the direction of the revived Roman Empire.

We are not surprised to see the door being opened to Britain to enter this alliance. Our surprise is that we are still here to see such events unfolding. May that which we are witnessing stir within our hearts a greater longing to hear the voice of our beloved Bridegroom calling us home to Himself, also a more earnest desire to sound forth the warning and pleading notes of the gospel, as we realize how near we have come to the end of the day of grace, and to place less value on the temporal things about us.

The other event which we believe to be of even more significance than General de Gaulle's interest in Britain's entry into the European Common Market was the recent visit of the Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Michael Ramsey, with Pope Paul VI in Rome.

This was the first official visit of the head of the Anglican Church to the Vatican since the schism of 1534, and is viewed with alarm by many, and with gratitude by others. How should we, who are waiting for our Lord from heaven, view such a significant event? Shall we give way to alarm, or shall we raise a public outcry against a "traitor to Protestantism," as others have done? Neither is the proper attitude of one who sees in such a development the setting of the stage for those events which will come to pass shortly after the Church is called home to glory. Perhaps we may say that our attitude might well be one of amazement-not amazement that these things could happen, but that we are still here to witness such developments.

Let us not forget that Revelation 17 gives us God's description of that religious system that is so widely admired today. Dr. Ramsey's greeting to the Pope, the head of that false system, started with these words: "Your holiness, dear brother in Christ, it is with heartfelt gratitude and brotherly affection in Christ that I greet you." This attitude is lauded as charitable and long overdue by many of the leaders in Protestantism. The few who express their disapproval are branded at once as narrow and bigoted.

The believer who loves the Word of God, and who waits with eager longing for the voice of his beloved Bridegroom, is by no means a neutral observer in all this. May the Lord help us to realize the increasing need of exhortations such as, "Touch not the unclean thing" (2 Cor. 6:17), and "Earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). Let us then reaffirm our stand with deep thanksgiving to God for the grace that has either spared or delivered us from that false religious system which soon will meet her fearful doom as outlined in some detail in Revelation 17 and 18.

Pope Paul VI in replying to Dr. Ramsey's greeting stated: "You rebuild a bridge which for centuries has lain fallen between the Church of Rome and the Church of Canterbury.... You cross over this yet unstable viaduct, still under construction.... May God bless this courage and piety of yours." Who rebuilds this bridge, and who crosses over this unstable viaduct? A leader in Protestantism! Rome remains basically unchanged while Protestantism rebuilds the bridge and retraces her steps to the system she left so long ago.

As we view this sorrowful trend, we feel a word of warning is in order. It will become increasingly unpopular to maintain a stand for the truth, in separation from this great system. It will be branded as most uncharitable to speak out faithfully concerning that which boasts of being the bride, and yet is so hateful to our beloved Lord. As the ecumenical movement grows, and the greater part of Protestantism moves with increasing strides toward Rome, let us look up to Him whose name by grace we love, and prayerfully seek with the Lord's help and by His grace that we might in some little measure be characterized by His words in Rev. 3:8: "Thou hast a little strength, and hast kept My word, and hast not denied My name." The open persecution now borne by many in other lands may yet be ours to share here.

May we not be stirred and encouraged by the words of Mal. 3:16: "Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance

was written before Him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon His name." This was written in a day of indifference and of arrogance. It was a day when the claims of the Lord were met with the most callous resentment. But in the midst of such declension, there were those who were characterized by the fear of the Lord- a little remnant of whom it could be said that they "feared the LORD, and... thought upon His name." In the 18th verse of Malachi 3 we read, "Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked." What! can we not now all discern between such extremes as this? No, the day is so dark that discernment between that which is righteous and that which is evil is only granted to those whose walk is in "The fear of the LORD."

Let us seek grace then to walk carefully and obediently, and let us look upward with increasing joy as we see the events about us indicating the near return of our Lord. He has said, "Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." Rev. 3:11.

Chapter 16

Demas

It is highly interesting and instructive to follow the divine commentary on Demas. He was no doubt a true child of God, and his history furnishes us with needed warnings. Very little is said about him, but the three verses that mention him speak volumes. Let us turn first to Philemon, verse 24: "Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellow laborers."

Here Demas is mentioned in the Apostle Paul's salutation in company with himself and three others. He is called a fellow laborer with that beloved and faithful servant of Christ. What a privilege was his to serve the Lord in such company!

There was also Luke, the beloved physician and writer of "The Acts of the Apostles," and of the Gospel bearing his name.

Mark, the writer of another gospel, is in the company; of him the same Apostle could write later and say, "he is profitable unto me."

Then there was Aristarchus, whose faithfulness soon caused. him to be a "fellow prisoner" with Paul.

There had been a bright day in Demas' history when he started out to serve his Lord. How long he continued in this path we do not know, but it was a bright beginning. Many other young Christians have started out well and have sought in their measure and sphere to follow and serve the Lord.

Young Christian, it is well for you when you reach a decision to wholly follow the Lord, and to let your light shine in this dark world. This requires real "purpose of heart," and grace and strength from the Lord. To attempt it in your own strength would only end in failure.

The next account of Demas is in Col. 4:14, where the same Apostle in closing his letter to the saints at Colosse gives the salutations. See how touchingly he speaks of Luke the beloved physician, and then only says, "and Demas." It must have grieved the Apostle to be unable to say more of Demas. Evidently something was wrong. It was what he did not say that expressed his feeling. Demas was still with Paul, and outwardly all may have looked well; but this now aged servant of the Lord felt and knew that all was not well, and could only say, "and Demas." This was unprofitable for Demas, and it is unprofitable for any of us when an aged and faithful servant of Christ giving account of his labors to the Lord, has to mention any of us with grief (see Heb. 13:17).

Dear young Christian, if a faithful and wise servant of the Lord were writing a letter today and mentioning various ones by name, would he only refer to you as "and -"? Would your name be there without comment? Would one walking with the Lord discern that your heart had grown cold? Remember that when the heart grows cold toward the Lord, and other objects have taken His place in your affections, the next steps will surely follow as we next read of Demas.

"Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world." 2 Tim. 4:10.

Now what had secretly pained the Apostle has come to light and borne fruit. Demas has now given up the path of service and faithfulness to the Lord which in brighter days he had chosen.

First, he had grown cold in heart; now his feet too have gone back. How sad! Yet, this is but the history of many dear young Christians who allowed something, probably very small at first, to come between their hearts and the Lord. For a time all may seem to go on well, and their brethren may think so; but if the heart goes after any other object, the feet will someday follow the heart.

We also learn from this verse the secret of what drew away the heart of Demas; he loved this present world. What a sad exchange! He had forsaken the fountain of living waters and hewn out a broken cistern that could not hold water (see Jer. 2:13). This poor world had come between his soul and the Lord - this world of which we read,

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world." 1 John 2:15-17.

This world is too small to satisfy our hearts here, and the love of it now is a great loss for eternity.

"Should we to gain the world's applause,

Or to escape its harmless frown,

Refuse to countenance Thy cause,

And make Thy people's lot our own?

What shame would fill us in that day,

When Thou Thy glory wilt display?"

The name Demas means "popular." Perhaps that gives a clue as to his declension. Popularity in this world is a deadly snare. Often the world has smiled on a young Christian, and granted him a measure of popularity, to his spiritual ruin. What is popularity but the "friendship of the world"?

"Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." Jas. 4:4.

May we seek rather to walk with. God, and seek His testimony that we please Him, than all the smiles of the world. The world did not know the Lord Jesus when He was here; and if we walk more as He walked, it will know us less too.

If something has already dimmed the glory, and supplanted Christ in your heart, go and tell Him all about it. Make a full confession, and put away whatever it is; and you will know the joy of finding Him just the same.

"Still sweet 'tis to discover,

If clouds have dimmed my sight,

When passed, Eternal Lover,

Toward me, as e'er, Thou'rt bright.

0 keep my soul, then, Jesus,

Abiding still with Thee;

And if I wander, teach me

Soon back to Thee 'to flee."

Chapter 17

Different Conversions

I have been looking at the different characteristics which mark the divine operation on the soul in the different conversions recorded in the gospels and the Acts. For instance, that of Peter and of Levi in Luke 5; that of Zacchaeus in Luke 19; that of Nicodemus and of the Samaritan in John.

It is sweet to inspect the way in which the light of God approached and entered the soul. Sometimes it was gentle; sometimes it was full of force and rapidity; sometimes it intimated a work more fully on the heart; and sometimes a work more on the conscience or understanding. But it was always God's work, that we know, though the material operated on may have been various, and the mode of operation various.

Look at Acts 8, 9, and 10. The Eunuch was evidently in the hand of God ere Philip met him - he was under the drawings of the Father (John 6). And that his heart was deeply engaged is evident, because he forgot the common order, as I may say, of the world, when he bid Philip come up to him in his chariot. He waited for no introduction. The stranger was no stranger, since he referred to that subject which at that moment was everything to his heart. He was another Zacchaeus, who forgot his place in society, and pressed through the crowd after Jesus.

Look at Saul. He was full of religious zeal - the zeal of an inquisitor. Look at Cornelius. He was full of religious devotion - gentle, benevolent, disposed (instead of persecuting others) to judge that all others were better than himself.

Here were different materials, and the mode of operation on them was different. The work was carried on in Saul's soul with characteristic force - that in Cornelius's with like gentleness and grace. But both of them equally needed Jesus. There was no life in either or for either, but through Jesus.

So the jailor and Lydia in chapter 16. Lydia was something of a female Cornelius. She was devout, and gentle, and gracious; and the Lord, by a very gentle operation, opened her heart. The jailor was a kind of Saul, at least in his apprenticeship; he was beginning to practice his hand in that work of persecution with which Saul had been long familiar. But as far as he had gone, he had learned his art well; and the operation on him, like that on Saul of Tarsus, was in characteristic force. An earthquake accompanied the unlocking of the bars of his strong and iron heart, as "the still small voice" had done the business with Lydia's.

But again; neither the gentle Lydia, nor the fiery jailor, could do without Jesus. Till Lydia knew Jesus, Paul could teach her; but he did not worship with her, though she was a devout woman (see vv. 13, 16).

May the souls of sinners be precious in our sight! and these witnesses of the grace of God, and of the power of the Spirit, be acceptable to our hearts.

Chapter 18

The Eucharist: the Editor's Column

THE EUCHARIST

When Pope Paul VI issued his recent Eucharist encyclical, called "Mysterium" (from the Greek, mysterion, meaning a mystery), at Rome, it was a theological discussion of the meaning of the Eucharist. The Pope had become concerned over the attitude expressed by some Protestants and some Catholics, that the bread and wine are symbols only. In this, his third encyclical, he asserted the Roman Catholic teaching that the body and blood of Christ are truly and substantially present in the consecrated bread and wine of the Eucharist.

The act of the priest, claiming to transform the bread and wine into the actual body and blood of the Lord Jesus, is called transubstantiation. But this is serious error, for it is but a memorial of the death of Christ. In contrast to all this, how simple is the truth as to the remembrance of the death of our Lord as given us in 1 Cor. 10:16: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" When we as Christians partake of the loaf and the cup, we remember the Lord as He requested. We do so in loving remembrance of Him in death.

"No blood, no altar now,

The sacrifice is o'er!

No flame, no smoke ascends on high,

The lamb is slain no more.

But richer blood has flowed from nobler veins,

To purge the soul from guilt,

And cleanse the reddest stains."

Horatius Bonar, 1808-1889

When Martin Luther taught the strange doctrine of consubstantiation, he claimed that the body and blood of Christ were actually present, and not merely a memorial of Christ's death and blood-shedding. In Luther's shorter Small Catechism, he mistakenly taught "the real presence" of "the true body and blood" of Christ "in, with and under," the bread and wine.

We feel sure that much of the misapprehension as to the simplicity of this memorial of the Lord's death stems from a misinterpretation of our Lord's teaching in John's Gospel, chapter six. We need to keep in mind this foundation truth as to John's ministry, that he never once refers to, or mentions Christian baptism or the Lord's supper. In John six, He is bringing before our souls the necessity of personally appropriating His death and blood-shedding as the answer to the need of our souls. So, "Whoso eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, hath life eternal." John 6:54. When

we receive Christ as the One who gave Himself in death for our sins, we thereby become possessed of eternal life. This is in nowise an institution of a memorial, but the solemn statement of the necessity of owning Christ as the one sufficient sacrifice before God for all our sins.

Let us then, dear fellow-Christians, be kept in the simplicity of what the Lord has given us through the Apostle in 1 Cor. 11:23-26. What a precious privilege to come together and show His death in the eating of the bread and in the drinking of the cup till He come.

Chapter 19

The Everlasting Gospel

I believe the everlasting gospel is the seed of the woman that shall bruise the serpent's head; that is, the declaration that the Lord shall destroy with power when He comes in judgment. It is the announcement that the hour of His judgment is come, the unchanging good news right from the beginning and onward. From the first, Christ was to bruise the serpent's head. The Christian has the special relationship union with Him who is going to bruise the serpent's head being thus identified with the King of the kingdom.

Chapter 20

Faith Never Asks "How?"

Leave such words alone as how, when, why; they are not for a Christian.

If we are walking in the path of obedience, we need have no anxieties about the future; for God is above all difficulties.

How beautifully this is illustrated in the life of Elijah. God said to him, "Get thee hence... and hide thyself by the brook Cherith" (1 Kings 17:3). Elijah implicitly obeyed the command. At that moment his path was a thorny one, his very life was in danger.

How wonderful the care God takes over one solitary servant of His; none are too obscure for His intense interest. He does not test Elijah's faith too far, but comforts him by telling him exactly how his daily needs are going to be supplied, and even works a miracle to send the necessary food to His servant. "I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there" (v. 4). Who but God could command birds and be obeyed! Thus God uses one of the least of His creatures to fulfill His will; He is never without resource.

How often have we felt anxious about some event in our pathway, and doubts have arisen in our minds as to what the result of it will be. Why these cares with such a God as ours? If, like Elijah, we have listened to God's voice and have taken a step in faith in obedience to it, we can surely trust Him with the result.

Another impossibility according to man's reckoning follows. A widow woman is next to provide for the daily needs of Elijah. "I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee" (v. 9). The human heart would at once say, "It is useless to go to such a home for provision; how can that poor woman find food for another mouth, when she cannot find enough for herself and son?"

"With God all things are possible." Elijah's first step in faith brings the blessing to himself; and there by the brook, in the quietness and solitude of his concealment, he is being taught by God alone. The second step in faith brings others into the blessing with himself; the widow and her son, besides Elijah, are sustained throughout the years of famine by another miracle of God: "The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail" (v. 14).

Elijah went through his testing times in confidence in God, and found Him always sufficient. May we, like him, implicitly obey God's voice, taking the step He indicates to us in faith, leaving the results to Him; and we too, like Elijah, shall receive blessing to our own souls, which will extend in blessing to others.

Chapter 21

Father Holding the Rope

A botanist was once standing on the edge of a precipice, and looking down, he saw a very rare flower which he much wished to possess; but, alas! it was beyond his reach. He went in search of a boy, and taking him to the edge of the precipice, he said, "If you allow me to tie this rope round your body, and put you down there to gather that flower for me, I will give you this piece of money." The boy hesitated a moment, and then said, "If you allow me to go home for father to hold the rope, I will go down." On permission being granted, the boy quickly ran home, and soon returned with his father; and now. without the slightest fear, he went down, knowing that his father had a firm hold of the rope, and would never let him fall. So, dear friends, could we not, with the simple faith of this little boy, trust our Father, knowing that if we trust ourselves to Him, He will never let us fall?

Chapter 22

Fellowship

Fellowship with the fullness of Christ most of all helps us to fellow-hip with others. The gushing fountain springs of mighty rivers come not originally from the basin where they are first visible. They have a secret connection, unseen but constant, with a hidden, unfailing, exhaustless reservoir, in unknown distance and depth. By continual supplies thence received, the fountain overflows; and the streams flow on, and come into fellowship with other streams, having a similar reservoir; and at last they all unite in the mighty ocean.

So let us all draw from the hidden, unsearchable fullness of Christ, the exhaustless reservoir, hid from the eye of flesh, but known to the eye of faith; and we shall come in due time, after refreshing many a thirsty land on our way thither, into the full ocean of joy prepared for the whole Church of Christ.

Chapter 23

The Field of Boaz

When the Lord Jesus, at the close of that wonderful unfolding of the grace that had brought Him down to be the Bread of Life, asked His disciples, "Will ye also go away?" Peter answered, "Lord, to whom shall we go?"

When Paul had come to the end of his pathway of service, and saw dark clouds gathering round, and all his work here threatened with failure, he could say with unshaken confidence, "I know whom I have believed."

When the clouds that Paul saw on the horizon had gathered heavy and dark, and the threatened failure had already set in, John had still a message for the worst day that can ever come - "And now, little children, abide in Him."

That is the stamp of God's own work. When the Father draws, He draws to Christ and nowhere else. It is not a place, a creed, a belief, but a Person.

The heart that is restlessly wandering, beating against the bars of doubt, needs the revelation of Christ to satisfy the deep need that causes this misery and unrest. But this is always God's end, the purpose for which He draws souls out of the place where all their lives have been lived without Christ. So we find that as soon as God has drawn this Moabitish damsel out of her fields of Moab, the place of distance, famine, and death, He at once brings upon the scene the person who through His grace can reach even an alien and an outcast.

It is Boaz, whose very name brings confidence-"In him is strength." "I have laid help upon One that is mighty," is God's word to the brokenhearted sinner, or to the doubting child of God; and in Boaz He presents a lovely picture of the one upon whom He has laid help. Four things are told us of Boaz, brought thus suddenly upon the scene because it is God's due time, even as that sudden burst of angelic song announced to shepherds of Bethlehem when God's due time had come that there lay in the manger of the inn a wondrous Stranger in this world of sin, a blessed Babe. God revealed in weakness, confounding the mighty things of the world, and uniting in His blessed Person the four things which we find in this plain, simple picture of Boaz.

He was a kinsman, of Naomi's husband. The word kinsman means friend or acquaintance. He was one who knew all about poor Elimelech's sad history, and yet was his friend. "Unto you" were the first words of the angel's message. It was One who knew all the depth of man's need, ours, yea, mine and yours, and who knowing all, had yet come down in love to meet that need. What blessed words-"Unto you"-the sinner has a friend.

He was "a mighty man of wealth." It needed such a one to meet the full extent of our poverty. "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich." 2 Cor. 8:9. All the riches of God are placed at the disposal of an empty sinner, through Him.

3) He was of the family of Elimelech. Not only was he one who knew Elimelech, he was of the same family, as Naomi says later on, he had the right of redemption. Still fuller the picture becomes of Jesus, the sinner's Friend, who "took not on Him the nature of angels; but He took on Him the seed of Abraham" (Heb. 2:16). In order that He might accomplish our redemption, He came so near to us as to become a blessed Man among men - a Man of sorrows indeed, but bringing here the source of eternal joy. All joy had gone, death and ruin had followed sin, and there was no one else who was able to bring out what was in God's heart for man. No one else could glorify God and meet man's deep need. He became a man to do it, that God might be glorified in man, and that man might go in to the glory of God. What depths in these simple words!

4) His name was Boaz. All is summed up in the name. God utters, so to speak, in the ear of the one whom He has drawn, a name which in one word tells out all His heart.

The name of Him who knew our lost estate, who knew the hatred of our blinded hearts to Him, and who loved us in spite of all-the name of Him in whom all the fullness was pleased to dwell for the accomplishment of the blessed work on the cross-the name of Him who was born of a woman, in lowliness to walk this sinful world as a man, there to learn Himself, by entering into it all, the woe and misery of the place where we were-there 'is but one name which tells out all that, and infinitely more of preciousness to God-Jesus.

But here the question comes in, how was Ruth to be brought into contact 'with Boaz, knowing nothing of him, his very name unknown to her?

That is the next thing God does. First He draws Ruth out of the fields of Moab, after that sad place has told its tale of will and sin and death; then' He shows us why He has taken the trouble to draw out in this way one who had no title at all. It is because He has a person with whom His heart is satisfied, and in whom He wishes the stranger to find rest.

Now, having brought the person before us, God shows us the meeting between Boaz and Ruth, between the Savior and the sinner. What a joy to know that there is a full Christ for empty sinners!

The meeting takes place in the portion of the field of Boaz. Have you met that blessed Savior, and is His name precious to your heart? If you have, these simple words concerning Him will find a response in your heart.

Chapter 24

Flesh and Faith: Their Energies From the First

Genesis 3, 4, and 5

These are very important chapters. They show us the production of the two great energies which, to this day, animate the whole moral scene around us, and also show us these two energies doing their several businesses then, as they are doing still.

They are remarkable chapters - wonderful in exhibiting so much various moral action so distinctly and yet so concisely, leaving, I may say, nothing unnoticed, and yet in so short a space.

I would notice the production of these great energies and their workings - the energy of flesh and the energy of faith; that is, of the old nature and of the renewed mind.

The lie of the serpent prevails to produce the first of these.

The serpent gains the attention of the woman to words in which there was some suggestion injurious to her Lord and Creator. It was a lie, though subtly conveyed -the only instrument by which, he could reach and, tempt her. She listens and answers; and her faculties thus enlisted are soon in action in the cause of her seducer, and she falls.

The principle which is called the "flesh," or "old man," is produced at once, and at once begins to work. Confidence in one another is immediately lost. Innocence had needed nothing; but guilt is necessarily sham e, and must get some kind of covering. Every man to this hour carries in him what he cannot comfortably and confidently let out, even to his fellow creature. Restraint has taken the place of freedom, and artifices come to the relief of guilt and shame. So it is now; and so it was in that hour when the flesh was generated.

More deeply still does it retire from God. Men can bear each other's presence under the dressing of form and ceremony, and the common understanding of the common guilty nature; but they cannot bear God's presence. Though he had the apron of fig leaves, when God's voice is heard, Adam retreats under the trees of the garden. This is the flesh, or the old guilty nature, to this day. God is intolerable. The thought of being alone or immediately with Him, is more than the conscience can possibly stand. All its contrivances are vain. God is too much for the flesh. It secretly whispers and lays all the mischief on God Himself, but it cannot come forth and tell Him so. Out of its own mouth it is judged.

These are its simplest, earliest energies; we are hateful and hating, and we are at enmity against God.

But the working of this same principle (thus produced in Adam through the lie of the serpent) is manifested in other ways afterward in Cain. "Cain... was of that wicked one" (1 John 3:12). He becomes a tiller of the ground. But he tills not as subject to the penalty, but as one that would get something desirable out of the ground, though the Lord had cursed it - something for himself, independent of God.

This is a great difference. Nothing is more godly, more according to the divine mind, concerning us, than to eat our bread by the sweat of our face; to get food and raiment by hard and honest toil. It is a beautiful accepting of the punishment of our sin, and a bowing to the righteous thoughts of God. But to get out of the materials of the cursed ground what is to minister to our delight, our honor, and our wealth, in forgetfulness of sin and of the judgment of God, is but perpetuating our apostasy and rebellion.

Such was Cain's tillage. And accordingly it ended in his building a city, and furnishing it with all that promised him pleasure, or advanced him in the world. This he seeks after - and seeks after with greediness- though he must find it all in the land of Nod, in the regions of one who had left the presence of God.

He had his religion withal. He brings of the fruit of the earth that he was tilling, to God. That is, he would fain have his enjoyment of the world sanctioned by God. If he could command it, he would keep God on terms with him, though he was making the very ground which He had cursed the occasion of his enjoyments. This is very natural, and practiced by our hearts to this hour. Cain desired to link the Lord with himself in his worldliness and love of present things, that he may keep conscience quiet. But the Lord refuses, as He does to this day; though, as we have said, the heart to this day would fain make the same efforts, and get its worldliness and love of present things sanctioned and shared by Jesus, that conscience may not interfere with the pursuits of lust.

What ways of the flesh or of "the old man" are here! All this is the very thing that is abroad in the world to this hour. It is the working of that apostate principle which was generated by the lie of the serpent in the soul of Adam. And, being of the wicked one, Cain "slew his brother." He had religion, as we have seen; but he hated and persecuted the truth, just as to this day. Look at the same thing in Saul of Tarsus, as he gives you the account of it himself in Acts 26. Look at it in the person of the Pharisees set against the Lord. Look at it in the history of Christendom all down its generations to the present hour.

This is the enmity of the seed of the serpent to the Seed of the woman. "Cain... was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous." This was the cause. It was the enmity of sin to godliness, the enmity of the carnal mind against God, the lusting of the old man, the lusting of flesh against Spirit; it was the hatred of the world to Christ, because He testified of it, that "the works thereof are evil." It does not always wear such garments stained with blood; but it is always in the heart, "the carnal mind is enmity against God."

Such is the flesh, the old nature, in the history of its production, and in the course and character of its workings. It is exactly now what it was then. It rules "the course of this world" under Satan; but it is found also in each of us, if provision be made for it. But we are to know it - to know whence it came and how it works, and to mortify it in its principle and in its acts, in all its proper native energies which so continually beset the soul.

But we now turn to the other activities which we find produced and at work in these wonderful chapters - the activity or energy of faith produced by the Word of God through the hidden but effectual power of the Spirit.

While Adam was in the condition to which sin had reduced him, while he was still the guilty and culprit man under the trees of the garden, the word of the gospel, the tidings of the Conqueror slain, of Him who bore the penalty, and yet reached the point of glorious victory, the woman's Seed, reached his ear; and he is born again of the incorruptible seed, the word of the truth of the gospel.

He comes forth just as he was. But he comes forth in the full sense of salvation and of the victory which the grace of God had counseled and wrought for him. Accordingly he speaks of life. There is something very fine in that. He calls his wife "the mother of all living." There is something truly marvelous as well as excellent in that. Dead as he was himself in trespasses and sins, he talks of life; but he talks of it in connection with Christ, and with Him only. He gives himself no living memorial at all. He does not link himself with the thought or mention of life, but only the Seed of the woman, according to the word which he had just heard. Nay, he rather implies that he knew full well he had lost all title and power of life, and that it was entirely in another, but that it was in that other for him. That the life found in another was for his use, he had no manner of doubt, the proof of which is this: that at once he comes forth from the place of shame and guilt into the place of liberty and confidence and the presence of God.

He regains God. He had lost Him and been estranged from Him. He had lost Him as his Creator, but he had now regained Him as his Savior, in the gospel, in the woman's Seed, in Christ his righteousness.

But we may add, to our great comfort as sinners, this simplicity and boldness of faith is exactly after the mind of God. Nothing could have been so grateful to Him as this; and, consequently, in pledge of this, He first makes a coat of skins for Adam, and then with His own hands He covers his naked body.

This is very blessed. This is the faith, which at the day of the well of Sychar, and to this day, gives the Lord a feast - meat to eat which even the loving careful sympathies of His dearest saints know not of.

Christ is now everything to this pardoned sinner. In like manner, through faith, Eve exults in the promise. It is the joy and expectation of her heart; and Abel's religion is entirely formed by it. The penalties of sweat of face and sorrow of heart seem to be forgotten. And what is deeply to be considered is, that the earth is lightly held when Jesus was firmly grasped. Adam has regained the Lord Himself, and he seems never to count on being a citizen of the world again, but a mere tiller of the ground according to divine appointment for a season, and then to leave it to share the full fruit of the grace and redemption he had now trusted, in other worlds. He dies - that is all He seeks for no memorial here. He builds no city. He aims not to improve a cursed world. He toils in it, and eats his bread out of it; but he never forgets that judgment is upon it. The family of Seth call on the name of the Lord, and look, in God's way and time, for comfort and blessing in the place of present toil and curse. But that is the thing of hope and of prophecy, while strangership in the judged world is the present path of faith and godliness. This is a wondrous scripture indeed, and it speaks to us of this very hour through which we are passing.

The energy of the flesh or of the old nature is produced and set at all its proper work; the energy of faith is also brought forth in the souls of the elect, and displays its power very blessedly. We learn

our own lessons here. We carry the two energies in us. By nature we are citizens of the city Enoch, and through grace our souls have got connection with Chris t, like Adam or Abel or Seth. And we wait for the translation of Enoch (Gen. 5:24).

These are contrary the one to the other. "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh." Gal. 5:16.

Chapter 25

Forever With the Lord

I think I have had my mind occupied more of late than ever with the subject of which your letter suggests - the being with the Lord. I am sure it is deeper, happier, fuller acquaintance with Himself that our hearts need; and then we should long, and desire, and pant after Him in such ways as nothing but His presence could satisfy. I know souls in this state; and yet it is not knowledge that gives it to them, but personal acquaintance with the blessed Savior through the Holy Ghost.

I alighted, as by chance the other day, on some fervent thoughts of an old writer in connection with this dear and precious subject. In substance they were as follows, and almost so in terms, only I have somewhat condensed them. "It is strange that we, who have such continual use of God and His bounties and mercies, and are so perpetually beholden to Him, should after all be so little acquainted with Him. And from hence it comes that we are so loath to think of our dissolution, and of our going to God. For, naturally, where we are not acquainted, we like not to hazard our welcome. We would rather spend our money at an inn, than turn in for a free lodging to an unknown host; whereas, to an entire friend, whom we elsewhere have familiarly conversed with, we go as boldly and willingly as to our home, knowing that no hour can be unseasonable to such a one. I will not live upon God and His daily bounties without His acquaintance. By His grace I will not let one day pass without renewing my acquaintance with Him, giving Him some testimony of my love to Him, and getting from Him some sweet pledge of His constant favor toward me."

Beautiful utterance this is. It expresses a character of mind which, in this day of busy inquiry after knowledge, we all need - personal longings after Christ. May the blessed Spirit in us give that direction to our hearts. It is a hard lesson for some of us to learn, to reach enjoyments which lie beyond and above the provisions of nature. We are still prone to know Christ Himself "after the flesh," and to desire to find Him in the midst of the relations and circumstances of human life, and there only.

But this is not our calling; this is not the risen, heavenly life. It is hard to get beyond this, I know; but our calling calls us beyond it. We like the home, and the respect, and the security, and all the delights of our human relationships and circumstances, and would have Christ in the midst of them; but to know Him, and to have Him in such a way as tells us that He is a stranger on earth, and that we are to be strangers with Him, "this is a hard saying" to our poor fond hearts.

In John's Gospel, I may say, among other things, the Lord sets Himself to teach us this lesson.

The disciples were sorry at the thought of losing Him in the flesh - losing Him as in their daily walk and conversation with Him. But He lets them know that it was expedient for them that they should lose Him in that character, in order that they might know Him through the Holy Ghost, and ere long be with Him in heavenly places (chap. 16).

And this is again perceived in chapter 20. Mary Magdalene would have known the Lord again, as she had already known Him; but this must not be; this must be denied her. "Touch Me not," the Lord says to her. This was painful; but it was expedient - good for her then (just as it had been

already good for the disciples in chapter 16) to know that she was to lose Christ in the flesh. For Mary is now taught that she was to have fellowship with Him in the more blessed place of His ascension.

So the company at Jerusalem in the same chapter: "Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord." But this gladness was human. It was the joy of having recovered, as they judged, the One whom they had lost - Christ in the flesh. But their Lord at once calls them away from that communion and knowledge of Him, to the peace which His death had now made for them, and the life which His resurrection had now gained for them.

All this is healthful for our souls to ponder, for we are prone to be satisfied with another order of things. The sorrow that filled the hearts of the disciples at the thought of their Lord going away (the

"Rabboni" of Mary Magdalene - the disciples being "glad when they saw the Lord") shows the disposedness of the heart to remain with Christ in the midst of human relationships and circumstances, and not to go with a risen Christ to heavenly places.

How slow some of us are to learn this, dear brother! And yet our readiness of heart to learn it, and to practice it, is very much the measure of our readiness to desire to depart and be with Christ.

But all this I say to you as one that suggests a thought. Would that it were the experience of the soul! But I desire to have it so.

"His wisdom ever waketh,

His sight is never dim;

He knows the way He taketh,

And I will walk with Him."

Chapter 26

God Promising to Answer Prayer

The promises do not refer to prayers offered up one for another only, though this is a large part of the cases put forward in Scripture; "pray one for another," "for me also," "laboring earnestly for you in prayers," and many others; but the prayer of faith is not confined to this.

There are prayers for opening the door for the gospel, and for all men. If it be not the prayer of positive faith, we are told in all things to present our requests to God; but then the answer is, or may be only, that God's peace "which pass eth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

For the prayer of faith, or the promise to it, there are certain limits as to the certainty of answer, such as "in My name," "according to His will." "If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will"; "If two of you shall agree"; besides what stops prayer, as "a sin unto death."

I see no limits put to the expectation of faith if God gives it. If it be my will asking amiss to consume it on my lusts, I cannot expect an answer.

But the Lord contemplates the giving of faith, and certainty of answer for drying up of the fig tree, or removing a mountain; and whatever I can ask believing, I can receive it. This is a very important principle. But first, the limits on which formal promise of answer rests, besides special faith. The first passage I may refer to is this:

"If we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us:... and we know that we have the petitions."

This supposes the demand according to His will, and then we can reckon on His power accomplishing it. This is the general Christian confidence, a great boon to be assured of the acting of Him who is Almighty in the way of His will.

Next it is said, "If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will." Here I do not doubt there was special reference to the twelve, but in principle it applies to all Christians.

Where the mind is formed by the words of Christ, when they abide in one who lives in dependence on and confidence in Him-one thus abiding in Him, having Him in spirit, and his mind guided by Christ's word, his will is (so to speak) Christ's - he asks what he will, and it will come.

Another case is where any two are agreed; here individual will is set aside. It is where Christians have a common desire, and agree to present it to God. The deliberate, formal agreement supposes a common Christian mind, and it will be done.

So, when I ask, coming for what I can attach Christ's name to, under His auspices (influence), the Father will do it. Here, I doubt not too, the twelve are especially in view; still it is, in principle, every Christian.

A man cannot in faith bring Christ's name attached to his lusts; and all these statements suppose the disciple and faith, as James expressly teaches us, and indeed the Lord Himself. But there are other statements which cast us more generally on the goodness of God, and His interest in us, and show us that, where faith is in exercise, the answer will be there. "All things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." This supposes faith and intimacy, so to speak, with God. The heart is supposed to be in His interests, and then if there is faith as a grain of mustard seed, a mountain goes.

I do not doubt this kind of faith was much more when any, as the apostles, felt themselves interested in God's cause, identified with Him and it on the earth; but there is no limit to it. Where such faith is, such answer will be; and God is as much occupied now with the details of blessing for us, as for the great deeds of those days. It might be more palpable, more concentrated too then, but not more true.

Not a sparrow falls now without Him, more than then; and the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availing much is ever true; only one must, so to speak, put ourselves with God, for those to whom these things were said, were identified with Him in His interests on the earth.

This gave their prayers of course a peculiar place; but then if faith (that is, the operation of His Spirit and grace) brings me into His interest now even in details, the promise is there, and we can reckon on God and His power, exercised in love now as then. There is no limit; only it is the working of His Spirit in us, and hence faith that reckons on the answer.

Presenting our requests, subject to His will, is always right; of this we have an example even in Gethsemane; so Paul for his thorn in the flesh.

The answer will be more glorious and blessed than the request, even when it does not as asked answer it. See John 12 and Psalm 132. So Psalm 21, and even Paul's request about the thorn.

Let us trust His love, and this will not come short; and if He has given us faith to expect a specific answer, bless God for it. Only our will must not come in, even if it were answered (this was the case of the quails); but as a rule not, as James teaches. But where there is earnest faith, God will surely hear, though He may give us safeguards against our own will in it.

Chapter 27

God's Searching Ways

When the Lord judges, He always goes back to the first sin. This is much to be noticed. It is not otherwise when grace works in our souls. Suppose a Christian, for instance, to have been walking practically at a distance from God. To begin merely with what he was doing today or yesterday is not enough; we must go back to the beginning. The Lord will have him to look well and judge, and see what was the root of fruits so evidently bad. Thus even a fall is used by grace as the means of rousing the conscience by the Spirit of God. One is thus made to feel the low point to which one may have come. But the object of God in permitting it is to lead to a retracing of the steps to the first point of departure from Himself.

Here we have this principle applied to the judgment of Israel. It is not merely the calves that Jeroboam set for politico-religious purposes at Dan and Beth-el. They are re minded when and where their idolatry began; that is, in the wilderness. False gods were objects of worship there, the Moloch and the Chiun, that they took up all the time that the Levites were carrying the ark of the tabernacle, with the sons of Israel so demurely following. They had not got rid of the gods of Egypt then. They brought these vanities along with them into the wilderness; and now this is charged upon them. "But ye have borne the shrines of your king, and the basis [such is probably the meaning of the difficult word Chiun] of your images, the star of your god, which ye made to yourselves." Mark the circumstances. "Therefore will I cause you to go into captivity" (the deportation to the cities of the Medes) "beyond Damascus." Stephen says beyond Babylon (and so indeed was the fact), perhaps to distinguish from the Babylonish captivity. Such was the result of the old sin in the wilderness. No doubt that sin was more glaring at the end; the dark stream was always gathering further contributions to its volume. The mass of waters flowed more mightily down at its mouth than at the beginning of its course. Nevertheless, God always goes back to the source, and at last declares that because of the first departure did the final blow come. The captivity of Israel was the consequence of their forefathers' sin in the wilderness, and not merely of the sins they had added to it in the land God allotted them. Of course there were many and bitter aggravations in the land; but the evils which abounded in the land were the consequence of a failure to judge the wickedness in the wilderness. It is the same thing practically with every Christian.

No doubt grace can and does act in the case of a Christian now, even where he might have slipped seriously aside, but where there followed deep and thorough repentance, and the sense of forgiveness which the Spirit grants. This would become the last starting point, so to speak, and grace if it went back beyond it would use it for good. Not only is He faithful and just to forgive and cleanse, but He loves to bring him who has failed when restored into a better condition than he had ever known before. Witness Simon Peter at the end of the gospels and the beginning of the Acts. And so it will be with Israel at a future day. But self-judgment, wherever it is thorough, wherever there is a vindication of God against one's own sin, always brings one in the measure of the repentance into a corresponding measure of depth in God's grace never possessed before.

There are few things more common than to see a person converted in what may be called a superficial manner. Where this is the case, there is commonly a falling into open failure of one kind or another, sometimes a shameful breakdown by which the man really becomes nothing less than a bag of broken bones, thoroughly brought to naught in his own eyes. After this, he will be incomparably humbler and will have a more grateful as well as chastened sense of what God is than he had when first converted. Hence, although it be a shame to him that he required such a humiliating process, it is the triumph of divine grace to use his folly for putting him that is restored into a better condition than before he went astray.

But if Peter knew and heeded this, Saul of Tarsus did not require it; and I have no doubt that in the early work in the latter's soul the iron entered incomparably more deeply than into any one of the twelve. It is always indeed a matter for thankfulness, when a soul goes through a sound and grave work at the starting point; that is, when it is not all joy and comfort, but the conscience is enabled fully to be before God as to our sins, when we realize gravely all that we have been, and are thoroughly sifted out in His presence. Surely this inward work should not hinder confidence in God. This ought never to be; for grace is preached in the fullest and most absolute way when man is called and enabled to search out and confess what he is in God's sight. On the other hand, there is no need that one should have gone to great lengths of outward evil in act, in order to a profound feeling of depravity and ruin.

Paul had been, we may be sure, a more scrupulously moral man in all his days than any of the apostles; yet none fathomed the iniquity of his heart as he did. It is therefore very possible by grace to combine the two things, which indeed go together according to God and are dangerous if separated; a rich and unwavering sense of the grace of God in the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; and a deep (the deeper the better) moral process in the soul when it judges itself, and not its acts only, before God. It ought to be evident that this is the kind of conversion which morally most glorifies God. It is that which we see exemplified in the case of Saul of Tarsus. Hence, there never was a man who had less of self-righteousness, as far as I know - never one who equally recognized the grace of God. Consequently, wherever was a man made so great a blessing to the whole Church of God?

But where one at first has been drawn more by affection than by conscience, there always follows the work in conscience, where the conversion is real; even so, where the inward work has been comparatively superficial, there may be the need of many a moral dealing, sometimes in pain and shame, as we see in the case of Peter. I do not think that Peter would have been allowed to deny his Lord, and swear to it too, in a very public manner, unless there had been a good deal of self righteousness along with ardor which carried him easily into danger but was unable to bring him safely out. Still, the Lord is always good, and His grace is tender and considerate, as well as wholesome and holy. Differences there are in men, but never anything but what is good in God.

Chapter 28

The Good Samaritan

The lawyer who comes to Jesus, in Luke 10, is not the young ruler who comes to Him in Matthew 19, though the inquiry they each of them put is much the same, and might lead to the conclusion that it was one and the same person, and occasion.

But further, I believe the state of mind which suggested this inquiry was very different in the two individuals.

The young ruler evidently had some anxiety of conscience, which moved him to seek the counsel of so good a man as the Lord, as his religious thoughts told him He was. But the lawyer had no feelings of that kind at all. He was the mere advocate of the law, who would plead for it in the face of the doctrine and the way of Jesus.

The parable of the good Samaritan constitutes the answer which he receives - a parable which sets forth to perfection the love of one's neighbor, illustrating that great duty of the law.

The Samaritan stranger loves the poor waylaid man, we may say, as he loved himself. He could not have done more for himself in the like case than he did for that afflicted one. He spent his affections and his resources upon him - he gave him what his heart and what his hand could command. He had compassion on him, and bound up his wounds. He changes places with him, becoming as it were poor, that he might be rich, walking at his side while he sat him on his ass. And all this with unwearied, unchanging love, for he provided that all this care should be spent on him by others, yet at his own cost, till care was needed no more, and the healing was complete.

Was anything wanting? Nothing. This was indeed a picture of perfect love to one's neighbor; it was a love to him as to himself; it was doing for him all that he could have done for himself.

Well, says Jesus to the lawyer, "Go and do thou likewise."

The lawyer had come as the advocate of the law, and he finds Jesus the still more blessed advocate of it. There was a greatness and self-devotedness in the principles of it which the lawyer had never conceived, but which Jesus Himself was ever practicing.

The lawyer had come under the vain thought that he could stand by the law; but he finds (surely he did) that this greatness and self-devotedness of it were far more than he could ever attain or measure.

But besides all this, we have comfort in this parable; for it sets forth the Son of God as a benefactor as well as an example.

Had the lawyer come as a brokenhearted sinner, he would have listened to a very different application of the parable than that, "Go and do thou likewise." He would have been comforted by the assurance, that what the good Samaritan was to the waylaid stranger, such was the Son of God to the poor ruined, brokenhearted sinner. He would have heard that the Son of God when rich became poor, that by His poverty we might be made rich. He would have been told, that we should

never be left nor forsaken, but that our divine benefactor, like the Samaritan, would not rest till He had perfected His mercy in our settled and enduring blessing.

Such would have been the application of the parable, had the lawyer come in the spirit of a contrite sinner.

And how precious to know that we are invited to be DEBTORS to the true divine Samaritan, rather than expected to be imitators of Him. Well is it, right is it, fit is it, to follow in His steps - to be imitators of God as dear children - but better still to share, by faith, His grace and bountifulness. And though human thoughts would have it otherwise, more is He glorified by our being debtors to Him than imitators of Him; rather would the blessed Stranger from heaven gather us up in our misery, than see us follow after Him in His ways.

Oh, the legal, religious thoughts of the heart of man!

"I cannot serve Him as I ought,

No works have I to boast;

But I would glory in the thought

That I shall owe Him most."

Chapter 29

Exhortations From Hebrews: "Let Us"

"Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into His rest, any of you should seem to come short of it." Chap. 4:1.

"Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief." Chap. 4:11.

"Let us hold fast our profession" (chap. 4:14).

"Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." Chap. 4:16.

"Let us go on unto perfection" (chap. 6:1).

"Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith" (chap. 10:22).

"Let us hold fast the confession of the hope unwavering, (for He is faithful who has promised)" (chap. 10:23; J.N.D. Trans.).

"Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works." Chap. 10:24.

"Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us" (chap. 12:1).

"Let us run with patience the race that is set before us" (chap. 12:1).

"Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear" (chap. 12:28).

"Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach." Chap. 13:13.

"Let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name" (chap. 13:15).

Chapter 30

His Joy Is Greater Than Ours

The Church will have her joy in Christ, but Christ will have His greater joy in the Church. The strongest pulse of gladness that is to beat for eternity will be in the bosom of the Lord over His ransomed bride. In all things He is to have the pre-eminence; and, as in all things, so in this, His joy in her will be greater than hers in Him. J. G. B.

Chapter 31

Isaiah 53: Notes on Ministry

The Person who is the subject of Isaiah 53 is referred to in various ways more than forty times in the chapter. He grew up before Him "as a root out of a dry ground."

There is one thing that is said about Him that is very striking. "When we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him." That is the One who grew up in this world before God as "a root out of a dry ground," as a "tender plant." In Him God saw every beauty; in Him from first to last, God had delight, and from Him continually a sweet savor rose up. It was a savor of obedience- not a legal obedience, but the obedience of love.

How is it that in this poor world, this vast world, there are those who do see beauty in Him, and who do desire Him, whom the beauty of the Lord attracts? What has made it to be thus with you and with me and with every believer far and near? Who gave us the anointed eye, the opened ear? Who gave us the receiving and understanding heart? We sing it in a hymn:

"To Thee our all we owe;

The precious Savior, and the power

That makes Him precious too."

How precious that sovereign grace becomes to us as we go on and learn more of its sovereignty, its righteousness. Through that sovereign grace, it is no longer true of us that we see "no beauty that we should desire Him"; but we learn how little we see! Perhaps we see little beyond the fact that He is our Savior; but that is beauty, and God gives us in some measure to share His joys and thoughts of Him who grew up before Him as a root out of a dry ground.

What an Object there was on earth for God when Christ was here! On that Object His eye rested, and to that Object now His sovereign grace attracts.

There are several things among the many said about Him in this short chapter (to which really the last few verses of the preceding chapter belong) which tell out His glory in a special way. One is in those words, "The LORD hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." How that tells out the infinite glory of that same One! Sinless in Himself, this "root out of a dry ground," He is the One upon whom God can lay the iniquity of us all. How it tells out the glory of that One! In that way the memorials of His death bring Him before us in a special way as the Bearer of our sins in love to us and in love and obedience to God His Father.

What a theme for praise is Christ when the eye beholds His beauty, or a little of it, when He becomes not simply an Object of faith (that is first), but when He becomes an Object of love. As Peter says, "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." 1 Pet. 1:8.

"Perfect soon in joy before Thee,

We shall see Thee face to face."

How those words do refresh and strengthen our souls! Who can conceive what the perfection of joy and glory will be in His presence! We shall see Him face to face.

May God in His grace make Isaiah 53 exceedingly precious to us all.

Chapter 32

Ishmael

I have been thinking a little of Ishmael now and again lately, not only as in the Book of Genesis, but as in the New Testament, as in God's house as well as Abraham's. It is well to watch him closely and to deal with him decidedly, especially nowadays, when he is becoming a little bolder perhaps than he was wont to be. Ishmael is the scriptural personification of the religion of ordinances.

If we follow him a little carefully through Scripture, we shall find that he has acted, though always in character, yet in different forms and energies. I think I see him there as an insolent one, an accuser or reviler, an angry. ill-humored man, a seducer and a persecutor.

In Abraham's house, where first he appears (we will say), he was insolent (Gen. 21). Isaac was little more than a feeble suckling when he was a sturdy youth of fourteen years of age. He sports with this weaned infant; he mocks Isaac who was a fit mark for him. The flesh or strength of nature might well despise Isaac, for he was a child; he could not speak. He was weakness itself in the hand of his elder brother; he can do nothing for himself through very feebleness; another must take up his cause.

In the Pharisee's house (as also in Zaccheus's, Luke 19:7), this same Ishmael is a reviler (Luke 7). The poor woman was, it is true, a sinner of the city. She could no more gainsay that than Isaac could deny his insignificancy or feebleness. It was equally a fact. The poor woman must be silent under the reproach; she has earned it all.

In the house of the two brothers, Ishmael is again found, an angry, ill-humored man (Luke 15). The reception of so worthless a one as the prodigal was the elder brother's high provocation. He stays outside in proud and angry refusal to go into a house that could thus lose its character, or so far forget itself as to hazard its respectability with all proper people. He is in heat and ill temper at the way of grace.

In the churches of Galatia, the same Ishmael lurks as a seducer.

He does not stay outside because of indignation at the way of grace, that grace which had filled the house; but he gets inside to seduce those who were there from faith, the answer, the only answer, which a sinner has to make to that grace. He acts as a serpent, seeking to corrupt the mind from the simplicity that is in Christ. The same Ishmael had been in the same character at Jerusalem and at Antioch, spying our liberty (Gal. 2). Against the Apostle Paul, the Ishmael of Scripture was a persecutor (Gal. 5:11). Foiled as a serpent or a seducer, he will not give up the field, but uses his strength as a lion, and as such has had terrible sport indeed - not only in the day or person of the Apostle, but in times of papal as well as pagan Rome. Paul himself acted as a lion when he was of the mystic Ishmael (Acts 26:10).

This is the Ishmael of Scripture-this is the child of the bondwoman - this is the religion of flesh and blood- the religion of ordinances and impositions. And such have been its varied forms of action,

mocking, reviling, hating, seducing, persecuting.

The same Ishmael is in full vigor still. He is as sturdy a youth as he was in the day of Hagar. But this is our comfort. If he be not changed, neither is the divine mind concerning him, the divine purpose about him, nor the divine dealing with him. And it becomes our consolation and our wisdom to mark how this mind and purpose and dealing of God with the mystic Ishmael have been revealed from the beginning.

Abraham rejoiced over that feeble infant that was provoking the scorn and sporting from Ishmael. And Sarah demanded that her Isaac should dwell alone in the house, and that the bondwoman and her son should be cast out. And all this joy of Abraham and purpose of Sarah expressed the mind of God. This voice of Sarah is called "scripture" (see Gal. 4:30). The Lord would have it with the poor, helpless, insignificant soul that trusts in Him, as Sarah would have it with little Isaac, and rejoices over such as Abraham did.

So, in His day, Jesus was feasted and gladdened by the one whom the Ishmael-Pharisee was secretly accusing and reviling. Simon saw the poor woman as she was in herself; Jesus, while He allowed all that, saw her and boasted in her, and rejoiced in her, as faith and love had now made her. This was the divine answer to the Ishmael-reviling of a poor confessed sinner. And this is still God's own way, in the riches of His grace, silencing every tongue that would judge or accuse such. "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth."

So in the case of the prodigal, the joy of the father's heart, the delight of God in His own grace, answers the Ishmael elder brother. It was true, the younger son had been a great waster. And it was true, had his father's house cared only about its respectability in society, it would not have welcomed him back. But there was a heart in that house, such a heart as the morals or religion of respectable society does not understand. And the joy of such gratified affections is the excuse for the father's house and the answer given to the Ishmael ill-humor of the elder brother. "It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad." The feast is still spread in Abraham's house over the helpless one- in the father's house over the worthless one. God "delighteth in mercy." And He will be God still, and have His way, in spite of Ishmael.

In his turn, as we have already noticed, the Apostle, in the energy of the Holy Ghost, has to do with Ishmael. He watches his practices and attempts as the seducer. He exposes them and rebukes them as of man, and against God's truth and way from beginning to end. He contends with them, insisting, like Sarah, that he to whom these practices belonged, and all connected with him, should be turned out of doors. He would resist him as a seducer even to the death, and so expose him as a serpent to be ready to be torn in pieces by him as a lion. And this energy of the Apostle tells us the mind of the Spirit, who was the spring of it all.

Precious relief for our souls all this is! Doubly precious in a day like ours, when Ishmael is abroad again, in full vigor and activity. He changes, as we have seen, the form of his action, accommodating himself to circumstances. He must do that. He could not have killed many, but does what he can. He insults feebleness, reviles character, is indignant at grace, seduces from faith, or slays and tears those who still cleave to it; but in every form of his action he meets resistance from God.

Blessed, simple consolation! If we do not nowadays suffer from his word as a persecutor, we do from his tongue as a reviler. And there is a measure of suffering from the scorning of his life and his eye. Liberty in Christ, independence of man's traditions and of the elements of the world, refusal of the religiousness of flesh and blood, are still reproached and challenged. But the Holy Ghost stands with us and helps us. And that is our victory and joy. He still encourages - "Stand fast... in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free."

With what awful power the witchery of the Ishmael or religious principle shows itself in Matt. 27:6 and 25. The Jewish rulers had purchased the blood of Jesus, but they own the purchase money to be so defiled a thing that they will not put it to the uses of the temple. They own the presence of the house more awful than the presence of Him who dwelt in it.

So the Jewish multitude. They had been deeply moved by the things which Jesus had been doing and saying for years; but now, as in a moment, at the bidding of the religious authority, they change their speech and say, "Let Him be crucified."

What solemn witnesses are these to the fascinating, infatuating power of fleshly religion, the religion of law, of ordinances, and traditions, and human authority!

Chapter 33

It Is I Be Not Afraid

My dear friend, I can see only the Lord in all this which you are now passing through. I can see no enemy, no injustice to the creature, no triumph of evil, so brightly does the love and wisdom of God shine over it all.

God is perfecting that which concerns you; and these are His instruments of blessing to you, if accepted in His will and submitted to for His sake.

He does not cause all this wrong-doing, but He overrules all, permits all, even causing the wrong-doing of others to be a ministry of good to His dear children. Has He not declared, and will He not perform?

"There shall no evil befall thee." Psalm 91:10.

"All things work together for good" (Rom. 8:28). Did not Job say (though all his affliction was directly from the hand of Satan), "The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD"? Job 1:21.

Never did there seem such a triumph of the powers of darkness as when Christ was crucified and laid in the tomb. Thank God, things are not what they seem. It was the hour of God's victory; it was the overthrow of Satan's kingdom; it gave to the world a risen Christ, who lives forever.

Christ feared not to go by that way to accomplish the will of God. So, beloved, fear not to go by the way He is now leading you, even unto the death of self, reputation, and all, that you may rise in all the life of God.

It is not for man to appoint his steps. God in His providence has brought you by this way; accept it as God's will to you; take it as the cup the Father offers you. "The cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?" John 18:11.

The crucifixion of self, and the regulation of all right desires, can only be accomplished by true and perfect submission. The will is the essence of the body of self; and in order to have it brought into perfect harmony with God's will, we must submit to all the discipline of life as it comes to us in God's causive or permissive will.

We, as consecrated children, must acknowledge all as from the Lord. Be patient; trust Him; wait for the end. God will let no enemy, no wrong, triumph over us.

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God." Rom. 8:28.

"Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." Matt. 11:29, 30.

Chapter 34

Life and Times of Josiah: Part 1

2 Chronicles 34 and 35

Two thousand five hundred years have rolled away since King Josiah lived and reigned; but his history is pregnant with instruction, which can never lose its freshness or its power. The moment at which he ascended the throne of his fathers was one of peculiar gloom and heaviness. The tide of corruption, swollen by many a tributary stream, had risen to the highest point; and the sword of judgment, long held back in divine patience and long-suffering, was about to fall in terrible severity upon the city of David. The brilliant reign of Hezekiah had been followed by a long and dreary period of fifty-five years, under the sway of his son Manasseh; and, albeit the rod of correction had proved effectual in leading this great sinner to repentance and amendment, yet no sooner had the scepter fallen from his hand, than it was seized by his godless and impenitent son Amon, who "did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, as did Manasseh his father: for Amon sacrificed unto all the carved images which Manasseh his father had made, and served them; and humbled not himself before the LORD, as Manasseh his father had humbled himself; but Amon trespassed more and more. And his servants conspired against him, and slew him in his own house.... and the people of the land made Josiah his son king in his stead." 2 Chron. 33:22-25.

Thus, then, Josiah, a child of eight years, found himself on the throne of David, surrounded by the accumulated evils and errors of his father and his grandfather, yea, by forms of corruption which had been introduced by no less a personage than Solomon himself. If the reader will just turn, for a moment, to 2 Kings 23, he will find a marvelous picture of the condition of things at the opening of Josiah's history. There were "idolatrous priests, whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense in the high places in the cities of Judah, and in the places round about Jerusalem; them also that burned incense unto Baal, to the sun, and to the moon, and to the planets, and to all the host of heaven."

Reader, ponder this! Only think of kings of Judah, successors of David, ordaining priests to burn incense to Baal. Bear in mind, too, that each of these kings of Judah was responsible to "write him a copy of this law in a book," which he was to keep by him, and in which he was to "read therein all the days of his life; that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them." (See Deut. 17:18, 19.) Alas! alas! how sadly had they departed from "all the 'words" of the law, when they could actually set about ordaining priests to burn incense to false gods!

But, further, there were "horses that the kings of Judah had given to the sun," and that, moreover, "at the entering in of the house of the LORD," and "chariots of the sun," and "high places... which Solomon the king of Israel had builded for Ashtoreth the abomination of the Zidonians, and for Chemosh the abomination of the Moabites, and for Milcom the abomination of the children of Ammon."

All this is most solemn, and worthy of the serious consideration of the Christian reader. We certainly ought not to pass it over as a mere fragment of ancient history. It is not as though we were reading the historic records of Babylon, of Persia, of Greece, or of Rome. We should not marvel at the kings of those nations burning incense to Baal, ordaining idolatrous priests, and worshiping the host of heaven. But when we see kings of Judah, the sons and successors of David, children of Abraham, men who had access to the book of the law of God, and who were responsible to make that book the subject of their profound and constant study - when we see such men falling under the power of dark and debasing superstition - it sounds in our ears a warning voice, to which we cannot, with impunity, refuse to give heed. We should bear in mind that all these things have been written for our learning; and although it may be said that we are not in danger of being led to burn incense to Baal, or to worship the host of heaven, yet, we may be assured, we have need to attend to the admonitions and warnings with which the Holy Ghost has furnished us in the history of God's ancient people. "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." 1 Cor. 10:11. These words of the inspired Apostle, though directly referring to the actings of Israel in the wilderness, may, nevertheless, apply to the entire history of that people - a history fraught with the deepest instruction from first to last.

But how are we to account for all those gross and terrible evils into which Solomon and his successors were drawn? What was their origin? NEGLECT OF THE WORD OF GOD. This was the source of all the mischief and all the sorrow. Let professing Christians remember this. Let the whole Church of God remember it. The neglect of the Holy Scriptures was the fruitful source of all those errors and corruptions which blot the page of Israel's history, and which brought down upon them many heavy strokes of Jehovah's governmental rod. "Concerning the works of men, by the word of Thy lips I have kept Me from the paths of the destroyer." Psalm 17:4. "From a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." 2 Tim. 3:15-17.

In these two precious quotations, we have the Word of God presented in its twofold virtue; it not only perfectly preserves us from evil, but perfectly furnishes us unto all good - it keeps us from the paths of the destroyer, and guides us in the ways of God.

How important, then, is the study, the diligent, earnest, prayerful study of Holy Scripture! How needful to cultivate a spirit of reverential submission in all things to the authority of the Word of God! Mark how continually and how earnestly this was impressed upon the ancient people of God. How often were such accents as the following sounded in their ears!

"Now therefore hearken, 0 Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers giveth you. You shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish aught from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.... Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes,

and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we tall upon Him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day? Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons." Deut. 4:1-9.

Let it be carefully noticed here, that "wisdom and understanding" consist simply in having the commandments of God treasured in the heart. This, moreover, was to be the basis of Israel's moral greatness, in view of the nations around them. It was not the learning of the schools of Egypt, or of the Chaldeans. No; it was the knowledge of the Word of God, and attention thereto - the spirit of implicit obedience in all things to the holy statutes and judgments of the Lord their God. This was Israel's wisdom, this their true and real greatness, this their impregnable bulwark against every foe - their moral safeguard against every evil.

And does not the selfsame thing hold good with respect to God's people at the present moment? Is not obedience to the Word of God our wisdom, our safeguard, and the foundation of all true moral greatness? Assuredly! Our wisdom is to obey. The obedient soul is safe, happy, and fruitful. As it was, so it is. If we study the history of David and his successors, we shall find, without so much as a single exception, that those who yielded obedience to the commandments of God were safe, happy, prosperous, and influential. And so it will ever be. Obedience will always yield its own precious and fragrant fruits - not that its fruits should be our motive for rendering obedience. We are called to be obedient, irrespective of everything.

Now, it is obvious that, in order to be obedient to the Word of God, we must be acquainted with it; and in order to be acquainted with it, we must carefully study it. And how should we study it? With an earnest desire to understand its contents, with profound reverence for its authority, and with an honest purpose to obey its dictates, cost what it may. If we have grace to study Scripture, in some small degree, after this fashion, we may expect to grow in knowledge and wisdom.

But alas! there is a fearful amount of ignorance of Scripture in the professing church. We are deeply impressed with a sense of this; and we may as well, at this point, just tell the reader that our main object in calling his attention to the subject of Josiah and his times is to wake up in his soul an intense desire after a closer acquaintance with God's holy Word, and a more entire bowing down of his whole moral being - heart, conscience, and understanding - to that perfect standard.

We feel the commanding importance of this subject; and we must discharge what we believe to be a sacred duty to the souls of our readers, and to the truth of God. The powers of darkness are abroad. The enemy is succeeding to an appalling extent in drawing hearts after various forms of error and evil, in casting dust in the eyes of God's people, and in blinding the minds of men. True, we have not got Ashtoreth, Chemosh, and Milcom; but we have Ritualism, Infidelity, and Spiritualism. We have not to cry out against burning incense to Baal, and worshiping the host of heaven; but we have something far more ensnaring and dangerous. We have the ritualist with his sensuous and attractive rites and ceremonies; we have the rationalist with his learned and plausible reasonings; we have the spiritualist with his boasted converse with the spirits of the departed.

We speak plainly, and deal faithfully, with living facts around us. We must do so, even at the risk of giving offense to some. We certainly do not wish to offend anyone, but we must be true to our responsibility. We hold that one great object of ministry, whether oral or written, is to bring the Word of God to bear on hearts and consciences, with direct reference to the principles and influences abroad at the moment. No doubt, there are certain great cardinal truths - truths lying at the foundation of Christianity - the unfolding and application of which must always be in place, always important. But, at the same time, we believe that the public teacher or writer is called upon, at times, to deal with certain forms of error and evil actually at work, and to bring the edge of truth to bear thereon. This surely may be done in such a way as not to wound, needlessly, the feelings of individuals. But even though some should feel hurt, we can only say, It is far better to be wounded by a friend than destroyed by an enemy; and however it may be, we cannot withhold a word of solemn warning, when we contemplate the rising tide of evil- a tide augmented every hour by the influx of these three broad and rapid streams of Ritualism, Rationalism, and Spiritualism.

We doubt if the minds of Christians generally are alive to the real character and extent of these formidable influences. There are at this moment millions of souls throughout the length and breadth of the professing church, who are building their hopes for eternity upon the sandy foundation of ordinances, rites, and ceremonies. There is a most powerful revival of the superstitions of the middle ages - a return to the traditions of the Fathers, as they are called - an intense longing after those things which gratify the senses - music, painting, architecture, vestments, lights, incense, all the appliances, in short, of a gorgeous and sensuous religion. The theology, the worship, and the discipline of the various churches of the Reformation are found insufficient to meet the religious cravings of the soul. They are too severely simple to satisfy hearts that long for something tangible on which to lean for support and comfort - something to feed the senses and fan the flame of devotion.

Hence the strong tendency of the religious mind in the direction of what is called Ritualism. If the soul has not got hold of the truth, if there is not the living link with Christ, if the supreme authority of Holy Scripture be not set up in the heart, there is no safeguard against the powerful and fascinating influences of ceremonial religiousness. The most potent efforts of mere intellectualism, eloquence, logic, all the varied charms of literature, are found to be utterly insufficient to hold that class of minds to which we are now referring. They must have the forms and offices of religion; to these they will flock; round these they will gather; on these they will build.

It is painfully interesting to mark the efforts put forth in various quarters to act upon the masses and keep the people together. It is very evident to the thoughtful Christian, that those who put forth such efforts must be sadly deficient in that profound faith in the power of the Word of God, and of the cross of Christ, which swayed the heart of the Apostle Paul. They cannot be fully aware of the solemn fact that Satan's grand object is to keep souls in ignorance of divine revelation, to hide from them the glory of the cross, and of the Person of Christ. For this end he is using Ritualism, Rationalism, and Spiritualism, now, just as he used Ashtoreth, Chemosh, and Milcom, in the days of Josiah. "There is no new thing under the sun." The devil has ever hated the truth of God, and he will leave no stone unturned to keep it from acting on the heart of man. Hence it is that he has rites and ceremonies for one man; the powers of reason for another; and when men tire of both, and begin to sigh for something satisfying, he leads them into converse and communion with the spirits of the departed. By all alike are souls led away from the Holy Scriptures, and from the blessed

Savior which those Scriptures reveal.

It is solemn and affecting beyond expression to think of all this, and not less so to contemplate the lethargy and indifference of those who profess to have the truth. We do not stop to inquire what it is that ministers to this lethargic state of many professors. That is not our object.. We desire, by the grace of God, to see them thoroughly roused out of it, and to this end it is that we call their attention to the influences that are abroad, and to the only divine safeguard against them. We cannot but feel deeply for our children growing up in such an atmosphere as that which at present surrounds us, and which will become yet darker and darker. We long to see more earnestness on the part of Christians in seeking to store the minds of the young with the precious and soul-saving knowledge of the Word of God. The child Josiah and the child Timothy should incite us to greater diligence in the instruction of the young, whether in the bosom of the family, in the Sunday school, or in any way we can reach them. It will not do for us to fold our arms and say, "When God's time comes, our children will be converted; and, till then, our efforts are useless." This is a fatal mistake. "He [God] is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him" (Heb. 11:6). He blesses our prayerful efforts in the instruction of our children. And further, who can estimate the blessing of being early led in the right way, of having the character formed amid holy influences, and the mind stored with what is true, and pure, and lovely? On the other hand, who will undertake to set forth the evil consequences of allowing our children to grow up in ignorance of divine things? Who can portray the evils of a polluted imagination, of a mind stored with vanity, folly, and falsehood, of a heart familiarized from infancy with scenes of moral degradation? We do not hesitate to say that Christians incur very heavy and awful responsibility in allowing the enemy to preoccupy the minds of their children at the very period when they are most plastic and susceptible.

True, there must be the quickening power of the Holy Ghost. It is as true of the children of Christians as of any other, that they "must be born again." We all understand this. But does this fact touch the question of our responsibility in reference to our children? Is it to cripple our energies or hinder our earnest efforts? Assuredly not. We are called upon, by every argument, divine and human, to shield our precious little ones from every evil influence, and to train them in that which is holy and good. And not only should we so act in respect to our own children, but also in respect to the thousands around us who are like sheep having no shepherd, and who may each say, alas! with too much truth, "No man cared for my soul."

May the foregoing pages be used by God's Spirit to act powerfully on the hearts of all who may read them, that so there may be a real awakening to a sense of our high and holy responsibilities to the souls around, and a shaking off of that terrible deadness and coldness over which we have all to mourn.

Chapter 35

Life and Times of Josiah: Part 2

In studying the history of Josiah and his times, we learn one special and priceless lesson; namely, the value and authority of the Word of God. It would be utterly impossible for human language to set forth the vast importance of such a lesson - a lesson for every age, for every clime, for every condition, for the individual believer, and for the whole Church of God. The supreme authority of Holy Scripture should be deeply impressed on every heart. It is the only safeguard against the many forms of error and evil which abound on every hand. Human writings, no doubt, have their value; they may interest the mind as a reference, but they are perfectly worthless as authority.

We need to remember this. There is a strong tendency in the human mind to lean upon human authority. Hence it has come to pass, that millions throughout the professing church have virtually been deprived altogether of the Word of God, from the fact that they have lived and died under the delusion that they could not know it to be the Word of God apart from human authority. Now this is in reality throwing the Word of God overboard. If that Word is of no avail without man's authority, then, we maintain, it is not God's Word at all. It does not matter in the smallest degree what the authority is, the effect is the same. God's Word is declared to be insufficient without something of man to give the certainty that it is God who is speaking.

This is a most dangerous error, and its root lies far deeper in the heart than many of us are aware. It has often been said to us, when quoting passages of Scripture, "How do you know that that is the Word of God?" What is the point of such a question? Plainly to overthrow the authority of the Word. The heart that could suggest such an inquiry does not want to be governed by Holy Scripture at all. The will is concerned. Here lies the deep secret. There is the consciousness that the Word condemns something which the heart wants to hold and cherish, and hence the effort to set the Word aside altogether.

But how are we to know that the book which we call the Bible is the Word of God? We reply, It carries its own credentials with it. It bears its own evidence upon every page, in every paragraph, in every line. True, it is only by the teaching of the Holy Spirit, the divine Author of the Book, that the evidence can be weighed, and the credentials appreciated. But we do not need man's voice to accredit God's Book; or, if we do, we are, most assuredly, on infidel ground as regards divine revelation. If God cannot speak directly to the heart - if He cannot give the assurance that it is He Himself who speaks - then where are we? Whither shall we turn? If God cannot make Himself heard and understood, can man do it better? Can he improve upon God? Can man's voice give us more certainty? Can the authority of the church, the decrees of general councils, the judgment of the Fathers, the opinion of the doctors, give us more certainty than God Himself? If so, we are just as completely at sea - just as thoroughly in the dark - as though God had not spoken at all. Of course, if God has not spoken, we are completely in the dark; but if He has spoken, and yet we cannot know His voice without man's authority to accredit it, where lies the difference? Is it not plain to the reader of these lines, that if God in His great mercy has given us a revelation, it must be sufficient of itself; and, on the other hand, that any revelation which is not sufficient of itself

cannot possibly be divine? And, further, is it not equally plain that if we cannot believe what God says, because He says it, we have no safer ground to go upon when man presumes to affix his accrediting seal?

Let us not be misunderstood. What we insist upon is this: the all-sufficiency of a divine revelation apart from and above all human writings, ancient, medieval, or modern. We value human writings; we value sound criticism; we value profound and accurate scholarship; we value the light of true science and philosophy; we value the testimony of pious travelers who have sought to throw light upon the sacred text; we value all those books that open up to us the intensely interesting subject of biblical antiquities; in short, we value everything that tends to aid us in the study of the Holy Scriptures; but, after all, we return with deeper emphasis to our assertion as to the all-sufficiency and supremacy of the Word of God. That Word must be received on its own divine authority, without any human recommendation, or else it is not the Word of God to us. We believe that God can give us the certainty in our own souls that the Holy Scriptures are, in very deed, His own Word. If He does not give it, no man can; and if He does, no man need. Thus the inspired Apostle says to his son Timothy, "Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." 2 Tim. 3:14, 15.

How did Timothy know that the Holy Scriptures were the Word of God? He knew it by divine teaching. He knew of whom he had learned. Here lay the secret. There was a living link between his soul and God, and he recognized in Scripture the very voice of God. Thus it must ever be. It will not do merely to be convinced in the intellect, by human arguments, human evidences, and human apologies, that the Bible is the Word of God; we must know its power in the heart and on the conscience by divine teaching; and, when this is the case, we shall no more need human proofs of the divinity of the Book than we need a candle at noonday to prove that the sun is shining. We shall then believe what God says because He says it, and not because man accredits it, nor because we feel it. "Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness" (Jas. 2:23). He did not need to go to the Chaldeans or to the Egyptians in order to find out from them if what he had heard was in reality the word of God. No, no; he knew whom he had believed, and this gave him holy stability. He could say, beyond all question, God has established a link between my soul and Himself by means of His Word, which no power of earth or hell can ever snap. This is the true ground for every believer - man, woman, or child, in all ages, and under all circumstances. This was the ground for Abraham and Josiah, for Luke and Theophilus, for Paul and Timothy; and it must be the ground for the writer and the reader of these words, else we shall never be able to stand against the rising tide of infidelity which is sweeping away the very foundations on which thousands of professors are reposing.

However, we may well inquire, Can a merely national profession, a hereditary faith, an educational creed, sustain the soul in the presence of an audacious skepticism that reasons about everything and believes nothing? Impossible! We must be able to stand before the skeptic, the rationalist, and the infidel, and say, in all the calmness and dignity of a divinely wrought faith, "I know whom I have believed."... God has spoken, and His voice reaches the heart. It makes itself heard above the din and confusion of this world, and all the strife and controversy of professing Christians. It gives rest and peace, strength and fixedness, to the believing heart and mind. The opinions of men may

perplex and confound. We may not be able to thread our way through the labyrinths of human systems of theology; but God's voice speaks in Holy Scripture - speaks to the heart - speaks to me. This is life and peace. It is all I need. Human writings may now go for what they are worth, seeing I have all I need in the ever flowing fountain of inspiration - the peerless, precious Volume of my God.

But let us now turn to Josiah and see how all that we have been dwelling upon finds its illustration in his life and times.

"Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign" (2 Chron. 34:1). This tells a tale as to the condition and ways of God's people. Josiah's father had been murdered by his own servants after a brief and evil reign of two years, in the twenty-fourth year of his age. Such things ought not to have been. They were the sad fruit of sin and folly - the humiliating proofs of Judah's departure from Jehovah. But God was above all; and although we should not have expected ever to find a child of eight years of age on the throne of David, yet that child could find his sure resource in the God of his fathers, so that, in this case as in all others, "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Rom. 5:20). The very fact of Josiah's youth and inexperience only afforded an occasion for the display of divine grace, and the setting forth of the value and power of the Word of God.

This pious child was placed in a position of peculiar difficulty and temptation. He was surrounded by errors in various forms and of long standing; but "He did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the ways of David his father, and declined neither to the right hand, nor to the left. For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father: and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images."

This was a good beginning. It is a great matter, while the heart is yet tender, to have it impressed with the fear of the Lord. It preserves it from a host of evils and errors. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Pro. 9:10); and it taught this pious youth what was "right," and to adhere to it with unswerving fixedness of purpose. There is great force and value in the expression, "He did that which was right in the sight of the LORD." It was not that which was right in his own eyes, nor yet in the eyes of the people, nor in the eyes of those that had gone before him, but simply what was right in the sight of the Lord. This is the solid foundation of all right action. Until the fear of the Lord gets its true place in the heart, there can be nothing right, nothing wise, nothing holy. How can there be, if indeed that fear is the beginning of wisdom? We may do many things through the fear of man, many things through force of habit, through surrounding influences, but never can we do what is really right in the sight of the Lord, until our hearts are brought to understand the fear of His holy name. This is the grand regulating principle. It imparts seriousness, earnestness, and reality - rare and admirable qualities! It is an effectual safeguard against levity and vanity. A man or a child who habitually walks in the fear of God is always earnest and sincere, always free from trifling and affectation, from assumption and bombast. Life has a purpose, the heart has an object, and this gives intensity to the whole course and character.

But, further, we read of Josiah that he "walked in the ways of David his father, and declined neither to the right hand, nor to the left." What a testimony for the Holy Ghost to bear concerning a young man! How we do long for this plain decision! It is invaluable at all times, but especially in a day of laxity and latitudinarianism, of false liberality, and spurious charity, like the present. It imparts great

peace of mind. A vacillating man is never peaceful; he is always tossed to and fro. "A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways." He tries to please everybody, and, in the end, pleases nobody. The decided man, on the contrary, is he who feels he has "to please but One." This gives unity and fixedness to the life and character. It is an immense relief to be thoroughly done with men-pleasing and eye-service - to be able to fix the eye upon the Master alone, and go on with Him, through evil report and through good report. True, we may be misunderstood and misrepresented, but that is a very small matter indeed; our great business is to walk in the divinely appointed path, declining "neither to the right hand, nor to the left." We are convinced that plain decision is the only thing for the servant of Christ at the present moment, for so surely as the devil finds us wavering, he will bring every engine into play in order to drive us completely off the plain and narrow path. May God's Spirit work more mightily in our souls, and give us increased ability to say, "My heart is fixed, 0 God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise." Psalm 57:7.

We shall now proceed to consider the great work which Josiah was raised up to accomplish; but, ere doing so, we must ask the reader to notice particularly the words already referred to; namely, "In the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father." Here, we may rest assured, lay the true basis of all Josiah's valuable service. He began by seeking after

God. Let young Christians ponder this deeply. Hundreds, we fear, have made shipwreck by rushing prematurely into work. They have become occupied and engrossed with their service before the heart was rightly established in the fear and love of God. This is a very serious error indeed, and we have met numbers within the last few years who have fallen into it. We should ever remember that those whom God uses much in public, He trains in secret, and, further, that all His most honored servants have been more occupied with their Master than with their work. It is not that we undervalue work; by no means; but we do find that all those who have been signally owned of God, and who have pursued a long and steady course of service and Christian testimony, have begun with much deep and earnest heart-work, in the secret of the divine presence. And, on the other hand, we have noticed that when men have rushed prematurely into public work - when they began to teach before they had begun to learn - they have speedily broken down and gone back.

It is well to remember this. God's plants are deeply rooted, and often slow of growth. Josiah "began to seek... God" four years before he began his public work. There was in his case a firm groundwork of genuine personal piety on which to erect the superstructure of active service. This was most needful. He had a great work to do. "High places, and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images" abounded on all hands, and called for no ordinary faithfulness and decision. Where were these to be had? In the divine treasury, and there alone. Josiah was but a child, and many of those who had introduced the false worship were men of years and experience. But he set himself to seek the Lord. He found his resource in the God of his father David. He betook himself to the fountainhead of all wisdom and power, and there gathered up strength wherewith to gird himself for what lay before him.

This, we repeat, was most needful; it was absolutely indispensable. The accumulated rubbish of ages and generations lay before him. One after another of his predecessors had added to the pile; and, notwithstanding the reformation effected in the days of Hezekiah, it would seem as though all

had to be done over again. Hearken to the following appalling catalog of evils and errors. "In the twelfth year he [Josiah] began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images. And they brake down the altars of Baalim in his presence; and the images, that were on high above them, he cut down; and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images, he brake in pieces, and made dust of them, and strewed it upon the graves of them that had sacrificed unto them. And he burnt the bones of the priests upon their altars, and cleansed Judah and Jerusalem. And so did he in the cities of Manasseh, and Ephraim, and Simeon, even unto Naphtali, with their mattocks round about. And when he had broken down the altars and the groves, and had beaten the graven images into powder, and cut down all the idols throughout all the land of Israel, he returned to Jerusalem.

See also the narrative given in 2 Kings 23, where we have a much more detailed list of the abominations with which this devoted servant of God had to grapple. We do not quote any further. Enough has been given to show the fearful lengths to which even the people of God may go when once they turn aside, in the smallest measure, from the authority of Holy Scripture. We feel that this is one special lesson to be learned from the deeply interesting history of this best of Judah's kings, and we fondly trust it may be learned effectually. It is indeed a grand and all-important lesson. The moment a man departs the breadth of a hair from Scripture, there is no accounting for the monstrous extravagance into which he may rush. We may feel disposed to marvel how such a man as Solomon could ever be led to build high places "for Ashtoreth the abomination of the Zidonians, and for Chemosh the abomination of the Moabites, and for Milcom the abomination of the children of Ammon." But then we can easily see how having, in the first place, disobeyed the word of his Lord, in going to those nations for wives, he easily enough fell into the deeper error of adopting their worship.

But, Christian reader, let us remember that all the mischief, all the corruption and confusion, all the shame and dishonor, all the reproach and blasphemy, had its origin in the neglect of the Word of God. We cannot possibly ponder this fact too deeply. It is solemn, impressive, and admonitory beyond expression. It has ever been a special design of Satan to' lead God's people away from Scripture. He will use anything and everything for this end - tradition - the church, so-called - expediency - human reason - popular opinion - reputation and influence - character, position, and usefulness - all those he will use in order to get the heart and conscience away from that one golden sentence - that divine, eternal motto, "IT IS WRITTEN." All that enormous pile of error which our devoted young monarch was enabled to grind into dust, and beat into powder - all, all had its origin in the gross neglect of this most precious sentence. It mattered little to Josiah that all these things could boast of antiquity and the authority of the fathers of the Jewish nation. Neither was he moved by the thought that these altars and high places, these groves and images, might be regarded as proofs of largeness of heart, breadth of mind, and a liberality of spirit that spurned all narrowness, bigotry, and intolerance - that would not be confined within the narrow bounds of Jewish prejudice, but could travel forth through the wide, wide world, and embrace all in the circle of charity and brotherhood. None of these things, we are persuaded, moved him. If they were not based upon, "Thus saith the LORD," he had but one thing to do with them, and that was to beat them into powder."

Chapter 36

Life and Times of Josiah: Part 3

2 Chronicles 34 and 35

The various periods in the life of Josiah are very strongly marked. "In the eighth year of his reign,... he began to seek after the God of David his father." "In the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem." And "in the eighteenth year of his reign, when he had purged the land, and the house, he sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, and Maaseiah the governor of the city, and Joah the son of Joahaz the recorder, to repair the house of the LORD his God."

Now in all this we can mark that progress which ever results from a real purpose of heart to serve the Lord. "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." Pro. 4:18. Such was the path of Josiah; and such too, may be the path of the reader, if only he is influenced by the same earnest purpose. It does not matter what the circumstances may be. We may be surrounded by the most hostile influences, as Josiah was in his day; but a devoted heart, an earnest spirit, a fixed purpose, will, through grace, lift us above all, and enable us to press forward from stage to stage of the path of true discipleship.

If we study the first twelve chapters of the book of Jeremiah, we shall be able to form some idea of the condition of things in the days of Josiah. There we meet with such passages as the following: "I will utter my judgments against them touching all their wickedness, who have forsaken Me, and have burned incense unto other gods, and worshiped the works of their own hands. Thou therefore gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee: be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them." "Wherefore I will yet plead with you, saith the LORD, and with your children's children will I plead. For pass over the isles of Chittim, and see; and send unto Kedar, and consider diligently, and see if there be such a thing. Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods? but My people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit." So also, in the opening of chapter 3, we find the most terrible imagery used to set forth the base conduct of "backsliding Israel" and "treacherous" Judah. Hearken to the following glowing language in chapter 4: "Thy way and thy doings have procured these things unto thee; this is thy wickedness, because it is bitter, because it reacheth unto thine heart. My bowels, my bowels! I am pained at my very heart; my heart maketh a noise in me; I cannot hold my peace, because thou hast heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war. Destruction upon destruction is cried; for the whole land is spoiled: suddenly are my tents spoiled, and my curtains in a moment. How long shall I see the standard, and hear the sound of the trumpet? For My people is foolish, they have not known Me; they are sottish children, and they have none understanding; they are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge. I beheld the earth, and, lo, it was without form, and void; and the heavens, and they had no light. I beheld the mountains, and, lo, they trembled, and all the hills moved lightly. I beheld, and, lo, there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens were fled. I beheld, and, lo, the fruitful place was a wilderness, and all the cities thereof were broken down at the presence of the LORD, and by His fierce anger."

What vivid language! The whole scene seems, in the vision of the prophet, reduced to primeval chaos and darkness. In short, nothing could be more gloomy than the aspect here presented. The whole of these opening chapters should be carefully studied if we would form a correct judgment of the times in which Josiah's lot was cast. They were evidently times characterized by deep-seated and widespread corruptions in every shape and form. High and low, rich and poor, learned and ignorant, prophets, priests, and people-all presented an appalling picture of hollowness, deceit, and heartless wickedness, which could only be faithfully portrayed by an inspired pen.

But why dwell upon this? Why multiply quotations in proof of the low moral condition of Israel and Judah in the days of King Josiah? Mainly to show that, no matter what may be our surroundings, we can individually serve the Lord, if only there be the purpose of heart to do so. Indeed, it is in the very darkest times that the light of true devotedness shines forth most brightly. It is thrown into relief by the surrounding gloom. The very circumstances which indolence and unfaithfulness would use as a plea for yielding to the current, will only furnish a devoted spirit with a plea for making head against it. If Josiah had looked around him, what would he have seen? Treachery, deceit, corruption, and violence. Such was the state of public morals. And what of religion? Errors and evils in every imaginable shape. Some of these were hoary with age. They had been instituted by Solomon and left standing by Hezekiah. Their foundations had been laid amid the splendors of the reign of Israel's wisest and wealthiest monarch; and the most pious and devoted of Josiah's predecessors had left them as they found them.

Who then was Josiah that he should presume to overturn such venerable institutions? What right had he, a mere youth, raw and inexperienced, to set himself in opposition to men so far beyond him in wisdom, intelligence, and mature judgment? Why not leave things as he found them? Why not allow the current to flow peacefully on through those channels which had conducted it for ages and generations? Disruptions are hazardous. There is always great risk in disturbing old prejudices.

These and a thousand kindred questions might, doubtless, have exercised the heart of Josiah; but the answer was simple, direct, clear, and conclusive. It was not the judgment of Josiah against the judgment of his predecessors, but it was the judgment of God against all. This is a most weighty principle for every child of God and every servant of Christ. Without it we can never make head against the tide of evil which is flowing around us. It was this principle which sustained Luther in the terrible conflict which he had to wage with the whole of Christendom. He too, like Josiah, had to lay the ax to the root of old prejudices, and shake the very foundation of opinions and doctrines which had held almost universal sway in the church for over a thousand years. How was this to be done? Was it by setting up the judgment of Martin Luther against the judgment of popes and cardinals, councils and colleges. bishops and doctors? Assuredly not. This would never have brought about the Reformation. It was not Luther versus Christendom, but Holy Scripture versus error.

Reader, ponder this! Yes, ponder it deeply. We feel it is a grand and all-important lesson for this moment, as it surely was for the days of Luther, and for the days of Josiah. We long to see the supremacy of Holy Scripture-the paramount authority of the Word of God - the absolute sovereignty of divine revelation reverently owned throughout the length and breadth of the Church

of God. We are convinced that the enemy is diligently seeking, in all quarters and by all means, to undermine the authority of the Word, and to weaken its hold upon the human conscience. And it is because we feel this that we seek to raise, again and again, a note of solemn warning, as also to set forth, according to our ability, the vital importance of submitting in all things to the inspired testimony - the voice of God in Scripture. It is not sufficient to render a merely formal assent to that popular statement, "The Bible, and the Bible alone, is the religion of Protestants." We want more than this. We want to be in all things absolutely governed by the authority of Scripture-not by our fellow mortal's interpretation of Scripture, but by Scripture itself. We want to have the conscience in a condition to yield, at all times, a true response to the teachings of the divine Word.

This is what we have so vividly illustrated in the life and times of Josiah, and particularly in the transactions of the eighteenth year of his reign, to which we shall now call the reader's attention. This year was one of the most memorable, not only in the history of Josiah, but in the annals of Israel. It was signalized by two great facts; namely, the discovery of the book' of the law, and the celebration of the feast of the passover. Stupendous facts! facts which have left their impress upon this most interesting period, and rendered it pre-eminently fruitful in instruction to the people of God in all ages.

It is worthy of note that the discovery of the book of the law was made during the progress of Josiah's reformatory measures. It affords one of the ten thousand proofs of that great practical principle. that "unto every one that hath shall be given." And again, "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine."

"Now in the eighteenth year of his reign, when he had purged the land, and the house, he sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, and Maaseiah the governor of the city, and Joah the son of Joahaz the recorder, to repair the house of the LORD his God. And when they came to Hilkiah the high priest, they delivered the money that was brought into the house of God.... And when they brought out the money that was brought into the house of the LORD, Hilkiah the priest found a book of the law of the LORD given by Moses. And Hilkiah answered and said to Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD. And Hilkiah delivered the book to Shaphan. And Shaphan carried the book to the king.... And Shaphan read it before the king. And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the law, that he rent his clothes." 2 Chron. 34:8-19.

Here we have a tender conscience bowing under the action of the Word of God. This was one special charm in the character of Josiah. He was in truth a man of a humble and a contrite spirit, who trembled at the Word of God. Would that we all knew more of this! It is a most valuable feature of the Christian character. We certainly do need to feel, much more deeply, the weight, authority, and seriousness of Scripture. Josiah had no question whatever in his mind as to the genuineness and authenticity of the words which Shaphan had read in his hearing. We do not read of his asking, "How am I to know that this is the Word of God?" No; he trembled at it. He bowed before it. He was smitten down under it. He rent his garments. He did not presume to sit in judgment upon the Word of God; but, as was sweet and right, he allowed the Word to judge him.

Thus it should ever be. If man is to judge Scripture, then Scripture is not the Word of God at all. But if Scripture is in very truth the Word of God, then it must judge man. And so it is, and so it does. Scripture is the Word of God, and it judges man thoroughly. It lays bare the very roots of his nature- it opens up the fountains of his moral being. It holds up before him the only faithful mirror in

which he can see himself perfectly reflected. This is the reason why man does not like Scripture-cannot bear it-seeks to set it aside-delights to pick holes in it-dares to sit in judgment upon it. It is not so in reference to other books. Men do not trouble themselves so much to discover and point out flaws and discrepancies in Homer or Herodotus, Aristotle or Shakespeare. No; but Scripture judges them-judges their ways-their lusts. Hence the enmity of the natural mind to the most precious and marvelous Book which, as we have already remarked, carries its own credentials with it to every divinely prepared heart. There is a power in Scripture which must bear down all before it. All must bow down under it, sooner or later. "The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight; but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." Heb. 4:12, 13.

Josiah found it to be even so. The Word of God pierced him through and through. "And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the law, that he rent his clothes. And the king commanded Hilkiah, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Abdon the son of Micah, and Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah a servant of the king's, saying, Go, inquire of the LORD for me, and for them that are left in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the book that is found: for great is the wrath of the LORD that is poured out upon us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the LORD, to do after all that is written in this book." What a striking contrast between Josiah, with contrite heart, exercised conscience, and rent garments, bowing down under the mighty action of the Word of God, and our modern skeptics and infidels who, with appalling audacity, dare to sit in judgment upon that very same Word! Oh! that men would be wise in time, and bow their hearts and consciences in reverent submission to the Word of the living God, before that great and terrible day of the Lord, in which they shall be compelled to bow, amid "weeping and wailing," and "gnashing of teeth."

God's Word shall stand forever, and it is utterly vain for man to set himself up in opposition to it, or seek by his reasonings and skeptical speculations to find out errors and contradictions in it. "Forever, O LORD, Thy word is settled in heaven." Psalm 119:89. "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away." Matt. 24:35. "The word of the Lord endureth forever" (1 Pet. 1:25). Of what possible use is it, therefore, for man to resist the Word of God? He can gain nothing; but, oh! what may he lose? If man could prove the Bible false, what should he gain? But if it be true, after all, what does he lose? A serious inquiry! May it have its weight with any reader whose mind is at all under the influence of rationalistic or infidel notions!

We shall now proceed with our history.

"And Hilkiah, and they that the king had appointed, went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum, the son of Tikvath, the son of Hasrah, keeper of the wardrobe; (now she dwelt in Jerusalem in the college;) and they spake to her to that effect." At the opening of this paper we referred to the fact of a child of eight years old being on the throne of David, as indicative of the conditions of things among the people of God. Here too we are arrested by the fact that the prophetic office was filled by a woman. It surely tells a tale. Things were low, but the grace of God was unfailing and abundant; and Josiah was so thoroughly broken down that he was prepared to receive the communication of the mind of God through whatever channel it might reach him. This

was morally lovely. It might, to nature's view, seem very humiliating for a king of Judah to have recourse to a woman for counsel. But then that woman was the depositary of the mind of God, and this was quite enough for a humble and contrite spirit like Josiah's. He had thus far proved that his one grand desire was to know and do the will of God; and hence it mattered not by what vehicle the voice of God was conveyed to his ear, he was prepared to hear and obey.

Christian reader. let us consider this. We may rest assured that herein lies the true secret of divine guidance: "The meek will He guide in judgment: and the meek will He teach His way." Psalm 25:9. Were there more of this blessed spirit of meekness among us, there would be less confusion, less controversy, less striving about words to no profit. If we were all meek, we should all be divinely guided and divinely taught, and thus we should see eye to eye; we should be of one mind, and speak the same thing, and avoid much sad and humbling division and heartburning.

See what a full answer the meek and contrite Josiah received from Huldah the prophetess-an answer both as to his people and as to himself. "And she answered them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Tell ye the man that sent you to me, Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the curses that are written in the book which they have read before the king of Judah: because they have forsaken Me, and have burned incense unto other gods, that they might provoke Me to anger with all the works of their hands; therefore My wrath shall be poured out upon this place, and shall not be quenched."

All this was but the solemn reiteration and establishment of what had already fallen upon the open and attentive ear of the king of Judah; but then it came with fresh force, emphasis, and interest, as a direct personal communication to himself. It came enforced and enhanced by that earnest sentence, "Tell ye the man that sent you to me."

But there was more than this. There was a gracious message directly concerning Josiah himself. "And as for the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the LORD, so shall ye say unto him, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel concerning the words which thou halt heard; BECAUSE THINE HEART WAS TENDER, and thou didst humble thyself before God, when thou heardest His words against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, and humbledst thyself before Me, and didst rend thy clothes, and weep before Me; I have even heard thee also, saith the LORD. Behold, I will gather thee to thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered to thy crave, in peace, neither shall thine eyes see all the evil that I will bring upon this place, and upon the inhabitants of the same. So they brought the king word again." 2 Chron. 34:23-28.

All this is full of instruction and encouragement for us in this dark and evil day. It teaches us the immense value, in the divine estimation, of deep personal exercise of soul, and contrition of heart. Josiah might have deemed the case hopeless -that nothing could avert the mighty tide of wrath and judgment which was about to roll over the city of Jerusalem and the land of Israel -that any movement of his must prove utterly unavailing-the decree gone forth, and that, in short, he had only to stand by and let things take their course. But Josiah did not reason thus. No; he bowed before the divine testimony. He humbled himself, rent his clothes, and wept. God took knowledge of this. Josiah's penitential tears were precious to Jehovah, and though the appalling judgment had to take its course, yet the penitent escaped. And not only did he himself escape, but he became the honored instrument, in the Lord's hand, of delivering others also. He did not abandon himself to the influence of a pernicious fatalism, but in brokenness of spirit and earnestness of

heart, he cast himself upon God, confessing his own sins and the sins of his people. And then, when assured of his own personal deliverance, he set himself to seek the deliverance of his brethren also. This is a fine moral lesson for the heart. May we learn it thoroughly!

Chapter 37

Life and Times of Josiah: Part 4

It is deeply interesting and instructive to mark the actings of Josiah, when his heart and conscience had been brought under the powerful influence of the Word of God. He not only bowed down under that Word himself, but he sought to lead others to bow likewise. This must ever be the case, where the work is real. It is impossible for a man to feel the weight and solemnity of truth, and not seek to bring others under its action. No doubt a quantity of truth may be held in the intellect-held superficially-held in a merely speculative, notional way - but this will have no practical effect; it does not tell upon the heart and conscience after a divine, living fashion; it does not affect the life and character. And, inasmuch as it does not affect our own souls, neither will our mode of presenting it be very likely to act with much power upon others. True, God is sovereign, and He may use His own Word, even when spoken by one who has never really felt its influence; but we are speaking now of what may properly and naturally be looked for; and we may rest assured that the best way in which to make others feel deeply is to feel deeply ourselves.

Take any truth you please. Take, for example, the glorious truth of the Lord's coming. How is a man most likely to affect his hearers by the presentation of this truth? Unquestionably, by being deeply affected himself. If the heart be under the power of that solemn word, "The Lord is at hand" - if this fact be realized in all its solemnity as to the world, and its sweet attractiveness as to the believer individually and the Church collectively, then it will assuredly be presented in a way calculated to move the hearts of the hearers. It is easy to see when a man feels what he is saying. There may be a very clear and clever exposition of the doctrine of the second advent, and of all the collateral truths; but if it be cool and heartless, it will fall powerless on the ears of the audience. In order to speak to hearts, on any subject, the heart of the speaker must feel. What was it that gave such power to Whitfield's discourses? It was not the depth or the range of truth contained in them, as is manifest to any intelligent reader. No; the secret of their mighty efficacy lay in the fact that the speaker felt what he was saying. Whitfield wept over the people, and no marvel if the people wept under Whitfield. He must be a hardened wretch indeed who can sit unmoved under a preacher who is shedding tears for his soul's salvation.

Let us not be misunderstood. We do not mean to say that anything in a preacher's manner can of itself convert a soul. Tears cannot quicken. Earnestness cannot regenerate. It is "not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the LORD" (Zech. 4:6). It is only by the powerful action of the Word and Spirit of God that any soul can be born again. All this we fully believe, and would ever bear in mind. But at the same time we as fully believe and would also bear in mind, that God blesses earnest preaching, and souls are moved by it. We have far too much mechanical preaching - too much routine work - too much of what may justly be called going through a service. We need more earnestness, more depth of feeling, more intensity, more power to weep over the souls of men, a more influential and abiding sense of the awful doom of impenitent sinners, the value of an immortal soul, and the solemn realities of the eternal world. We are told that the famous Garrick was once asked, by a bishop, how it was that he produced far more powerful results by his fiction than the bishops could by preaching truth. The reply of the actor is full of

force. "My lord," said he, "the reason is obvious; I speak fiction as though it were truth, whereas you speak truth as though it were fiction."

Alas! it is much to be feared that too many of us speak truth in the same way, and hence the little result. We are persuaded that earnest, faithful preaching is one of the special needs of this our day. There are a few here and there, thank God, who seem to feel what they are at - who stand before their audience as those who consider themselves as channels of communication between God and their fellows-men who are really bent on their work-bent not merely on preaching and teaching, but on saving and blessing souls. The grand business of the evangelist is to bring the soul and Christ together; the business of the teacher and pastor is to keep them together. True, it is most assuredly true, that God is glorified and Jesus Christ magnified by the unfolding of truth, whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear; but is this fact to be allowed to interfere, in the smallest degree, with the ardent desire for results in reference to souls? We do not, for a moment, believe it.

The preacher should look for results, and should not be satisfied without them. He should no more think of being satisfied to go on without results than the husbandman thinks of going on from year to year without a crop. Some preachers there are who only succeed in preaching their hearers away, and then they content themselves by saying, We are a sweet savor to God. Now, we believe this is a great mistake, and a fatal delusion. What we need is to live before God for the results of our work-to wait upon Him-to agonize in prayer for souls-to throw all our energies into the work-to preach as though the whole thing depended upon us, although knowing full well that we can do just nothing, and that our words must prove as the morning cloud, if not fastened as a nail in a sure place, by the Master of assemblies. We are convinced that, in the divine order of things, the earnest workman must have the fruit of his labor; and that according to his faith, so shall it be. There may be exceptions; but, as a general rule, we may rest assured that a faithful preacher, working in his divinely appointed sphere, will, sooner or later, reap fruit.

We have been drawn into the foregoing line of thought while contemplating the interesting scene in the life of Josiah, presented to us at the close of 2 Chronicles 34. It will be profitable for us to dwell upon it. Josiah was a man thoroughly in earnest. He felt the power of truth in his own soul, and he could not rest satisfied until he gathered the people around him, in order that the light which had shone upon him might shine upon them likewise. He did not-he could not-rest in the fact that he was to be gathered to his grave in peace, that his eyes were not to see the evil that was coming upon Jerusalem, that he was to escape the appalling tide of judgment which was about to roll over the land. No; he thought of others, he felt for the people around him; and, inasmuch as his own personal escape stood connected with and based upon his true penitence and humiliation under the mighty hand of God, so he would seek, by the action of that word which had wrought so powerfully in his own heart, to lead others to like penitence and humiliation.

"Then the king sent and gathered together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. And the king went up into the house of the LORD, and all the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the priests, and the Levites, and all the people, great and small: and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant that was found in the house of the LORD. And the king stood in his place, and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD, and to keep His commandments, and His testimonies, and His statutes, with all his heart, and with all his soul,

to perform the words of the covenant which are written in this book. And he caused all that were present in Jerusalem and Benjamin to stand to it. And the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God, the God of their fathers. And Josiah took away all the abominations out of all the countries that pertained to the children of Israel, and made all that were present in Israel to serve, even to serve the LORD their God. And all his days they departed not from following the LORD, the God of their fathers."

There is a fine moral lesson in all this for us-yea, many lessons to which we, with all our light, knowledge, and privilege, may well sit down. What, first of all, strikes us at this moment, is the fact that Josiah felt his responsibility to those around him. He did not put his light under a bushel, but rather allowed it to shine for the full benefit and blessing of others. This is all the more striking, inasmuch as that great practical truth of the unity of all believers in one body, was not known to Josiah, because not revealed by God. The doctrine contained in that one brief sentence, "There is one body, and one Spirit," was not made known until long after the times of Josiah, even when Christ the risen Head had taken

His seat at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens.

But, although this truth was "hid in God," nevertheless there was the unity of the nation of Israel. There was a national unity, though there was not the unity of a body; and this unity was always recognized by the faithful, whatever might be the outward condition of the people. The twelve loaves on the table of showbread in the sanctuary were the divine type of the perfect unity and yet the perfect distinctness of the twelve tribes. The reader can see this in Leviticus 24. It is full of interest, and should be deeply pondered by every student of Scripture, and every earnest lover of the ways of God. During the dark and silent watches of the night, the seven lamps of the golden candlestick threw their light upon the twelve loaves, ranged by the hand of the high priest according to the commandment of God, upon the pure table. Significant figure! In it we have foreshadowed, in the most vivid way, the indissoluble unity of Israel's twelve tribes-a truth which must never be lost sight of-a truth which God has revealed, established, and maintained, and which the faith of His people has ever recognized and acted upon.

It was on this grand truth that Elijah the Tishbite took his stand when on Mount Carmel he built an altar with "twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the word of the LORD came, saying, Israel shall be thy name." 1 Kings 18:31. To this same truth Hezekiah had regard when he "commanded that the burnt offering and the sin offering should be made for all Israel" (2 Chron. 29:24). Paul in his day referred to this precious truth when, in the presence of King Agrippa, he spoke of "our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night" (Acts 26:7).

Now, if any one of those men of faith had been asked, Where are the twelve tribes? could he give an answer? Could he have pointed them out? Assuredly he could, but not to sight -not to man's view-for the nation was divided-its unity was broken. In the days of Elijah and Hezekiah there were the ten tribes and the two; and in the days of Paul, the ten tribes were scattered abroad, and only a remnant of the two in the land of Palestine, under the dominion of Daniel's fourth beast. What then? Was the truth of God made of none effect by Israel's outward condition? Far be the thought! "Our twelve tribes" must never be given up. The unity of the nation is a grand reality to faith. It is as true at this moment as when Joshua pitched the twelve stones at Gilgal. The Word of our God

shall stand forever. Not one jot or tittle of aught that He has spoken shall ever pass away. Change and decay may mark the history of human affairs; death and desolation may sweep like a withering blast over earth's fairest scenes; but Jehovah will make good His every word, and Israel's twelve tribes shall yet enjoy the promised land in all its length, breadth, and fullness. No power of earth or hell shall be able to hinder this blessed consummation. And why? What makes us so sure? How can we speak with such absolute certainty? Simply because the mouth of the Lord has spoken it. We can be a great deal more sure that Israel's tribes shall yet enjoy their fair inheritance in Palestine, than that the house of Tudor once held sway in England. The former we believe on the testimony of God who cannot lie; the latter, on the testimony of erring man.

It is of the utmost importance that the reader should be clear as to this, not only because of its special bearing upon Israel and the land of Canaan, but also because it affects the integrity of Scripture as a whole. There is a loose mode of handling the Word of God, which is at once dishonoring to Him and injurious to us. Passages which apply distinctly and exclusively to Jerusalem and to Israel, are made to apply to the spread of the gospel and the extension of the Christian Church. This is, to say the least, taking a very unwarrantable liberty with divine revelation. Our God can surely say what He means; and, as surely, He means what He says; hence, when He speaks of Israel and Jerusalem, He does not mean the Church; and when He speaks of the Church, He does not mean Israel or Jerusalem.

Expositors and students of Scripture should ponder this. Let no one suppose that it is merely a question of prophetic interpretation. It is far more than this. It is a question of the integrity, value, and power of the Word of God. If we allow ourselves to be loose and careless in reference to one class of scriptures, we are likely to be loose and careless as to another, and then our sense of the weight and authority of all Scripture will be sadly enfeebled.

But we must return to Josiah and see how he recognized, according to his measure, the great principle on which we have been dwelling. He certainly proved no exception to the general rule; namely, that all the pious kings of Judah had regard to the unity of the nation of Israel, and never suffered their thoughts, their sympathies, or their operations, to be confined within any narrower range than "our twelve tribes." The twelve loaves on the pure table were ever before the eye of God, and ever before the eye of faith. Nor was this a mere speculation-a non-practical dogma-a dead letter. No; it was in every case a great practical, influential truth. "Josiah took away all the abominations out of all the countries that pertained to the children of Israel." This was acting in the fullest harmony with his pious predecessor, Hezekiah, who "commanded that the burnt offering and the sin offering should be made for all Israel."

And now, Christian reader, mark the application of all this to our own souls at this present moment. Do you heartily believe upon divine authority in the doctrine of the unity of the body of Christ? Do you believe that there is such a body on this earth now, united to its divine and living Head in heaven, by the Holy Ghost? Do you hold this great truth from God Himself, upon the authority of Holy Scripture? Do you, in one word, hold as a cardinal and fundamental truth of the New Testament the indissoluble unity of the Church of God? Do not turn round and ask, Where is this to be seen? This is the question which unbelief must ever put, as the eye rests upon Christendom's numberless sects and parties, and to which faith replies, as the eye rests upon that imperishable sentence, "There is one body, and one Spirit." Mark the words! "There is." It does not

say there was at one time, and there shall be again, "one body." Neither does it say that such a thing exists in heaven. No; but it says, "There is one body, and one Spirit," now, on this earth. Can this truth be touched by the condition of things in the professing Church? Has God's Word ceased to be true, because man has ceased to be faithful? Will anyone undertake to say that the unity of the body was only a truth for apostolic times, and that it has no application now, seeing that there is no exhibition of it?

Reader, we solemnly warn you to beware how you admit into your heart a sentiment so entirely infidel as this. Rest assured it is the fruit of positive unbelief in God's Word. No doubt, appearances argue against this truth; but what truth is it against which appearances do not argue? And say, is it on appearances that faith ever builds? Did Elijah build on appearances when he erected his altar of twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob? Did King Hezekiah build on appearances when he issued that fine commandment, that the burnt offering and the sin offering should be made for all Israel? Did Josiah build on appearances when he carried his reformatory operations into all the countries that pertained to the children of Israel? Surely not. They built upon the faithful word of the God of Israel. That word was true whether Israel's tribes were scattered or united. If God's truth is to be affected by outward appearances, or by the actings of men, then where are we? or what are we to believe? The fact is, there is hardly a truth in the entire compass of divine revelation to which we could with calm confidence commit our souls, if we suffer ourselves to be affected by outward appearances.

No, reader; the only ground on which we can believe anything is this one clause, "It is written." Do you not admit this? Does not your whole soul bow down to it? Do you not hold it to be a principle entirely vital? We believe you do, as a Christian, hold, admit, and reverently believe this. Well, then, it is written, "There is one body, and one Spirit." (Eph. 4.) This is as clearly revealed in Scripture as that "we are justified by faith," or any other truth. Do outward appearances affect the saving fundamental doctrine of justification by faith? Are we to call in question this precious truth because there is so little exhibition of its purifying power in the lives of believers? Who could admit such a fatal principle as this? What a complete upturning of all the foundations of our faith is necessarily involved in the admission of this most mischievous line of reasoning! We believe, because it is written in the Word, not because it is exhibited in the world. Doubtless, it ought to be exhibited, and it is our sin and shame that it is not. To this we shall afterward refer more fully; but we must insist upon the proper ground of belief; namely, divine revelation; and when this is clearly seen and fully admitted, it applies as distinctly to the doctrine of the unity of the body, as it does to the doctrine of justification by faith.

Chapter 38

Little Children

"Lo, children are a heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward." Psalm 127:3.

"Children's children are the crown of old men; and the glory of children are their fathers." Pro. 17:6.

"And they brought unto Him also infants, that He would touch them: but when His disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them unto Him, and said, Suffer little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God." Luke 18:15, 16.

"Then there were brought unto Him little children, that He should put His hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto Me; for of such is the kingdom of heaven. And He laid His hands on them, and departed thence." Matt. 19:13-15.

"And they brought young children to Him, that He should touch them;...and He took them up in His arms, and put His hands upon them, and blessed them." Mark 10:13, 16.

"Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels [representatives] do always behold the face of My Father which is in heaven. For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost." Matt. 18:10. 11.

The infant as a child of Adam is lost, and the Son of man came to save. That this applies to all infants, as such, is clear. There is no difference between the children of believers and unbelievers. If they die before they come to the age of responsibility, they are saved. He came, it reads here, to save them, and not to seek and save, as in Luke 19:10.

An untold multitude of these little ones out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation will be in heaven - a goodly part of that which will constitute "the fruit of the travail of His soul."

The wondrous love of the Father and the Son thus displayed toward the infants, little children, and young children, as noted, may give those of us who are parents, and whose care and responsibility they are, an added incentive to endeavor to "bring them up in the nurture [discipline] and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). It should also cause our children to give constant heed to God's command with promise: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honor thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth." Eph. 6:1-3.

How good to know that He who "shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom" (Isa. 40:11), is also the Lord of hosts (a millennial title) who "saith,...and the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof" (Zech. 8:4, 5). Nor does He forget the dear mothers - "and shall gently lead those that are with young" (Isa. 40:11).

What a God is ours! Glory to His name!

Chapter 39

The Lord's Desire

"Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me: for Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world." John 17:24.

What was before my mind in turning to this scripture was just the desire of His own heart. I do not believe, beloved, that He will really get the desire of His heart fully until He has those He has ransomed with Himself in His own presence.

It is so beautiful to remark in His blessed Word, even this in John 17, that notwithstanding all the failures that are in us, and all the willfulness, all the negligence, all the carelessness, and all the indifference, He has not one word to say to His Father against us. The marvelous love and grace of His own heart passes over all our failures, shortcomings, and slightings of Himself. He appeals to His Father that they may be one.

"Fat he r, I will"; 0 beloved, does not that sink down into our hearts! Is it not His own voice in our hearing, so to speak? "Father, I will" - "I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me: for Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world."

It is so sweet and so precious that we have John 17, after the previous four chapters. The blessed Lord had been speaking to those who had been with Him; and He turns to His Father from them, and speaks to His Father in their hearing-those who are dear to His heart- it is the eleven, because Judas had left before.

In chapters 14, 15, and 16, He speaks in their hearing and to them; and in the 17th He looks up to His Father, and how blessed! He says, "I have glorified Thee on the earth: I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do."

Remember, He is not yet come to the cross; but it is in anticipation of that work which is to be accomplished on Calvary's tree. It was especially this verse which was upon my heart. He is speaking to His Father, and His words are worth our meditating on continually.

When these desires are fulfilled, then it will be, as it says in Isaiah, "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied." And it is in connection with that blessed word in Hebrews 12, "Who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross," etc. The joy was having those for whom He had been into death, with Himself in His own image, and to the praise and glory of His own blessed name - for eternity. We will just read the verse again:

"Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me: for Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world."

Chapter 40

Mary at the Sepulcher

John 20

In John 20 we have a scriptural illustration of affection for Christ; Mary Magdalene came early when it was yet dark to the sepulcher. She did not wait for sunrise, but, while nature was still shrouded in darkness, her affection hastens here to the only spot on earth that had any interest for her - the grave of her Lord.

Oh! what a character this stamps on the earth - it was the grave of Jesus! Beloved reader, has it this character for you?

Now observe, the Person of the blessed Lord was engaging the affections of the heart of Mary; and hence, how could she domicile where He was not?

Not so Peter and John; having satisfied themselves that the sepulcher was empty, having carefully examined the empty grave, and seen the garments of death left behind by the mighty Conqueror who had risen out of them, they returned to their own home.

But look at Mary; she has no home. And in more senses than one, did this devoted woman stand "without"; for, not finding her Lord, she was truly without home, or cheer, or solace in her sorrow, a brokenhearted woman whom none can comfort; and yet it is a lovely sight to see her in all her genuine personal love for Christ, standing, weeping, stooping down, and looking into His grave!

Ah! is this not rare - the spirit of it I mean - in these days? If I were asked what is the characteristic feature of the present time, what should I say? If I spoke the truth, I should say, HEARTLESSNESS AS TOUCHING CHRIST.

Is it nothing to you, beloved reader, that Christ is rejected and cast out by man? Is it not very little thought of, and lightly esteemed?

The absence of affection accounts for the little loyalty there is to the Lord Jesus. How few hearts are really true to Him! It is not possible to drill them into it, and mere knowledge cannot secure it. There is no lack of information as to Christ and His interests, yet it is a dry, cold thing, because it is not Christ. The question for the moment is, "What think ye of Christ?"

Another truth of exceeding beauty may be seen here; namely, how genuine affection gauges everything, measures everything. To him whom she thought was the gardener, she says, "Sir, if thou have borne Him hence, tell me where thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away." Observe, she does not say who it is; but, as she was full of Him in her thoughts, she supposed everyone else was like herself. Alas! how little of this we find in ourselves or around us!

But observe too, how her affection was the gauge of her ability: "I will take Him away." If she had reasoned or calculated, she might well have hesitated ere she proposed such a task; but affection never calculates; its power or ability is itself.

And now the moment has arrived for Jesus to make Himself known. What a moment for Him - for her!

He fulfills John 10, and "calleth His own sheep by name"; and she answers to John 10, "The sheep hear His voice." He gives her to hear her name from His very own lips - Mary!

What a scene it is! The history of the first garden, its blight and sin, all reversed. The history of the first garden, with a fallen man and woman driven out by the hand of God, is closed at the cross of Christ.

Here in this second garden, we find a risen Man and a redeemed woman, whose affection for His Person the blessed Lord appreciates at worth, that He commissions her to be the bearer to His disciples of the most wonderful tidings that human lips ever announced.

"Go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God."

May the Lord awaken in the hearts of His people, in these days so sadly fruitful in debates, strifes, whisperings, and confusion - but days of barrenness surely as to loyalty of affection for Christ - such true self-judgment as will lead to more wholehearted devotedness, at all cost, to His Person, honor, and interests!

Chapter 41

Meditation

Have you ever thought much of the exercise of meditation, and how frequently it is spoken of in Scripture?

Perhaps it may be from the want of this holy exercise, and really comprehending it, that the Church of the living God is wanting in unity of doctrine, and in spirituality of mind.

The study of God's Word may be concentrated, deep, constant, like searching for a vein of gold; and memory may marvelously retain and bring forth what study has discovered. But meditation is not the discovery of more or of new things, but a calm sitting down with God to enrich itself with what study has discovered, and feeding with Him upon the stores which memory has laid up.

Study and memory make the ready and admired speaker; meditation, the sweet, living exhibition of Jesus everywhere, whether speaking or silent (Josh. 1:8; Psalm 104:34; 119:15). The former hunts for something new; the latter finds renewed life, strength, and refreshment from the old, which are never old to meditation. Truths from an infinite, all-wise God - they have in them more than the best meditative faculty has ever or can ever exhaust.

May the Lord unfold to us some of His own rich stores! They are very deep! But we are only at the surface of them, They are our "inheritance"; it "shall be forever."

Chapter 42

The Meeting in the Field of Boaz

"Oh that I knew where I might find Him!" was Job's cry (chap. 23:3). "When He hath found it," was the blessed word of the Lord Jesus. And, truly, when the heart deeply feels its need, it is not far from meeting with Him whose joy it is to meet that need.

So it was with Ruth. They had heard in the distant fields of Moab that the Lord had visited His people with bread; they had returned to the house of bread, two poor desolate widows with no resource but God; but what was the next thing? The bread was there, but how were they to get it? The simple faith of the outcast Moabitess lays hold of her true place, and of the provision God had made in His Word for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow (Deut. 24:19). She has only to take her place as one who is nothing and has nothing, in order to claim God's promise. And so she goes out in faith to cast herself upon the goodness of God, to glean after him in whose eyes she may find favor.

Acres upon acres of harvest field stretch before her, undivided by hedges or walls, as with us, and perplexing the stranger's heart as to which little plot out of the whole belongs to the unknown friend in whose eyes she is to find favor.

How is she to choose? She leaves the choice to God; and, guided by His hand in that mysterious way which down here seems chance, she lights upon a little plot belonging to Elimelech's friend, Naomi's kinsman, that wealthy man, Boaz.

So in simple language that the needy heart can understand, God points to him in whose eyes the stranger and the outcast may find favor. There is but One, the One who was born in the manger in Bethlehem, who ate with publicans and sinners, who went to be guest with a man who was a sinner, who suffered a woman who was a sinner to weep out her tears of repentance over His blessed feet, who hung between two sinners on Calvary's cross, who took a sinner with Him into paradise - Jesus the friend of sinners.

Boaz, then, comes from Bethlehem, the house of bread, to meet the outcast damsel who was seeking bread; and his eye travels straight to her as she stoops to glean in the heat of the day, humbly following behind the reapers, taking the stranger's place. Little rest has been hers as yet, says the steward, who knows his master's heart. The meeting has come; how will the wealthy man receive the poor outcast?

It is most beautiful, yet simple, to see how God's way of grace shines out in this meeting. First Boaz, calling her by the gentle name; "my daughter," teaches her the first simple lesson: "go not to glean in another field." There is only one place where the sinner's need can be met; there is only one person who can meet it.

Elimelech had wandered away to the fields of Moab, and there had found nothing but bitterness and death. Now God had drawn the outcast from the fields of Moab to the field of Boaz by a chain of love whose links Ruth could never know at the time, and the lesson is driven home, "go not to

glean in another field."

Are there not some who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, but who, nevertheless, have not learned the simple lesson?

Are you seeking satisfaction out of Christ? Are you trying to find something for your heart in the fields of Moab? There is only bitterness and emptiness there.

"Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to Me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst." John 6:35. Thus the first lesson leads quickly to the second: "When thou art athirst, go unto the vessels, and drink of that which the young men have drawn." The well is deep, as the poor woman of Samaria truly said; but the water of life has been drawn from the deep well of the heart of the Father, and now whosoever thirsts, "let him take of the water of life freely." Jesus gives it - "He would have given thee living water." The thirsty soul, drawn from the dry plains of the Dead Sea, takes it and thirsts no more.

Perhaps you will say, This is all very simple; I know all this. That may be, but have you really learned what it is to be drawn from the fields of Moab to find that there is One and only One who can satisfy your heart? Have you learned what it is to come as an empty sinner, one who has nothing, not even a title to God's goodness, to be met by all the fullness of God's grace in His own beloved Son? If you have, you will certainly not grumble at these simple things, but will bow down, like Ruth, before Him in joyful worship. You will not want to leave the little plot of the field of Boaz.

Chapter 43

Nebuchadnezzar

Daniel 1-4

There is much interest attaching to the person of this great Gentile. The place he occupies in the progress of the divine dispensations, the circumstances which connect him with the saints of God, and his own personal history, all contribute to give him a place in our recollections, and to read us some holy and important lessons.

He was the man in whom God set up the Gentiles. The house of David. the throne of Judah, had corrupted itself; the measure of the people's iniquity was full, and the term of the divine long-suffering was spent in Nebuchadnezzar's day; and he is used by the Lord to be the rod of His indignation against Jerusalem, and the hand to take from Him the sword of rule and judgment in the earth.

The glory had departed. It had left the earth. The prophet had seen it in its gradual and reluctant, but sure and judicial, flight on the cherubim and the wheels, as far as the mountains on its way to heaven. But though "the glory is departed" might have been written on Jerusalem, "the glory is here" could not have been correspondingly written on any seat, or city of the nations.

(The silence of Scripture is at times holy and impressive. I observe this as to the ark. We are not told a word about its fate in the day of Jerusalem's sorrow. It is never mentioned; the theme was too sacred. The ark was the symbol of the divine presence; and the Spirit would not contemplate its captivity, if He could not do so in connection with glorious victory, as in 1 Sam. 4 Therefore, He will leave it untraced in the day of Jerusalem's downfall. When next it is seen, it is in heaven [Rev. 11; 15].)

This Chaldean, however, this Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, is set up by the Lord; and the sword is committed to him. Power in the earth, for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of them that do well, is put into his hand, formally put there, by God, on the glory forsaking the earth, or the Lord, for the present, refusing to take His place as King of Israel.

This is Nebuchadnezzar's connection with the dispensational purposes of God. He was glad, of course, to extend his dominions, and to let his conquests be known far and wide; and Jerusalem is welcome as plunder by him; but all the while he was filling out the purposes of God. At length his sword is in its sheath, and we see him, not in connection with the purposes, but with the saints, of God; and then we get a more personal sight of him, and a subject of still holier interest and meaning. For then we see the man under divine operation, and not merely the power under divine commission and appointment. And it is this sight which Daniel gives of him in these chapters.

The tumult of war being over, and the sword, as I said, in its sheath again, the king is seen in his place at Babylon. His royal estate he purposes to set off to all advantage. Elegancies and accomplishments, and provisions of all sorts, shall fill his court. Both his greatness and his pleasures shall be served by all that conquered lands can furnish, and the ancient land of the glory

is now only one of them. Babylon, famed for its wisdom and its astrologers and soothsayers, shall be set off by some of the captive youths of Judah, distinguished for their understanding science, and skillfulness in knowledge. This is the first chapter.

As it often happens, the Lord comes to disturb him. His heart is moved, if not his estate and condition in the world. Ere he went to sleep one much-to-be-remembered night, he is thinking on what was to be hereafter. He then sleeps and dreams; and the dream being all about what was to be hereafter, shows that the hand of God was in the whole scene. The king, however, does not understand anything of all this. Even the dream itself goes from him. He has no remembrance of it. It leaves uneasiness behind it, but that is all. Often it is thus with the soul. There is a disturbance, but no intelligence. A restlessness has been awakened; but whence it came is not known, or whither it goes (what is its purpose) is not conjectured. And it is too high for man. It is the hand of God, and mere man cannot reach it. All the wisdom of Babylon is at fault. The dream, the departed dream, which had left only its shadow to scare the heart of the king, is beyond all Chaldean art. This is beautifully significant. We live amid these wonderful shakings, these hidden operations of God with the hearts of the children of men. And when it is with the elect, the work thus begun is conducted to a blessed issue. The man of God, however, gets into the secret. The saint is made to know the mind of God in this great operation of His hand. Daniel tells it all to the king.

Nebuchadnezzar is, naturally, moved to wondering admiration. The knowledge of the prophet is marvelous in his eyes, and all that he can do for him he is ready to do. The wisdom of the God of Daniel he also religiously acknowledges, and, under the excitement, even delights in it. This is the second chapter.

But with all this he is but Nebuchadnezzar still, a mere child of nature, the sport of human passions, of the devil's wiles. Vanity seems to feed on the communications which the prophet of God had delivered. Wonderful, but natural! These communications had dealt with solemn truths - that an image was to be broken in pieces, and made like the chaff of the summer threshing floor. But this is all passed by the heart of the king; and that he himself is the head of this image, the golden head of it, is all that practically works on him. His pride can get food out of that, but the rest may remain for a future day, however awful it may be.

Accordingly, he sets up a golden image for all to worship. All orders and estates of men are summoned, by musical instruments of all sorts, to own the image which Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up. Marvelous that our hearts can so deal with God's revelations! God had spoken of an image being broken to pieces and scattered like chaff before the wind. Nebuchadnezzar can set up an image to be honored with divine honors by all the world! How falsely the heart traffics with divine truth. We turn to the present account of our own vanity what connects itself with the most solemn realities. Admiration of God's wisdom will not do. Nebuchadnezzar had that. But with that he was a self-worshiper, and to himself he can sacrifice everything. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, the very instruments or vessels for awaking that admiration, shall burn in the fiery furnace if they consent not to fall down before this image which Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up. Wonderful infatuation!

God, however, is but again displayed. If wisdom belong to Him, so does power. If He can reveal secrets and make known the thoughts of the head upon the bed of the children of men, He can quench the violence of fire and save every hair of the head from perishing, though in a burning

fiery furnace. The king is again moved, and he does more than before. He had honored the servants of the God of wisdom already; now he is for honoring the God of power Himself, establishing His name in the land, and making reverence of Him a part of the business of the state, a standing ordinance of the realm. This is the third chanter.

But what of this? He is as before, only Nebuchadnezzar still - the haughty, self-pleased, self-pleasing child of the dust - a man who, like Adam of old, would be as God. For, after these witnesses of the divine wisdom and power, and after the motions which his heart and conscience had passed through, he was, as in earlier days, at rest in his own house, and flourishing in his palace (v. 4). He was the same self-pleased, self-pleasing, important king of Babylon.

Nature outlives a thousand checks and improvements. The new wine poured into the old bottle is but spilled. "We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented." Matt. 11:17. The various melody of the dispensations of God is lost on the dull ear of man. But then the Lord is not weary. He can still sit at the well and talk with the sinner. He shakes the heart of this king with another dream, and Daniel again interprets it. It is still, however, the new wine in the old bottle, and it is spilled as ever. Twelve months after this solemn visitation, the king walks into the palace of the king of Babylon; and his poor proud heart, after all this, can say, "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?" Chap. 4:30.

Here, surely, is old Nebuchadnezzar still, the "old man" of nature. The divine revelations are spent on him in vain. All the goodly emotions are but as the morning cloud and early dew. The new wine, to be preserved, must be put into new bottles. And so, at last, it is. Nebuchadnezzar is made a new bottle. Deeply and solemnly is this process conducted, or this work accomplished. The sentence is lawfully laid on him. The case is one of great character; and it might well be so, because, as we have seen, the light of the wisdom of God, and the hand of the power of God, had already addressed this man; and the further care and diligence of the Lord had been in the recent dream, also bestowed upon him; but all is to no real purpose. The new wine had been spilled again and again.

Nebuchadnezzar is the same man still, and the old bottle is now to be cast away.

The former vessel having been marred on the wheel, the lump is now taken into the potter's hand, to fashion it another vessel, a new vessel, as it pleases Him. "Man that is in honor, and understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish." Psalm 49:20. In honor indeed Nebuchadnezzar had been; but he had not understood, and now he becomes a beast. "He was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws." Thus he is made to know himself, and to learn the lesson that he was, in all his honors, as brutish as the cattle of the field, having no understanding. The occasion was special, and the display of the operation of God signal almost without a parallel. But if he learn that he has "destroyed" himself, he shall also learn that there is One that lifts up even from dunghills; and under the further working of His gracious as well as mighty hand, Nebuchadnezzar revives; he becomes a risen man in due season.

The field and the oxen are left, his understanding returns to him, his kingdom and its glory, his honor and its brightness, his nobles and his counselors, all return to him; and even majesty is

added to him. And then, as one of understanding indeed, who had come to the knowledge of God and himself, he no longer thinks of honoring

God by state decrees only, ordinances of his realm, but bows before Him as sovereign Lord in heaven and on earth, and publishes His doings. He is no longer the king, but the dependent. The old thing is passed away, and all is become new.

Chapter 44

Nothing but Christ

The epistle to the Hebrews calls us to leave all for Christ. Whatever be the objects in which thus far we may have gloried, it is necessary to abandon them now, and to receive in their stead Jesus the Son of God. Angels give place to the Son; Moses, the servant of the house, gives place to Christ who is the Builder; Joshua, the ancient captain that led Israel into Canaan, gives place to Christ the Captain of salvation who is now conducting the children to glory; Aaron, the carnal and dying priest, gives place to the true Melchisedec who lives and serves in the heavenly temple forever; the old covenant gives place to the new which Jesus administers; and at the same time the old carnal or earthly ordinances give place to the spiritual and efficacious ministrations of the heavenly Priest; finally, the blood of the victims gives place to the blood of Christ offered by the eternal Spirit.

Such is one of the principal characteristics of this divine and glorious epistle, which thus annihilates all that in which man puts his confidence, in order to establish the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, as the object of glory and only refuge of poor souls.

But this was a doctrine hard to bear, particularly for a people such as the Jews who had in so many ways put their confidence in the law and legal righteousness. Among us also at the present day when, amid so many religious forms, men propose with authority other foundations of confidence than Jesus, and other men blindly receive them, we have to consider carefully what are the bases of this doctrine. In these days, when all creation groans, the soul thirsts after this simple gospel which preaches to us the perfect satisfaction of Jesus; and it is the design of the Holy Spirit in the epistle to the Hebrews to unfold to the eager soul the reasons for which it can thus embrace Jesus as all that forms the object of its confidence and glory. This epistle declares what authorizes it thus to appreciate Jesus - to estimate Him as having no equal-to judge that He is, in a word, the one and only stay of the poor sinner.

But how does the Holy Spirit assure us of this truth by this epistle? How does He show us that it is our own salvation to leave every other prop in order to have none but Christ alone for our stay? He shows it to us in the only way in which it could be done - by presenting to our souls the appreciation which God makes of Christ.

That which warrants the value I am to attach to Christ is that God has already before this made known to us the worth which He possesses. If my soul confides exclusively in Him, I cannot be grounded in so doing but by seeing the foundation of Israel's confidence at the time of the blood sprinkling in Egypt. God had prescribed this blood; such is my divine and sure warrant; and the epistle to the Hebrews assures it to me. It speaks to me of the high value God sees in Christ; it tells me how clearly, simply, and exclusively He has laid upon Christ all that can relieve the soul. Such is the reason why this admirable epistle lingers with so much complacency upon Christ in all His present relations with us, in all the ministrations He accomplishes for us. There is what explains the numerous quotations (chap. 1) which establish Jesus far above angels; there is what explains the glorious commentary which chapter 2 gives on the dignity of the Son of man, the

declarations of His great superiority over Moses (chap. 3), the abundant and varied testimonies (chap. 4) borne to His priesthood, supplying in quite another way that wherewith Aaron had been honored or what the law conferred (chap. 7). There is the reason why He is represented as anointed and consecrated by an oath, and seated in the heavens in the midst of the sanctuary, as well as at the right hand of Majesty (chap. 8).

In all this we have the hand of God Himself exalting the merit of Jesus, weighing Him in His dignities known in heaven and on earth. The soul is invited in the most pressing manner to come and be present at this grand work, at this divine proof of the merit of Jesus. Just so the congregation of Israel was commanded to wait at the door of the tabernacle, in order that each for himself should contemplate and know how pleased with the priest God was; so that each, however large the congregation was, should have personally, individually, all liberty to resign himself to the care and intercession of Aaron (Lev. 8:9). It was a matter which concerned each individually, and the same liberty should also appertain to every one of us individually.

The soul is a thing which concerns ourselves; for it is written that "none... can by any means redeem his brother"; and it is ourselves who should know the divine remedy, ourselves who should possess it. It is not a faithful brother who can hear and believe for us; it is not a church which can represent us; we must be at the door of the tabernacle ourselves; we have ourselves to know the worth of Jesus in the eyes of God; and the epistle to the Hebrews is commissioned to reveal this secret in the holy of holies. It is addressed not to a certain order of privileged persons, but to us all, in order that there we may gather the blessed fruits of this ensured supply which has been stored in Him. It is not the question in this epistle of a particular church, nor of a. class of privileged persons, as is very often thought and said; but it is the voice of the Spirit addressing itself directly to the soul, in order that it may learn to know for itself Him in whom God has placed the help which is necessary to it. In this epistle, our soul breathes, in some sort, the perfume of the plain which the Lord has blessed, and faith breathes the perfume of Christ; it enjoy s Christ as God Himself enjoys Him, and we have the divine light in our hearts - we are converted from darkness to the light of God. In a word, God becomes our own.

There is yet another thing in this epistle: it makes us understand in what characters God has set this exclusive value on Christ; and these characters are such as fully answer to our necessities. The victim, or the sacrifice (chap. 9:4); the priest (chap. 7); the prophet, or teacher (chap. 2:1-4); the captain who brings His own to glory (chap. 2:10); and in all these qualities, as on each of them separately, we see Him estimated in the most exact manner by the hand of God, and we find Him perfectly what it is needful He should be, for persons so wretched as we are. According to God, Jesus is a victim perfectly suited to purify, a priest perfectly suited to intercede, a prophet perfectly suited to instruct, and a guide perfectly suited to transport us safe and sound unto glory. There is that precisely which we need. This epistle traces our book of travels, in leaving our place of exile as sinners, up to our dwelling in glory, where we shall be in the companionship of Jesus. Yes, we clearly read there our rights; and we rest on Jesus as our Victim, our Priest, our Prophet, and our Guide, because God has given Him all that is possible of worth in these qualities with which He is endowed for us; and God has appreciated Him because of His work, because of His Person, because of His obedience, because He has shed His blood and fully accomplished the will of God for us. There, in this epistle, the soul may read its titles, not according to the estimate which itself makes of them, but according to that which God makes of Christ.

Chapter 45

Obedience of Love

The Lord Jesus said, "If any man serve Me, let him follow Me" (John 12:26). If I am following my own will in a matter, taking the lead, I am practically ignoring Him! I am to "follow" Him; in other words, to obey Him, every day, every hour. This is holding the Head; it is waiting on Him-going therefore according to His Word, His way, His desire-this is fellowship. The Lord is now winning the love of His own to follow Him. It is not mere formal obedience to law, but the obedience of love to Him. "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" is a question of life and heart and submission. It is the cry of a subject one.

Chapter 46

Opposing the Gospel: Spirit of Judaism As Satan's Instrument

The Apostle Paul says, "And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution?" Gal. 5:11. It will in fact be seen that the Jews were habitually the instigators of the persecution which the Apostle suffered from the Gentiles. The spirit of Judaism, as has been the case in all ages, the religious spirit of the natural man, has been Satan's great instrument in his opposition to the gospel. If Christ would put His sanction on the flesh, the world would come to terms and be as religious as you please, and would value itself upon its devotion. But in that case it would not be the true Christ. Christ came, a witness that the natural man is lost, wicked, and without hope, dead in his trespasses and sins; that redemption is necessary, and a new man. He came in grace, but it was because man was incapable of being restored; and consequently all must be pure grace, and emanate from God.

If Christ would have to do with the old man, all would be well; but, I repeat, He would no longer be Christ. The world then, the old man, does not endure Him. But there is a conscience, there is a felt need of religion, there is the prestige of an ancient religion held from one's fathers, true perhaps in its original foundations, although perverted. Thus the prince of the world will use carnal religion to excite the flesh, the ready enemy, when once awakened, of the spiritual religion which pronounces sentence upon it.

It is only to add something to Christ. But what? If it is not Christ and the new man, it is the old man, it is sinful man; and, instead of a needed and accomplished redemption, and an entirely new life from above, you have a testimony that agreement between the two is possible; that grace is not necessary, except at most as a little help; that man is not already lost and dead in his trespasses and sins, that the flesh is not essentially and absolutely evil. Thus the name of Christ is made subservient to the flesh, which willingly adorns itself with the credit of His name in order to destroy the gospel from its very foundations. Only preach circumcision, accept the religion of the flesh, and all difficulty will cease; the world will accept your gospel, but it will not be the gospel of Christ. The cross in itself (that is, the total ruin of man -man proved to be the enemy of God), and perfect finished redemption by grace, will always be a stumbling block to one who desires to maintain some credit for the flesh. "Would to God," says the Apostle, for he sees the whole gospel falling into ruin before this device, and souls destroyed-"I would they were even cut off which trouble you." What have we seen since then? Where is the holy indignation of the Apostle?

Chapter 47

The Passover Plot: the Editor's Column

THE PASSOVER PLOT

An article in a recent copy of the Denver Post comments at some length on a new book recently published in England (and soon to be for sale in this country) which seeks to completely destroy the very foundations of Christianity. This book was written by Dr. Hugh J. Schonfield, a Jewish scholar living in London. This man has authored some commentaries on Biblical history and a modern translation of the New Testament.

This author is noted for his liberal views; and his book, "The Passover Plot," which claims that Jesus planned His own crucifixion, is causing much concern in many quarters. The author suggests that Jesus, believing Himself to be the Messiah, schemed throughout His life to manipulate people so that the Old Testament prophecies would be fulfilled.

Dr. Schonfield says he subscribes to no religious creed himself. He claims that his book is the result of forty years of objective research. In it he states that "a conspiracy had to be organized of which the victim himself was the principal instigator."

Such a charge is outright blasphemy, and impugns the holy Son of God as an imposter. The Word of God tells us that the Father "hath committed all judgment unto the Son: that all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father" (John 5:22, 23). How solemn it will be for this man, who has written in such a wicked manner concerning the Son of God, when he stands before Him as his judge in that day when the books are opened and the dead are "judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works" (Rev. 20:12).

"The Passover Plot," if as reported, will go down as one of the blackest and foulest blots in the history of Christendom. Think of charging the perfect, sinless Son of God with unheard-of wickedness, and of keeping up a pretense of imposture! One of the claims that Dr. Schonfield makes is that the vinegar passed to Jesus on a sponge was really an opiate administered at the proper moment to enable Him to simulate death so that His legs would not be broken like those of the two thieves that were crucified on either side of Him. The Word of God carefully anticipates this fraud by telling us that when they attempted to give Him a little Roman mercy by an opiate, Jesus refused the gall.

If Dr. Schonfield, as he claims, has spent 40 years of research on this subject, with such defective conclusions as he has put forth, it scarcely need be said that he has failed to find the true worth or power of the Holy Scriptures. Rather he brings to mind the ones of his same nation of whom the Lord said, "They be blind leaders of the blind" (Matt. 15:14), and "If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth" (John 9:41).

According to the review, this unscrupulous author has not forgotten to bring up the old story which was taught by the Sadducees and others, that His disciples came by night and stole Him away while the soldiers on guard slept. How could these men know what happened while they slept?

There was no chance of such a development happening under the jealous eyes that were watching the scene. So while another effort has been made to prove fraud in connection with the resurrection, His resurrection still remains as one of the best authenticated facts in history. There is no better witness to His resurrection than the factual account given in the Scriptures. We read that "He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures: and that He was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: after that, He was seen of above five hundred brethren at once" (1 Cor. 15:4-6).

As this author (whose apparent objectives of denouncing Jesus seem so parallel with the Jewish leaders of almost 2000 years ago) makes his vicious but pitifully weak attacks on what he considers vulnerable records of Jesus' life, we fail to see how he could explain the following:

1. How did Jesus, the unborn Babe, arrange His birth in the obscure town of Bethlehem Ephratah in accordance with Micah's prophecy more than 700 years before?

Were the Jewish rulers, who openly proclaimed themselves the enemies of Jesus, also a part of His hypothetical conspiracy when they covenanted with Judas for 30 pieces of silver or when Judas returned the money to them, wherewith they purchased the potter's field? "Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value; and gave them for the potter's field." Matt. 27:9, 10.

How were the Roman soldiers, callous and unimpressed by Jewish religious claims, drawn into the subterfuge that he claims was perpetrated by the world's Savior, so that they "parted his raiment and cast lots" (Luke 23:34), as prophesied by David so many years before and recorded in Psalm 22:18?

4. In what way does the misdirected Dr. Schonfield account for the many "infallible proofs" that established for posterity the resurrection of our Lord Jesus, as recorded specifically in the first chapter of Acts and 1 Cor. 15:5-8, as well as in numerous other scriptures?

We forbear further comment on the fallacious statements and conclusions of Dr. Schonfield, an obvious enemy of the cross of Christ, although we have barely scratched the surface of numerous proofs of the true story of the Savior's life and work at Calvary.

Chapter 48

Patronage

The nearness to Himself to which the Lord invites the soul - the intimacy with which He invests the heart of a believing sinner-it is most blessed for us to know. He does not deal with us in the style of a patron or benefactor; the world is full of that principle. "They that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors." Luke 22:25. Man will be ready enough to confer benefits in the character of a benefactor or patron, occupying all the while the distant place of both conscious and confessed superiority; but this is not Jesus. He can say, "Not as the world giveth, give I unto you." He brings His dependent one very near to Him; He lets him know and feel that He is dealing with him as a kinsman rather than as a patron. Is it the condescending of a great one that we see in Christ? "I am among you as He that serveth," says He. Is it the distant and courtly benevolence of a superior that we receive from Him? "The glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them" is not of that kind. He is, it is eternally true, "Master and Lord," and He would have us know Him as such; but He sits at our table with us. As of old, He could command Moses to take off his shoes in His presence, but speak to him face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.

And was it not thus to perfection in the days of His flesh on earth? Every case, I may say, tells us so; it was never the style of a mere benefactor, the distance and elevation of a patron. He "bare our sicknesses" and "carried our sorrows." Just look at Him at Jacob's well. A woman was there who had the most exalted thoughts of Him. "I know that Messias cometh, who is called Christ; when He is come, He will tell us all things." This was her high and just sense of the Messiah, not knowing that He to whom she was thus speaking face to face could say immediately in answer to her, "I that speak unto thee am He." But where was He, the exalted Christ, all this time? Talking with her as they had met together by the side of the well; and in order to give her entire ease in His presence, He had asked her for a drink of water. Was this patronage after the manner of men? Was this the distance and condescension of a superior? Was this heaven or the world, man or God? Condescension, or the world, will confer what favor you please, but will have the elevation of a superior, and the reserve of a dependent kept and honored. But heaven, or love, acts not thus. Blessed, blessed be God, Jesus, God manifest in the flesh, was kinsman to them He befriended; and as a kinsman He acted, and not as a patron. He seeks to bring us near - to invest our hearts with ease and confidence. He visits us, nay, He comes to us upon our invitation, as He went and dwelt two days with the Samaritans who came out and sought His company at the report of the woman of the well. He asks a favor from our hand, that we may take a favor from His without reserve; He will drink out of our pitcher while opening His eternal fountains for us, and eat of our kid at the tent door while revealing eternal secrets to us. (Gen. 18; John 4.)

And so it was (as another once observed) after He rose from the dead; He meets His disciples again, gets the dinner ready for them, but tells them to help Him to load the board (John 21). All this is still the way of love and of heaven. He has now done with His sorrow and His humiliation in the world, it is true; but He has not done with this essential way of love; He is still the kinsman, and not the patron.

Chapter 49

Paul's Doctrine: Address 1 - Part 1

One was requested to give these addresses; and, furthermore, the subject of them was likewise suggested - that is, "Paul's Doctrine in these last days." We might consider especially for the benefit of those who are younger, the ground of gathering together for collective worship and fellowship. Confessedly, this is a large subject; we could not hope to do it justice in one address. So we have arranged, God willing, to have three addresses on the subject; that means that some of the things we would like to say tonight will have to remain unsaid for another night, when we will be able to complete the circle of truth we have in mind.

Perhaps we should start out something like this: We know according to the promise of the Lord Jesus, a new thing was to be brought forth upon the earth when He said, "I will build My church." Evidently it did not exist at that time. To go on a little further in its history, we find at the close of the gospel of Luke, the Lord tells the disciples that they are to tarry at Jerusalem where they should receive power from on high. This is again alluded to in Acts 1. We find the disciples obeying the injunction as they waited together in the upper room; and, when the day of Pentecost was fully come, the Spirit of God came and formed an entity upon the earth. It was not complete in all the purposes of God, because the Gentiles were to be brought in later; but it had its beginning, its birthday, on the day of Pentecost. Peter was the one the Lord had chosen to use the keys of the kingdom of heaven. He used them on the day of Pentecost; later he used them in admitting the Samaritans; and, finally, God used him in a definite, special way to throw the door wide open for the Gentiles in Acts

10. When Peter has finished this mission, we do not hear a great deal more about him. He soon bows out of the scene, and another unique figure comes before us who dominates the remainder of the history of the Church as we have it recorded in the Word of God. That man, of course, was Paul, the Apostle.

Our thought tonight is to trace the connection of Paul's ministry with the revelation of the truth of the Church of God. Paul has a dominant place in this particular revelation. Of the eight holy men through whom God chose to give us the New Testament, here is one who occupies a most important place. The other apostles were chosen by our Lord when He was here upon earth; they had companied with Him. That was one of the requirements in order to be numbered among the apostles. But with the Apostle Paul, God acted in an extraordinary way; He separated that man from his mother's womb. Paul was a definitely chosen, prepared, elect instrument from the time he came into this world. God had great work for that man, and He chose and fashioned an instrument that could do it better than any other.

I suppose that Paul's ministry has evoked more opposition than that of any other author in the New Testament. Modernists are almost all opposed to Paul's line of thinking, because they say he narrowed Christianity down to the Jewish way of thinking and reduced it to a system of vicarious sacrifice in order to approach God. Thus they say the world lost its opportunity to carry out the great conception of Jesus as to the brotherhood of man and Fatherhood of God. Modernism

definitely does not care much for Paul's line of things. When you come to the other branches of Christendom, those who profess to believe the Bible, they seem somewhat reluctant to go all the way with Paul. They evidently feel that Paul condemns many of the things with which they are going on. For you cannot consistently profess to believe a thing and act directly contrary to it. So, many a man, many a Christian leader who says he believes the Word of God, who says he is a fundamentalist, will definitely sidestep many of the things in Paul's ministry, because they come into collision with the system with which he is connected.

When we come to consider Catholicism, we find that they do not want their people to know about Paul's ministry. Why should they want their followers to know that there is but one Mediator between God and men? Or to read of the fact that by one offering He has perfected forever them that are sanctified-no, that branch of the professing Christian Church does not care to have Paul's ministry spread abroad among their followers.

On a train recently one had a long talk with a Catholic priest, a young man about 27 years of age. He confessed without a blush that he had never read Paul's ministry. Yes, he had read the four gospels, but in his five years in training as an ecclesiastic, he had never given one cursory reading to the ministry of Paul.

Paul's ministry is the key to the present dispensation in which we are living. Without it we are going to lose our proper character as those who are possessed of the heavenly calling, those who await to be taken out of this world, those who are expecting His return to take us into the place where we belong.

Going back into the historical sequence of things-in the third of Acts, the Church was formed. And in the next two chapters, the Spirit of God energizes them with such unique power and Christian affection as the world had never known -not a jarring note, everything in lovely harmony-a beautiful answer to our Lord's prayer in the 17th of John that they all might be one. Very soon failure came in; for, remember, the Word of God never promises a perfect condition in the Church of God. We will never have it while we are down here in this world, for wherever anything is committed to man, we can look for failure to come in. So it was in the 5th chapter, in the lie of Ananias and his wife; likewise in the 6th, we discover selfishness. We find trouble early in the Church of God. I trust none of us are so self-complacent as to think we can expect or look for a perfect company. Mr. Armet used to say that if he found that company, he would not join it; because, if he did, it would be spoiled. No, we are not looking for the perfect company, but we are seeking to discern from the Word of God the path marked out for faith in these last days.

In Acts 7 we find that the Jewish nation sins again against Christ in the stoning of Stephen. They definitely say, "We will not have this man to reign over us." How final was Israel's rejection of their Messiah!

Immediately, in the next chapter, we find grace beginning to work outside the bounds of Israel proper; and the Samaritans were brought in. All is orderly progress from the day of Pentecost right down to the 9th chapter. Here Saul of Tarsus is converted, that chosen instrument whom God, as it were, had hidden away. His eye was upon him. Saul of Tarsus thought he was going on in his own way and using his dynamic drive to wipe off the face of the earth the name of Jesus. There was no name he hated like that name. Nevertheless, he was a chosen vessel of God, "a vessel of

mercy." God was going to demonstrate in that vessel, that where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. And so, in the 9th of Acts, it is Saul who is brought to God. The Acts continues in the 10th and 11th chapters with the introduction into the Church of the Gentiles, formally.

Perhaps we might open our Bibles to Acts 11:19-25. There is something significant there. The moment the Gentiles begin to accept the gospel, this man of God who was full of the Holy Ghost, this man Barnabas, instinctively feels that the man who is needed to fill in right here is Saul of Tarsus. No doubt he was guided by the Spirit of God in those thoughts; so, he goes to Tarsus, gets Saul, brings him to Antioch, and in the 26th verse, "And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people." That is characteristic of Paul, "with the church." How his name is linked all the way through Scripture with that precious ministry-Christ and the Church. So here, early in his ministry, he is at Antioch spending a whole year with the Church. Something also significant comes out here-"And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch"-Christians! You do not get Christianity recognized as a definite and new thing until you find it under the ministry of Paul down at Antioch far removed from Jerusalem. From here on Peter's leadership is rapidly eclipsed by that of Paul, save for a single crisis which arose later in connection with the Gentiles and their relationship to the law. But even there it was not Peter but James who gave the mind of the Spirit in the final decision. In the 12th chapter of Acts, we hear Peter saying, "Go show these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place." That is the last we hear of Peter's formal ministry. But what do we find in the next, the 13th, chapter? "Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul." Yes, here Saul is right on hand in the Church at Antioch, and is selected to carry the gospel to the Gentiles. Moreover, he is the one used in a typical way to set aside the Jew under judicial blindness. 9th verse: "Then Saul... filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him." Here we get the mystical intimation that Paul is the one to give the final word as to apostate Israel. Thus they were given over to judicial darkness so that they will not be able to find their way for a season; that season is going on at the present day.

This reminds me of when I was a boy and used to go to Sunday School and study under the International Sunday School lessons-six months in the Old Testament, those beautiful stories about Joseph in Egypt and David and the giant, etc.-six months in the Old Testament and six months in the New Testament. We learned the precious story of the life of our blessed Lord. It was valuable, and I thank God for those things. I came from a home where I did not get these things. But the point I am making is this: We never made an excursion into the epistles of Paul, unless it was to wrest some verse out of its context and get a temperance lesson. We were not given the faintest idea of the grand outline of the ministry committed to Paul. Paul was neglected. That is what one is trying to emphasize in tracing this great servant. God raised him up in this definite line of ministry, and woe to the one who neglects Paul. He is going to be emaciated in his spiritual life; he will be out of communion with the mind of Christ.

Chapter 50

Paul's Doctrine: Address 1 - Part 2

Now we go on to the 14th chapter. Paul returns from his missionary journey, "And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how He had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles." Is that not significant? When they got back, it was the Church that Paul sought. It was there he unburdened his heart and told out the story of God's way with him on that eventful missionary journey. Yes, Paul was an assembly man, a Church man; and I trust any of us here tonight in our service for Christ will never get beyond the place where we feel the need of the assembly.

I pass on the little illustration given me by a brother. He said, Some brethren seem all gospel-minded. They do not seem to get much beyond the gospel to discover the importance of the assembly, and others are so church-minded that they seem to lose sympathy with the gospel. Neither is in accordance with the mind of God. The brother went on to say, In our ministry we should be like a pair of compasses-one leg planted in the middle of the assembly and kept there, and never wandering away, and the other leg of the compass wandering as far in gospel testimony as it may, consistently with the Word of God.

When the Apostle had finished this evangelical tour, he was back with the Church in happy fellowship, telling them what God had done and how He had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles. "And there they abode long time with the disciples." This man was a great servant, entrusted with the highest truth God ever committed to man; but he never became so infatuated with saving souls that he forgot or neglected assembly life and testimony. Here Paul abode a long time with the disciples. How easy it is to put wrong emphasis on things. I was thinking about Peter's commission in John's gospel. After his restoration, what did the Lord tell him to do? Send him out to preach the gospel? Not a word about the gospel. He says, "Feed My sheep." He is a shepherd-"My sheep." It all had to do with the house of God. How the Lord loves the sheep, and when we put the gospel above ministry to the saints, when we discount teaching in order to elevate preaching, we have not the mind of God. The greatest preacher and evangelist who ever lived is this man Paul, but he did not think he was wasting his time by staying there a long time teaching the disciples.

Now we go further, to the 20th chapter. Here he is making his farewell address. The 25th verse: "And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men [this is Paul's last visit to Ephesus]. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." Now, if you are going to be in the good of Paul's ministry, you will desire the whole counsel of God; and if you deliberately refuse it, you are cutting yourself off from what God has for you. And if you refuse it to others, you are like a man who wraps a cord around the arm of another and stops the circulation. If you rob the saints of some of the truth of the counsels of God for them, you are doing damage to them. Paul said that if he had done it that way he would be guilty of the blood of those people. He means to say that he would be responsible spiritually for

their being left lame, sickly, and puny, and lacking in normal growth; but he says, "I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." Should we seek less? Should we be satisfied with less than the whole counsel of God?

Now going to the 22nd chapter, 14th verse. We are back to Paul's conversion, but it comes in here in an orderly way. Ananias said to him, "The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know His will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of His mouth." Now the expression one desires to emphasize is this: "That thou shouldest know His will." That is more than simply going out to preach the gospel. From the very start of his commission, Paul was to know God's will.

Now we will go to the last chapter of Acts, last two verses: "And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him." We see the double character of Paul's ministry there- teaching and preaching. They both went together. And what was the theme? The theme was the kingdom of God and all that concerned the Lord Jesus Christ. Now when you have those three titles put together in that way, it means God is seeking to bring before us all the range of truth that has to do with the Person of His Son-as Lord, as Savior, as the Anointed, as the crucified Man up there-our Lord Jesus Christ.

One of the sad things that one notes in conversations with Christians at large is that you seldom hear them speak of "our Lord Jesus." They will talk about "Jesus," about "Christ," about "Christ Jesus." But how seldom do you ever hear Christians speak about the "Lord Jesus," and even more rarely do you hear them speak about the "Lord Jesus Christ."

Paul in his ministry and teaching filled out the whole of God's thoughts as to Christ, and he would have us do the same. Now let us connect that expression in the 22nd chapter of Acts: "that thou shouldest know His will," with what we find in Eph. 5:17: "Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is." Does not that connect beautifully with Paul's commission at the start-"That thou shouldest know His will"? How important it is, young Christian, to be instructed in the will of God. God does not want us to be unwise. Sometimes you hear Christians say, shrugging their shoulders, "You know some of us do not have time to study these things out. We do not know much about the Bible. There is brother so-and-so, we will let him handle that." We shrug our shoulders and eliminate ourselves from the richest possible discoveries we can make in God's Word. It is not just for the old brothers to enjoy: it is for every child of God. God does not want us to be unwise. He wants us to stand complete in Him. The Word of God is written for you - "Be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is."

Now compare that with Col. 1:9, 10. We find ourselves on familiar ground. "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." I take from those two verses that you cannot walk correctly as a Christian unless you understand the calling of a Christian as given to us in the ministry of Paul. I see this demonstrated all around me as I look on the Christian world that has given up the ministry of Paul. Everywhere I go I see contradiction to the heavenly calling of the Christian. I find them with apparently good conscience mixed up in all sorts of worldly connections that deny their heavenly) calling. Seemingly they would ignore the, coming of the Lord as though there was no

possibility that it could interfere with the orderly run of affairs down here. And so men plan and scheme in a religious way for years to come; establish great and permanent institutions; they throw themselves wholeheartedly into political and social reforms, and so the doctrine of Paul, which leaves the Church expecting any moment the return of the Lord Jesus, is so completely lost sight of that it is seldom mentioned.

One remembers visiting a family in Louisiana. The father was a dear child of God, a Methodist, and we had some good talks together. But when I tried to interest him in the blessed fact that the Lord Jesus is coming back again, I found my friend utterly indifferent. I could not see that there was the slightest response. His attitude was this: "If He is coming, He will come, and when He comes, why, I am ready. But I do not think that should form any part of our thinking or planning. We will go on in our gospel efforts as though He is not coming, and when He comes, He will come. That is all there is to it." The pulsating hope in his heart's affections was totally missing. Why? Not a Christian? No, he was saved, but he had had bad teaching; not wicked teaching, but poor teaching. He was not instructed in the will of God. How much had he heard of Paul's ministry? How much did he know of the epistles, those precious parts intended for the saints of God - bread upon their table. How much? Very little! He knew the gospel; he traced the life of our Lord; he preached John 3:16. He knew about Christ and His death, but what did he know about the marvelous epistles that have to do with the glorified One up there and our vital union with Him; that any day the Church may be called to meet Him in the glory? It made no part of his thinking.

So, we cannot expect to walk rightly, we cannot expect to be right in anything in our Christian activity if we are not instructed in the will of God as we have it in the Word of God, including the fourteen epistles of Paul.

Further on in this chapter, verses 23-25, Paul receives a double 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." What verses those are! What a wealth of truth is contained in them! Here is this special instrument of God who receives a double ministry, a ministry of the gospel, which he calls "a gospel of the glory." Paul's gospel included John 3:16, but it took in the whole range of all that is ours as a consequence of Christ's having suffered and died and risen again and having taken His place at God's right hand.

Not only so, Paul says that God has committed to him another ministry of the Church, the ministry of the body of Christ. "That I might fill up that which is lacking and complete the word of God." What does it mean? Well, saints, in Paul's ministry you have brought out all that God has for man; and after Paul lays down his pen, the whole SCOPE of the truth of God is now revealed. Now, that does not mean that other men did not write after Paul. John wrote long after Paul; and after Paul had written this to Colosse, he wrote other things. That does not mean that this was the last thing that God was going to pen to the Church-definitely not. We know there were other communications, but in none of those communications was the Spirit of God exceeding the borders that have been explored in Paul's ministry. Paul had to suffer for that ministry; so he says,

"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." Paul's ministry has always necessitated suffering on the part of the saints of God. Paul says, "I am filling up what was lacking in the suffering of Christ." It was not atoning suffering- not that! Paul was proving that he was so in fellowship with the mind of Christ that he was sharing the same kind of rejection that his blessed Lord had had in this world. If you and I go on with Paul's ministry, his doctrine, with the full circle of the truth of Christ and the Church, we are going to find it costs something. It never has been possible in this world, and never will be possible, to escape rejection by this world if we testify to all the truth - especially the heavenly truth brought out by Paul. If you adopt Paul's ministry in its full character, and accept its consequences, you will find that it is not wanted even in Christendom. "Even the mystery... God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." As it were, Paul exhausted the vocabulary when he got into that subject-Christ and the Church! How much does it mean to us? How much does it mean to you? Are you satisfied to be just taken up with the gospel, or are you definitely interested in the truth of the Church, and order your life accordingly? If you do it may cost you something. "Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." Now I understand that that is the highest ministry. How many of our ministries go that high? You cannot go higher than that: "present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." Any ministry that has less than that for its object is ministry that is too limited; it cannot have the full sanction of the Spirit. It is only a partial ministry.

Do we in our ministry seek to present every man perfect in Christ Jesus? Not to just present the old brothers, or the leaders, or the gifted, or the preachers, or just the brothers and leave sisters out. No, God wants every one of us to be perfected in the range of truth that is brought out in Paul's writings, as well as the truth ministered by the other New Testament writers. Paul's heart was burdened right down to the end that they might stand complete in all the will of God.

Chapter 51

Paul's Doctrine: Address 2 - Part 1

Let us open our Bibles again to Colossians. We have already had one address in this series on Paul's doctrine and its bearing on our life and testimony in these last days. Last time we traced the bringing in of the Church historically, the conversion of the Apostle Paul, together with the testimony that was committed to him. We saw in his ministry how he sought to bring all the saints into full fellowship with the revelation that had been given to him as the special Apostle of God. Confessedly, the Apostle has a unique position unlike that of other apostles. Fourteen men are spoken of in Scripture as "apostles," of whom Paul was not a whit behind the very chiefest! Paul was the chosen vessel through whom Christ revealed the truth of the Church. In fact, Paul is the only one of the eight authors of the New Testament who speaks of the "church of God." To be sure, others of the apostles speak of "the church," but Paul only, I believe, uses the expression, "the church of God."

In our last address, we followed Paul down to the first chapter of Colossians, and we laid emphasis on this statement in Col. 1:27, 28, 29: "Christ... whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: whereunto I also labor, striving according to His working, which worketh in me mightily." Then in the next chapter, Colossians 2: "For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh; that their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God." vv. 1, 2. Leave out the remainder of that verse. You will find it omitted in the better translations. Verse 3: "In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." The Apostle's exercise there is that there should be the acknowledgment in your life and mine of the whole truth of the mystery of God. And the mystery of God is connected with Christ and the Church.

In God's ways and wisdom the Apostle Paul became the medium for the communication of three distinct revelations. The greatest of these is first alluded to in 1 Cor. 12:12: "As the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body; so also is [the] Christ" - "the Christ!" I am not supplying the definite article there without reason. It is so given in the Greek text. "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." "So also is [the] Christ." What does that expression, "the Christ" mean there? It means that the union of the members of the body with the ascended Head is so real that the whole looked at together - the body, Head, and the members - are regarded as one, and so are called "the Christ." The mystical "Christ" then, comprehends the Head in heaven and the members down here on earth. Paul in that first chapter of Colossians said that he had received a double ministry. The first part of that ministry was connected with the gospel, and Paul's gospel always connected man with the glory, as he calls it in the fourth chapter of 2 Corinthians, "the gospel of the glory of Christ." Why was that? When Paul preached the gospel, he did not stop with telling sinners that Christ died for them, and by receiving Christ they would get their sins forgiven. Paul preached that the gospel

was of such enormous purport and power, that the man who received Christ not only received forgiveness of sins but became attached to the Man in glory - connected with that One up there. Yes, he goes further in this doctrine, and sees the believer seated in the heavenlies in Christ.

The second revelation that Paul received was closely connected with the former. In addition to this truth that the Church is a heavenly institution joined to the glorified Head by the indwelling Spirit of God, there was also committed to Paul the full doctrinal significance of what we commonly speak of as the Lord's supper. In the religious world around us it is spoken of as the Communion Service. In the Word of God we find it brought before us in the 10th and 11th chapters of 1 Corinthians as the great central ordinance to express through all the Church's history the truth of Christ's death for us. Now, to Paul was committed the bringing out in connection with the remembrance of the Lord the additional significance of the one loaf. "Because we (being) many, are one loaf, one body; for we all partake of that one loaf." 1 Cor. 10:17; J.N.D. Trans. Thus is the unity of the body of Christ (the Church) brought before us.

The third revelation committed to Paul was that of the resurrection of the departed saints plus the fact that some of us may never have to die. How does that integrate with the other two revelations? In this way: If the truth of Christ and the Church is the highest truth that God can give to man, and if the memorial of the Lord's supper is the expression of that truth for the Church here on earth, what about the saints that have passed off this scene? Are they going to lose any of the benefits accruing to the living saints? No, we are assured that they lose nothing. For the Lord is watching over them and is going to bring them all back that they, with us, should be changed and so fitted for the blessing when we enter into the fullness of what we have now received by faith. This raising of the dead saints and the changing of the living to be caught up to meet the Lord in the air is commonly called the "rapture," or, the catching away of the Church.

When all who are predestinated to form part of that mystical body are gathered in through the preaching of the gospel, there will sound the shout in the air as the Church is caught away from the earth forever. We must go to the 4th chapter of 1 Thessalonians to find out how this takes place. All these three revelations committed to Paul are interrelated. Together they complete the special Pauline testimony.

In our chapter this afternoon, Colossians 2, we find the Apostle is much concerned that there might be full acknowledgment of the mystery of God. In the 4th verse: "And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words." The 8th verse: "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him."

Dear saint of God, "ye are complete in Him." Oh, how jealous Paul was that that truth continue with us. "Complete in Him" - but that is connected with the truth of Christ and the Church. You cannot separate them. It all hangs together, and Paul says in that first verse, "I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you." On what point? That they might be saved? No! That they might get to heaven when they die? No!' That they might enter, into this mystery; that that might form and fashion their lives. And he goes on to develop the doctrine as it practically affects the life of the believer.

Turn to the last chapter of this same epistle, 12th verse: "Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God." There was a man who labored in spirit for the Lord by praying. Was he gospel-minded? I have no doubt he was. No saint is in a healthy state of soul who is not gospel-minded, but I tell you there was something about Epaphras that went beyond being gospel-minded. Epaphras was church-minded. Are you church minded? Are you? Paul was. Paul commends Epaphras for the fact that he labored and sweated and toiled in spirit that the saints of God might enter into the full acknowledgment of all the truth of God. We are living in such shallow times that Christianity has become so watered down that in many places today it is becoming synonymous with the concept of a home and foreign missionary society.

I shall relate an incident. One afternoon we had a nice Bible reading at a conference. A minister was there, a child of God. I knew him personally. In fact, his mother was in the meeting. I remarked to him at the close of the reading what a lovely time we had had over the Word of God, and he gave a rather reluctant agreement to the statement, and added, "I don't attach much importance to this kind of thing. I believe that God measures all things in terms of the salvation of men's souls." He meant it. He was sincere, and I believe he was a real soul winner, too. Some day all his service for Christ is going to pass in solemn review at the judgment seat of Christ. Do you think that his idea will be the measuring stick in that coming day? Is God going to sum up our Christian lives in terms of how many souls we have won for Christ? Paul said in writing to the saints, "Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men." 2 Cor. 3:2. What do they read in you? Do they read only that which concerns man's salvation? Or do they find in you the spirit of Epaphras, who was seeking to be in harmony with the will of God concerning Christ and the Church? We need the right standard of measurement; if we do not have it, we may drift far off from God's thoughts.

One remembers, perhaps 30 years ago, brother M. and I helped a widow to excavate for a new home. We measured the length and width, but one inch of the yardstick had been cut off, and we did not know it. When the mason came to lay the bricks, he was disgusted to find the hole in the ground was too small both ways. We were sincere; we did not know there was an inch missing - never dreamed of it. We had to be convinced. But we were using a faulty standard of measurement, and the result showed up in our work. The mason came along and saw the error. And if we use the wrong measuring stick in our work down here for God, we can expect our work to be faulty. We want to be sure in our Christian life and testimony that we are making room for the whole scope and realm of God's full and free revelation.

Notice how Paul says, "Lest any man spoil you." And as you look out in the Christian world today, can you by any stretch of the imagination conceive of anything more unlike to its origin than Christendom? Of all the babel of voices found in the world today, Christendom excels. We find every kind of schism, truth, error, cult, ritualism, rationalism - all parading under the banner of Christianity.

In our portion here (Col. 2:8, 18), there are two solemn dangers before the saints of God - one is rationalism and the other is ritualism, and either one will rob you of the preciousness of the truth of God. Rationalism - young people, these addresses are primarily for the benefit of younger Christians - let me urge it upon you, is the result of letting your mind work in the things of God.

Rationalism is the attempt to mentally dissect the things of God; and if you allow it, it will maneuver you off the ground of the truth of God without your realizing it. It is a subtle thing, and Satan knows that by using your mind he is using an instrument that he has had experience with for 6,000 years. He knows how to put things in a specious way that appeals to the natural mind. The remedy is Paul's word in 2 Cor. 10:5: "Casting down imaginations [reasonings], and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." If we can learn to take the truth of God in the simplicity in which it has been given to us, we shall be safe.

In that connection, I think of Paul's word in 2 Corinthians 11, "But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." Young folks, value that expression: "the simplicity that is in Christ." The things of God, the truths of God, are called "simple," and they are simple to faith, but they are stumbling blocks to reason. Yes; it is no wonder that the world hears the gospel and terms it foolishness. So it is with the natural man. But to the believer, the Word of God is a precious storehouse and treasury, and out of it He brings forth treasures new and old. So in our chapter, the Apostle says, I do not want you spoiled. Are you going to allow the enemy to spoil you and rob you?

I saw a book advertised in a fundamentalist magazine. I got a copy of it and read part of it. It was alluringly written; yes, ably written. But the whole book was an attempt to fit God's plan to man's mind. It was an attempt by human reason to force the truth into a mold that would be accepted by man in the flesh. Before I finished that book I was impressed how a child of God can be led so far astray. I felt Satan had maneuvered that man so far off the ground of truth that he was actually preaching serious error. He had really lost God's Christ - the Eternal One. Yes, his Christ had become the offspring of God; not in those words, of course, but in sum and substance that is where his reasoning led. How careful we need to be! Do not trust those minds of yours! Remember God gave us His Word and He did not take us into consultation when He did it. Rom. 11:34: "Who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been His counselor?" That is what Paul had in mind when he wrote to the Romans. Yes. who helped God out? Who gave Him advice when He was forming His plan for time and eternity? Paul rules that all out. The part of wisdom is for you and me to submit to the truth of Hebrews 1. God has spoken unto us; and, if we are wise, we will receive what God has said, and-receive it without question. In Colossians 2 we are warned' that Satan would love to maneuver us off the ground of truth; either by rationalism or by ritualism.

You know in the modernism we have around us today, you see the full-grown result of man letting his mind work in the things of God. You have the extreme exponent of it in Henry Emerson Fosdick, who says openly that he does not believe in the resurrection of Christ, the virgin birth of Christ, the atoning work of Christ. He comes out openly and solidly an infidel. That is the end of the road; that is where modernism leads. Modernism, or rationalism, starts out with modifying or neutralizing Scripture, and it may be in little things. But all are on the same road; it is only a question of how far we go. For instance, one of the radio preachers who likes to be classified among the fundamentalists recently came out with a defense of denominationalism. He made the remark something to this effect: There will always be denominations as long as the Church is here. We dress our children in different kinds of clothes; we do not dress them exactly alike. We permit them some individuality and dress them according to their personality. And he dismissed the denomination question with a wave of his hand, as much as to say that part of the matter is, left up

to us.. IS that faith, or is that rationalism?

Chapter 52

Paul's Doctrine: Address 2 - Part 2

In the early part of 2 Cor. 2:17, Paul uses this expression: "We are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ." Notice how weighty it is! The margin reads, "Which deal deceitfully with the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ." Could it be put more solemn or more weighty than that?

I read in the Word of God that divisions in the Church of God are a sin, and one solemnly condemned. If God, as it were, has given us a definite part of His instruction for His Church as long as it is here, then denominationalism is rebellion against God. It is of man. Can I glibly and suavely make allowance for it? Is that dealing with the Word of God faithfully before God, in the sight of God? Some day we are going to give an account of all these things. Yet, is it not true that many of these things are handled as though they did not amount to anything-just a matter of personal opinion?

One remembers reading an address that the president of a Bible institute gave to a graduating class. I suppose he had at least 20 different denominations represented in that class, and I presume he wanted to make them feel good, as they graduated and then went out into the field of Christian labor and conflict; so he said to them: "I believe God raised up different denominations for different emphases-as He raised up the Methodist Church to put emphasis on method in Christian work; the Baptists to lay proper emphasis on baptism; the Presbyterians to lay proper emphasis on church government; and he went down the list and named perhaps six or eight of the well-known denominations. Is that faithfulness to Christ? Is that the truth of the Word? Will that stand the test of the judgment seat of Christ? In principle, that is rationalism.

What is rationalism? It is that which neutralizes the Word of God; neutralizes the effect on the conscience so that man can take up the Word of God and ride right over its plain statements with a calloused conscience, because those who had instructed him had encouraged an elastic conscience on these points-had given him to feel that they were of no weight.

When Epaphras was laboring there on his knees in prayer for the saints of Colosse, what was the burden of his heart? That they might stand complete in all the will of God. Well, dear saint of God, where do you stand today? Are you bowing at the shrine of reason, or are you submitting to the Word of God? Are you seeking to fit your life into the pattern of the marvelous revelations which we have received through Paul?

Paul speaks of the "church of God." "Church of God"- what one are you connected with? Perhaps there is someone here this afternoon who says with pride, "I belong to the best of all-I'm a Baptist." One would perhaps agree that there is much to be said in favor of the Baptist Church, but I can assure you of one thing-Paul was no Baptist, for he said, "Christ sent me not to baptize." So you could not claim Paul. Now that is just one example. Perhaps you might say, "I belong to the Friends." "Ye are My friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." Yet perhaps the most definite

thing the Lord Jesus asked His own to do as long as they are in this scene is "This do in remembrance of Me." "Eat this bread, and drink this cup." "This do"-not something else! These dear people never, never have the Lord's supper. It is not a part of their plan or program or set-up at all. Is that Paul's doctrine? Does it make any difference to what you belong? God's truth is one complete whole. Paul is very anxious for people to get the whole of it, and makes no allowance forever having any will in the matter. It is for us to receive what God has said in His Word. Rationalism can rob you of the truth!

Then there is something else that can spoil you, too. And they work together, one on one side of the street and the other on the other. They seem to get along pretty well side by side. The other is ritualism.

Everything around us in Christendom today is tending to one of two climaxes. The head of the revived Roman Empire will be an absolute "no-God" man, but he will act in close liaison with the woman, the "great whore," the eventual form of apostate Christianity. Part of the Christian world now is heading for the man-rationalism; and part toward the woman-ritualism! When the true Church is taken out and all is left behind that is unreal, then you will find those two forces working together for a little while. And then, finally, in His governmental way, God uses the one to destroy the other; and then the Lord Himself destroys the infidel power. Everything around us today is moving toward the man or toward the woman-toward rationalism or toward ritualism. Which way do you want to move? Where do you want to be? Remember, according to Paul's doctrine, there was to be a definite, clear-cut testimony rendered to the world by the Church. The Church was left in this scene as a testimony for our absent Lord. She is waiting for the return of her Lord. We are "partakers of the heavenly calling." How much does the Church know about it? How far has the Church departed from it? Yes, we are called to heaven, not to earth. "Consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus." Where is He? In heaven. The Church was never put here as an institution belonging to earth. Eventually, the Church is to be taken out of the world. In the meantime, the Church is waiting for the Lord to summon us to glory. That is the testimony of the Word of God according to the truth Paul brings out.

If Satan cannot corrupt things through rationalism, he will corrupt them through ritualism. Anything that seeks to make your soul fit for God apart from the work of Christ, is ritualism. Any least thing that is brought between your soul and the finished work of Christ, is ritualism, and it will spoil you and rob you. But you know it comes in bit by bit. It is referred to in the end of this chapter, verse 20: "Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances,

(Touch not; taste not; handle not; which are all to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrine of men?" In the Revised Version you will find that these are put in opposite order: "Handle not; taste not; touch not." Now, this is not a question of temperance; anything like the liquor or tobacco question is not involved at all. It is a question of religious ritualism, and God is showing how man rather than accept the completed work of Christ to which nothing can be added, that sets him perfect before Christ-rather than accept that, he introduces religious performances to perfect himself before God. He introduces them innocently, as one might say, and finally secures the sanction of some great ecclesiastical authority, and they become so solemnized that perhaps only one man in the world dares touch them with his finger; but at the same time it had led away

from Christ-led away from His completeness-that fullness that we have in Christ. So men are robbed in their souls.

This morning some of us came together, and we remembered the Lord Jesus in His death. Did you? If you did not, where were you? How often do you remember the Lord? He did not say, "As seldom as ye do it," but "As often as ye do it." We came to do it in solemn, precious memory of Him; and we drank the cup in solemn memory of His bloodshed for us. Why did we do it? Was it a means of making us acceptable to God? Was there merit in it? Did eating that bread, drinking that cup, give us some kind of religious position or standing that we did not have before? Not the slightest! There was not one atom of virtue in it from that viewpoint. It was simply a question of doing what the blessed Lord asked us to do- almost the last thing He asked us to do. Yet is it not a fact that some Christians become so busy with their testimony, giving their testimony, so busy in the Lord's work, that they do not have time even to come aside and remember the Lord in His death?

I remember an interesting case of a sister in -, who was connected with a church there; perhaps that church would rank at the top among fundamentalists. They have thrown themselves into gospel work but disregard almost entirely the line of truth we have before us today. This sister became exercised as to taking her place at the Lord's table. She went to the minister about it, and he discouraged her leaving; but she said she felt she must leave because she did not find in the Church some of the things she found in the Word of God. He asked her what were some of the things. "Well, I feel in my heart a desire to remember the Lord in His death, and I would like to do it with those who meet for that purpose, not as a denomination, not as some certain church, but meet in simplicity of faith to remember Christ." His reply to her was, "You know, there are a few of us in this big church that feel that way too. We meet to remember the Lord each Lord's day except the Sunday the church has communion." What an admission! Are there two standards? Two ways? Is God the author of confusion? Three Lord's days in the month they hold that semi-private memorial, but on the fourth Lord's day this is given up to meet as a denomination. Is that according to the truth and teaching of the Word of God? I do not say this to disparage any truth taught in that church; thousands of souls have been blessed there, no doubt, but that does not atone for the sad inconsistencies we have just called attention to. I do not discount the truth, but in the fear of God I am here to state we are not loyal to Christ if we compromise the truth, if we seek to hide some of it so as to become acceptable to the religious world.

In the next chapter, Paul says: "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above." If you and I are seeking those things which are above, we are not going to be occupied with what man thinks. If the Apostle Paul cared for what man thought of him, he would never have written what he did in 1 Cor. 4:9-13: "For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honorable, but we are despised. Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling place; and labor, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: being defamed, we entreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the off scouring of all things unto this day."

Why did Paul have to suffer those things? That he might fill up that which was behind of the sufferings of Christ for His body's sake. Friend, here this afternoon, how much have you really suffered for the sake of the Church? How much have you paid of the price for treading the path of separation? If you and I are going to be obedient to the doctrine of Paul, it is going to isolate us from the great organized bodies of Christendom around us. The doctrine of Paul as to the Church has been given up long ago. For it was substituted the fallacy of what they call the "church invisible" and the "church visible." And so, all of Paul's doctrine as to the "church invisible" was given over to the keeping of the angels, as it were, while man took over the "visible church," after his own pattern. What sad confusion he has made of it! You can see it everywhere.

But Paul's doctrine cuts a distinct line. The Church is the witness for Christ, a witness for her absent Lord, maintaining all the truth as to Christ-not just a part of it. He left the Church here, not as an institution to establish foundations in the world, or to build for generations to come, but as a witness now-now-with the thought that at any moment we are going to leave it.

Over forty years ago now, I was worshiping in a church.

We had a godly man, for pastor. I was active there. Many dear Christians were in that institution. I left there because I did not find the doctrine of Paul. I found a part of the truth, but I could not go on with the doctrine of Paul and stay there. When I left, my dear old pastor wrote me a letter telling me what an awful blunder I was making in leaving a big ship to get into a very small one. Then he went on to tell me what

a big thing the M. Church was, and gave a long list of statistics. The whole letter was a mass of comparative figures. But there was not one verse of Scripture in that two-page, type written letter-not one verse of Scripture-and, what is more, there was not one reference in that whole letter to the will of God. No, it was a question of human wisdom. I was making a blunder, sacrificing my chances in life, jeopardizing my opportunities for advancement in the ecclesiastical world by stepping out and aligning myself with a group of "nobodies." Forty years have rolled by, that old institution still stands- I pass it many a time, but never with one note of regret that I did not stay there. I am glad that God revealed to me comparatively early in my spiritual life that the truth of Christ and the Church is so dear to the heart of Christ that I cannot be in full communion with Him unless that truth forms a part of my thinking and a part of my path and practice.

Paul says of the counsels of God, "I have kept back nothing." Friend, are you keeping back something? Are you compromising the truth? Fellow Christian, I feel so helpless as I close this address; I feel I have just scratched the surface. I feel there is so much here, and one would love to go on in this line. It is in this Book. Make it your own. Dig deep; find out what it has for you. Value it! Do not let anyone rob you of it. God forbid that I should discount the gospel. I do not mean that, but I mean do not stop at that. Go on to perfection. I am reading this verse in closing-Col. 1:28: "Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus."

Chapter 53

Paul's Doctrine: Address 3 - Part 1

This is the third and final address in this series on Paul's doctrine. In the first address we traced Paul's doctrine historically. We found he was a special witness for the unfolding of those wonderful revelations. We outlined the main points of it in our second address. We spoke of some of the things that corrupt that doctrine-the influence of ritualism and the influence of rationalism-either of which, or both of which, can rob us of what Paul by the Spirit gave us.

Tonight one desires to speak of the problems that face the Church of God and render the observance of Paul's doctrine a far more difficult path than in Paul's days. Confessedly we are living in the last days.

When man launches a new enterprise of any kind, perhaps a stock company, he gets out a prospectus, perhaps a very lovely brochure, and tells the investors what a wonderful success it is going to be, how they can buy this stock at $10 a share, and perhaps in a short time it will jump to $100 a share. They demonstrate by figures and arguments and statistics that it cannot possibly fail. It is going to be what they call a success. When we come to the introduction of Christianity into the world, we have the promise of the Church, the promise of the reception it was to have in this world, the promise of the progress that the truth was to make, and then the final consummation of all at the end of the age. We find that exactly the opposite kind of prophecy is made. As we trace the history of the Church - as we follow it in the seven churches of Revelation 2 and 3 - we find the downgrade, with rare exceptions, the thing ending in that which is so nauseous to Christ that it has to be spewed out of the mouth as a thing hateful to Him The

Apostle's writings abound with warnings that in the last days things are going to be bad, that it is going to be a difficult time. We learn that toward the end it is going to be hard to find real, genuine faith on the earth. We find that the love of many is going to wax cold, truth is going to be surrendered, people are going to refuse to have ears to hear the Word of God-especially those lines of truth peculiar to Paul. How different from what man desires!

We find ourselves in the end of the Christian dispensation, if we can call it dispensation. We are faced with the problem of finding a clean path through the confusion Satan has brought in. Who can look out over Christendom today and not recognize what a Babel it is? We cannot wonder that people stumble about hopelessly, something like in the days when Israel was without a king, and every man did what was right in his own eyes. Men have come to the cynical conclusion that all that is left to do is to do the best they can and go with the confusion. In the case of Israel, there was no king; and everyone did that which was right in his own eyes. You and I cannot say that in reference to the Church of God. No! We cannot rob Him of His headship of the Church. He did not jeopardize that headship by making it dependent upon the faithfulness of man. He did not put the keeping of the body of Christ in the hands of man and make it man's responsibility. No, it is in His keeping: "I will build My church; and the gates of hell [Hades] shall not prevail against it." Matt. 16:18.

When the day comes for Christ to claim His Church, He is going to present it to Himself perfect, without spot, without blemish. It is going to answer perfectly to all that He has planned and purposed-not a blemish. Glorious! It is going to be in company with Himself-His work. That is His responsibility. That is going to be His glory. That is His workmanship.

Now, we are not going to talk much about that side of it tonight. Our problem is to find our way through the difficulties besetting us as to human responsibility in connection with the truth entrusted to us, and that especially in connection with the Church of God. When our Lord Jesus gave His farewell address to His disciples, He held out a very dark picture as to how their testimony was to be received in this world. Perhaps we might trace a verse or two in John 15:18, 19: "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." Next chapter and the last verse: "These things have I spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." The next chapter, 14th verse: "I have given them Thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world."

One ventures to say that it is a safe conclusion from the sentiments expressed there that it was never our Lord's intention that the Church was to be an accepted institution in the world. Or, in other words, the program that is outlined by the Lord as He takes His departure from His disciples - as He takes them, so to speak, into the holy of holies in the 14th, 15th, 16th, and 17th chapters of John's Gospel-the burden of what He has to say is this: "I am leaving you in a hostile world, and the testimony that you have to bear in that world will never be accepted." Christianity was never intended to be a popular affair in the world. And I would say I believe and speak the truth that Bible Christianity has never been popular in the world. Oh, I know we have a situation today where the Church boasts of the power it has succeeded in grasping in worldly affairs, and the world boasts of the presence of the Church. The world feels that it needs the Church, and the Church has certainly aligned itself with the world in many ways. It has become increasingly so, but the path we find marked out in the Word of God is the Church passing through this scene and finding everything hostile to it. Paul took up this testimony in his writings, and he bore it out personally in his own life and doctrine; and he pressed it upon the disciples.

If we turn to 2 Timothy 3, we find him saying this: "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." Now, I call attention to the fact that he does not say, "They that do," but, "They that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." If you and I dress up our Christian testimony so as to make it acceptable to the world, we can escape that persecution; but if we are seeking to live godly in Christ Jesus-if that is the purpose and desire of our lives- the Word of God says that we will be rejected, we will suffer persecution. What had been Paul's personal experience? As we noted in our previous address, the Apostle Paul had been treated as the "filth of the world... the off-scouring of all things" (1 Cor. 4:13). That is about as vivid language as it would be possible to use-to be counted as refuse-the filth and off-scouring of all things.

In the 6th chapter of 2 Corinthians, Paul speaks of his ministry. The 4th verse: "But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in watchings, in fastings; by

pureness, by knowledge, by long-suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things." Oh, what a ministry! What a ministry! That is the man that God raised up to give us the truth of the Church, and he says, "I am going to fill up that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ for His body's sake, which is the church." Yes, the Church was to be an institution in this world that would call forth the hatred and opposition of the unsaved around. Paul's testimony was never popular. When he stood there on Mars hill in Athens and preached to that critical Greek group, they termed him, "this babbler." That was not the only time he was termed the equivalent of a babbler. If we follow him through his ministry, what a life we witness! He was a man who was not afraid to work with his hands. He worked that he might not be a burden to the saints. He earned his own way so that none might say that he was in the Lord's work for money. He was willing to make tents if thereby he could make the gospel without charge.

In the early part of 1 Corinthians the Apostle rules out all natural wisdom. Chapter 3, verse 19: "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God: for it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain. Therefore let no man glory in men: for all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's."

"Let no man glory in men"! Is it not a sad thing that the Christian Church has become like a vast arena where men strive for honors? They have their gradations of achievement, they have their titles, and at times contend for them with bitter jealousies. Men deck themselves with various degrees and titles, and disport themselves in the Church of God as though it were a place for someone else than Christ to be seen. Is that not sad? How Satan must delight in that kind of display.

In 2 Timothy 4, the Apostle says. "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom; preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts they shall heap to themselves teachers. having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry." Do you want to serve the Lord? I trust you do. If I may use a figure of speech, there are no drones in God's hive. Every one of us has the privilege of Christian testimony, brothers and sisters everywhere. Do you want to do some little bit in connection with the ministry of the gospel? You have your opportunity. "Make full proof of thy ministry." How are you going to do it? By seeking constantly - every day, every hour-to prove all by the Word of God. For we can become so inured to departures from God's way that finally we accept them as a matter of fact and raise no question. Yes, that is the way it comes about; first, small departures, which afterward wear calluses on our Christian consciences so that we fall in line and accept them as part of what was intended to be. Dear young Christians, you and I are called upon as long as we are down here to check all by the Word of God. You have a little

meeting here in L.A., or you have one up there in S.M.; what is the excuse for such little assemblies? If we, in a divided and separated Christendom that has broken itself into 1,500 different kinds of sects and parties, have no God-given scriptural testimony to render, then why should we not lock the door here, forget about this place, and dissipate ourselves among the sects about us? Is there anything worthwhile to contend for, anything vital at stake, or have we followed a course of self-will? followed a mistaken leadership? If we have, it is a tragedy! I remember reading William Kelly's remark: "I believe some of us have suffered a deal for a delusion, if that is what it is." Is it worthwhile to stand for the owning of no other Name than that of the Lord Jesus and refusing to compromise that Name by any human arrangements outside of what we find in the Word of God? I verily believe it is, else I would not be speaking to you tonight.

I recall that in one of the gospels, the disciples came to the Lord quite agitated, saying, "We saw one casting out devils in Thy name... and we forbade him." The Lord's answer was something like this: "Do not forbid him. No man can work a miracle in My name and speak lightly of Me." I hope I have learned that lesson. I hope I rejoice in every voice that is lifted up in this poor, mad world today to magnify Christ. I was in a home only this week where I heard someone down here at A- T- speaking on the radio; and I heard him exalting Christ, and my heart rejoiced. I trust I have not dried up in my affections so that I do not rejoice when Christ is well spoken of. So Paul did in Philippians 1; he rejoiced when Christ was preached. He was not disposed to forbid Christ being preached. even though it was a Christ of contention. So would I stop nobody's mouth, but I would seek to be faithful to the testimony as I find it in the Word of God, if there is any such in this present-day Babylon. I would seek to continue in the path which God plainly marks out in His Word.

Chapter 54

Paul's Doctrine: Address 3 - Part 2

If we turn over to the 4th chapter of Ephesians, 2nd verse, we find the Apostle speaking of the responsibility that lies at the door of every child of God. "With all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Now, returning to my illustration, I can rejoice that Christ is preached at A- T-, but I cannot cross the threshold with a good conscience. I can show no fellowship to one who said she believed all the Word of God except that little bit written by the Apostle Paul. I cannot show fellowship to an institution founded upon the denial of Paul's doctrine; for in the chapter that she was referring to, the Apostle Paul said, "The things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord." "If any man think himself to be...spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord." Woe be to the Christian servant, man or woman, who stands up and deliberately sets aside any part of the sacred Word of God! I would not wish to stand in their place at the judgment seat of Christ, and I trust by the grace of God that I may be kept free from such departure, for it is a serious one. "Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit."

Now God speaks about a unity that He calls "the unity of the Spirit." If God talks about it, it must exist. Where is it? Yesterday a rather unusual thing happened. I found an old schoolmate of mine at the little meeting where I was. He had just dropped in, a converted man, whom I have known for 45 years. At the close of the little meeting where we remembered the Lord in His death, the poor wife was in a restless fever to know who we were and what name we went by. To her it was a strange thing that we did not care to speak of any place or name but that of Jesus. It seemed an odd thing to her; yet, her husband parades a D.D. after his name - a D.D., Doctor of Divinity, whatever that is. And yet it was a strange thing that we met owning no name but the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

O beloved, that is the only name there will be in heaven - the only name worth contending for! When we begin to glory in man, we are doing an injustice to that One who deserves every bit of praise that your lips and mine can speak. Perhaps some of us are attracted by what the world calls the magnificent displays that are going on now in connection with Christian effort. Huge, immense conventions can fill Madison Square Garden - 20,000 people, wild with enthusiasm about hearing the gospel, and worked up to a pitch of high excitement by trained bands and choirs and musical instruments of all kinds. Some of our young people are attracted by that kind of thing. Again one would reply, If any soul finds Christ there, we are glad. We are glad when anyone gets saved. Do not forbid them. "Costing thousands of dollars" is another attraction for these much advertised gospel efforts. O brethren, let us ever remember the exhortation, "Let no man glory in man."

Again I say, I rejoice that Christ is preached; but, brethren, you and I have a blessed, precious opportunity, in these last closing days of the Church's history here on earth, to tread the path of rejection, to follow in the footsteps of a man who said, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ." That man was one of the greatest saints that ever lived, and to 'him was entrusted the revelation of the mystery of Christ and the Church. That Church is very dear to the heart of Christ.

Yes, the gospel is dear to the heart of Christ. That is true. I know that; I hope it is dear to my heart. I know I rejoice whenever I hear it preached. One time my wife and I were stranded in Jacksonville, Florida - we did not know a soul in town - and we saw a father and a son playing a guitar and singing songs about Jesus. It warmed our hearts to hear others speaking the praises of our Savior, though they were strangers to us. I rejoice whenever I hear the name of Jesus spoken well of. But there is something dearer to the heart of Christ than the gospel. `Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it." How much do you and I love the Church? If we love the Church, we will desire to go on consistently with the doctrine of the Church, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace.

Do you think division in the Church means anything to Christ? Do you think it makes any difference when I say I am of Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas? How Paul warned them there in Corinth! How he pleaded with them, how he begged them to put that thing aside. Look at 1 Cor. 3:21: "Therefore let no man glory in men: for all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's." The 12th chapter and 12th verse: "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ." Further down, in the 25th verse: "That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another." That is the statement of the doctrine. Does it mean anything, or are we just to make our own choice?

Someone was telling me about listening to the biggest fundamentalist broadcast in America the other day, and this dear man was telling them how to choose their church; he said to just canvass around and find where the real gospel was preached; that was the place to go. Canvass around and make your choice! It is your choice! When Israel had no king, every man did that which was right in his own eyes. Is that true here? Has He ceased to have an interest in the path His people tread? Tell me this: Is the Lord a hard master, reaping where He has not sowed? Has He not said that division is sin, and has He not told us to keep the unity of the Spirit? Is there a path for the saints right now in this time, just before He comes? Is there a path where I can avoid the sin of division in the Church of God? If there is not, ah, well, let us scatter and each find that which suits him, his taste, his whim. You know we are all different; we all have our preferences in that kind of thing. Probably you would not choose the same place at all that I would choose. No, brethren, it is not up to us to go where we please. God marks out a path in the midst of the confusion.

2 Tim. 2:20. There was a time in my life when this portion in 2 Timothy had a loud voice for me - I hope it does still - but it was Christ's voice to me. "But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honor, and some to dishonor. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work. Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart." I find there the intimation that in 2 Timothy, which gives us the last days when the outward profession is broken down, the house of God is likened to a great house where all kinds of vessels are found. Every kind of unclean bird has taken shelter in the branches of Christian profession today. I have read statements of most awful blasphemies, the most Christ dishonoring doctrines all connected with some kind of a confession of the name of Christ. What a defiled house it has become! And now hear this word: "'If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor,

sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work."

Did people ever tell you that if you take the path of separation it will cut you off from opportunities of service and testimony? I have heard it many times. What does God say? God says if you take the path of separation, you will be prepared for every good work. Does that mean you are to be cut off from every great service? Not as He sees it. People say, 'You are ruining your career. You are cutting yourself off from all your opportunities." Did you ever stop to think there is a Lord of this harvest? "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth laborers into His harvest." Who is going to see to it that all the sheaves are safely gathered in? Who is going to see that all the wheat is in the garner? Why, the Lord of the harvest; and if He gives me some little work to do in fellowship with Him, oh, I esteem it a great honor and a great privilege; but I know He can get along fine without me. Yes, He can accomplish all the purposes of His grace without you, without me. Service is not the great thing; obedience is the great thing. "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." 1 Sam. 15:22. Yes, that is the Word of God. Hath the Lord as great delight in sacrifice as in obeying the voice of the Lord?

Now, in the next chapter (2 Tim. 3:16): "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." What fits the man of God for every good work? The Word of God! Will the Word of God warrant my departing from the plain exhortation, "endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit"? May I transgress that? May I trample upon that and go on my way thinking I am entering a larger sphere of service by ignoring that plain exhortation? Sometimes as I walk my way to the little meeting back home, I pass other dear Christians. I see them with their Bibles under their arms. That makes my heart glad, and I hope they are His; I hope they love God's Word. It looks good to see someone with the Word of God snuggled under his arm; but as I go this way and my brother passes me going that way, I think of that verse: "endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit." "The unity of the Spirit." Is the same Spirit who dwells in me and in him sending me one way and him the opposite way? Must we pass, almost rubbing elbows, each headed the other way? Is that the unity of the Spirit? There is only one Holy Spirit. Ephesians 4 tells us that there is one Spirit, just one. And by that one Spirit we have all been baptized into one body. If we follow His leading, His guidance by the Word of God, will we not be brought to see eye to eye?

Let me reply: "If you are a child of God and have the Spirit of God dwelling in you, the Spirit is there to show you the things of Christ; and He would lead you to the right place." In other words, the Spirit of God cannot sanction division in the Church of God. "Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit."

In 2 Tim. 4:10 we read about a man by the name of Demas: "For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia." It does not make any difference where Demas went, he went away. He may have departed to Thessalonica, to Los Angeles, to Chicago - the point is, he left Paul! "Demas hath forsaken me." It does not say he forsook Christ; it does not say he apostatized, but he forsook Paul. Why? Because he loved this present world. If he were living in our day, perhaps he wanted a D.D., or a bishopric,' or, perhaps, he wanted to launch some Christian campaign. Perhaps he was not satisfied to follow in the footsteps of a man like Paul. "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am

of Christ." That fellowship cut too close; he loved this present world. Perhaps he loved religious applause - not that he loved worldliness - he loved this present world! You can go out in this present world and be an immense religious success. You can get your name in the paper and you can capture the headlines, if you deliberately plan for it. If you are minded enough, you can do it. But, beloved, some day it is all going to pass in solemn review at the judgment seat of Christ. What is going to be the standard by which these things are going to be reviewed? What is the Lord going to use as the standard in that day when your service and mine pass in solemn review? Does He have a standard? The only one that I know of is the "Word of God." And you and I are called upon before God and before angels to keep His Word and not deny His name. Is that a little thing?

This is my parting message at this time, and I want it to go home to your heart - weigh it. I hope I have not said one word tonight that can be interpreted as boasting. If I have, I am sorry; I do not mean it that way at all. Before God, I believe there is a path in the confusion and babel of Christianity today that we can tread to the glory of God and honor the name of Christ. If I am not in it, I want you to lead me there. Before God, I do want to be found there when He returns!

Chapter 55

Perfect Confidence: Deaf and Dumb Boy

A little deaf and dumb boy, at an examination at an institution in London a few years ago, on being asked, "Who made the world?" immediately wrote,

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." Gen. 1:1.

He was asked, in a similar manner, "Why did Jesus come into the world?" when again the little boy, with a bright smile on his countenance, indicating delight and gratitude, wrote,

"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." 1 Tim. 1:15.

A third question was then proposed, evidently adapted to call the most powerful feelings into exercise: "Why were you born deaf and dumb, while I can hear and speak?"

"Never," said an eyewitness, "shall I forget the resignation which sat upon his countenance as he took up the chalk and wrote,

"Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in Thy sight." Matt. 11:26.

The Proverbs: Chapter 10:11-32

Chapter 10:11-32

In the verses that immediately follow, "the mouth" has a predominant place for good will, though labor or its fruit is noticed by the way, no less than heed to instruction, as in verses 15-17.

The mouth has a widely different intent and character in man from the beast, where it expresses animal need, innocuous or baneful to others. Man's mouth has a nobler purpose and unique, as the means of expressing his inner nature in relationship, not with the realm of nature which he is set to rule, but, in subjection, with God whom he represents, or, alas! misrepresents. Here it is the mouth of a righteous man, and is said to be a fountain of life; for this is the divine mind as to such a one in the desert world. He is not merely seen of God providentially as Hagar by a fountain of water in the wilderness, which was called accordingly. He endures as seeing Him who is invisible. He becomes thereby an active source of blessing to others, and of blessing toward that nature which has in it now the taint of death through the sin of man, its first typical head, before the second Man (the unfailing and true Head) restores all things as He surely will in due time. Meantime the righteous man's mouth by grace is a fountain of life. He is a witness of God in Christ; and as he believes, therefore so he speaks. With the wicked it is wholly otherwise. His mouth not only utters the violence of self-will and ungodliness, but does yet worse in covering the violence he feels, which if disclosed might lead to wholesome caution or restraint and solemn warning.

"Hatred" is next brought before us, the precise reverse of God in His love, the transcript of Satan in his malice. So evident is its association, that it is needless to state its parentage; it is "as Cain," who was of the evil one, and slew his brother. But, even if in its lightest form, it "stirreth up strifes," resenting all interference with man's will, as God is nowhere in its thoughts. "But love covereth all transgressions." Such is the deep feeling of the divine nature in a man of God. Personal resentment is far from the heart. He is pleased to forgive and forget. So the Apostle repeats (1 Pet. 4:8) that love covers a multitude of sins, as James similarly concludes his epistle. Yet even Israel, not Christians only, were to be holy; and if a false witness rose up and was convicted, when both stood before Jehovah, then, instead of covering, they were bound to do to him as he meant against his brother, and so put the evil away from among them. Any other course is Satan's work by setting one scripture to annul another, instead of obeying all. To bring human feeling into such a case is as contrary to the gospel as it was to the law. "Do ye not judge them that are within?" "Holiness becometh thy house, 0 Jehovah, forever." This is as inalienable as love's privilege to cover all transgressions personally. When our Lord on the mount taught His disciples not to resist evil (Matt. 5:38-42) according to the law of retaliation, it was for Christian life in its individual walk. The same Lord insisted on unsparing judgment of evil in the Church. So we all know how wrong it is to efface 1 Corinthians 5 in practice by forbidding the uprooting of the tares in Matt. 13:29. How unintelligent and blind!

Again, we are told that "in the lips of one intelligent, wisdom is found; but a rod is for the back of him that is void of heart" (or, understanding). How true is this, and evident experimentally! It is not

only that every intelligent man has wisdom, but in his lips it is found. How self is betrayed in seeking it otherwise! Who would look for wisdom elsewhere unless he (perhaps unconsciously) wanted his own way? On the other hand, he that lacks heart in the moral sense deserves the rod for his own chastening. If his eye were single, he could not want light.

Another blessing comes to wisdom. It does not lose what it has, but grows by grace. "The wise lay up wisdom." Acuteness or originality may not and often does not turn to profit the most brilliant and useful ideas; but wisdom keeps and uses what is given from above. Just as the fool's mouth, however voluble, utters nothing of real value, but has ever at hand ample elements for mischief and "near destruction."

The next couplet seems to state this simple fact, and not without irony. "The rich man's wealth is his strong city; the destruction of the poor is their poverty." So they think, and others say; yet riches have wings and may fly away; as the poor, if godly and content with the will of God, have great gain.

Compared with the rich, we have now "a righteous man's labor," which has the stamp on it of tending "to life." On the other hand, "the revenue" (it is not said, the labor) of a wicked man tendeth "to sin." How cheering for him who accepts the portion, though it be in a ruined world, of eating bread in the sweat of his face! and how sorrowful is the course of a revenue, were it ever so abundant, flowing into sin!

Then follows the practical test: "Keeping instruction is the path of life," as surely as "he that forsaketh reproof erreth." For not to hear only, but to keep instruction, is of great price; 'whereas to dislike, and so forsake, the "reproof" of our manifold faults, is the way to go astray, one knows not how far.

Next, we hear the yet more solemn warning against hypocritical ill will, its character and natural issue, and God's judgment of it, whatever men say. "He that hideth hatred with lying lips, and he that uttereth a slander, is a fool" (Proverbs 10:18). So He says who searcheth reins and hearts, which we cannot do and so need to profit by His word. Malevolent lies, when laid bare, thus prove hatred that was covered up, and the sending forth of slander evinces the fool. The divine oracle does not stoop to the deceiving politeness of society, but speaks out that all saints may hear, whether for comfort or for admonition.

Further, we are cautioned against overmuch speaking, as our Lord denounced vain repetitions in prayer like the Gentiles, and long prayers in public like the Jews. It is well at all times to watch and refrain, save in peremptory duty. "In the multitude of words there wanteth not transgression; but he that restraineth his lips doeth wisely." Let us not fail then to ask the Lord to set a watch before our mouth, and keep the door of our lips, as in Psalm 141:3. Our evil nature is too ready to watch our neighbor's mouth to the shame of faith and love.

The tongue of the righteous, as we are told in verse 20, is as choice silver. This is apposite and suggestive. We might have thought other metals might have suited not less well. Many a tongue that is not righteous cuts like the brightest and sharpest steel. But as silver in sanctuary associations pointed to grace, and gold to righteousness divine, so in usage among men silver is specially adapted for probing wounds without corrosion or festering. So is the tongue of the just, always with grace, seasoned with salt. Hence the apostolic call on "the spiritual" to restore one

overtaken in any trespass; the unspiritual is apt to be severe, the carnal would be careless and resent true judgment.

The following verse (21) pursues and defines the positive blessing. "The lips of a righteous man feed many." On another side we hear, "but fools die for want of understanding." The bread which Jesus made and gave through His disciples fed the multitude, with more at the end than at the beginning; and this is what the righteous soul finds in Him for many in their many wants and in a thousand ways. Him they are called to testify, and their "lips" will as certainly "feed many." Just as certainly do fools who believe not in Him, though they may hear with their ears, "die for want of understanding." His flesh, which the Son of man gave us to eat, and His blood to drink, is the most precious grace on His part, and the most needed truth on ours; but upon this many of His disciples went back and walked no more with Him. How true and sad to say that "fools die for want of understanding"! It is the perverse heart, insensible alike to its own sinfulness, and to the goodness of God, who in Christ went down to all depths to save the lost at all cost.

To the end of the chapter we have the blessing of Jehovah in contrast with the fool, the wicked, and the sluggard, in their respective paths; the fear of Jehovah, and again the way of Jehovah, and the effects compared with the opposed evil.

The Israelites were here called to remember that their God, Jehovah, the only unerring moral governor, is the blesser, and that His blessing makes rich. The day comes when Messiah shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall reign in judgment. In that day, as the rule, false appearances shall not flourish. The vile person or fool shall be no more called liberal, nor the churl said to be bountiful. The work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and confidence forever. The very wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad; and no wonder, when He reigns who made all very good, before the sin of man brought in confusion and every evil work. But then shall the wolf dwell with the lamb, and the leopard lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp (or adder), and the weaned child shall put his hand on the viper's den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain. In that day will it be seen by every eye that the blessing of Jehovah makes rich, and He adds no sorrow to it. But even in this day of man when sin still reigns in death, godliness with contentment is great gain, whatever be the outward circumstances.

On the other hand, the lively pleasure of moral folly is to do wickedness for a little while. What is the end of such sport, but death as part wages, and judgment as full? A man of understanding has wisdom, and the fear of Jehovah is his constant part as well as beginning. Moreover, the fear of the wicked is far from groundless, and if it heed not the goodness of God that leads to repentance, the suspended blow falls, "it shall come upon him." Just so, even while it is still the evil day, the desire of the righteous shall be granted; for he asks of God what is according to His will, judging himself where, seeking more or otherwise, he yielded to vain thoughts. Why should he doubt care and mercy in any trial from Him whose grace justified the ungodly? No doubt, even now there are hours of exceeding pressure, here compared to a whirlwind. When it passes, where is the wicked? "No more." The very distress which overwhelms him discloses that "the righteous is an everlasting foundation." "Sluggishness" may not have the dark character of "wickedness" or of "folly" in the

moral sense; but it is a twofold wrong of no small dimensions. It is unworthy in itself, and dishonors the failing man by its purposeless ease; it is as vexatious to others "that send him" "as vinegar to the teeth, and as smoke to the eyes." How sad when lack of heed and diligence in a Christian exposes his Master's name to be ill spoken of!

The Apostle Peter cites a word kindred in substance to verse 27 from Psalm 34, though the form differs. The fear of Jehovah is the source of strength and security for the weak in a world of evil and anxiety and danger. It "prolongeth days" for him who trembles at His word, not at the enemy; as "the years of the wicked" who has no such fear "shall be shortened." For the same reason "the hope of the righteous is joy" now as well as at the end; whereas "the expectation of the wicked shall perish." Not only is there the wearing chagrin and worry of disappointment to shorten his days, but he cannot shut out his dread of inevitable judgment; and his mockery of perdition ends in the blackest despair.

In bright light shines out verse 29. "The way of Jehovah is strength to the upright, but destruction to the workers of iniquity." It is not here His "end" as in Jas. 5:11, but His "way"; though they are alike worthy of Him, and also the reliance and comfort of faith, as His Word reveals both. Oh, what patience and long-suffering in His way, however dark and afflicting it seemed to Job and his friends! but what was the end? Could Satan deny its compassion and mercy? But His way corrected error for the upright, while its forbearance gives occasion to the destruction of such as work iniquity. They shall no more inhabit the earth, than the righteous be removed, in the judgment. They may foam out their own shames now; but "the froward tongue shall be cut out," as surely as "the mouth of the righteous putteth forth wisdom." It is the single eye to the Lord that gives the lips to know what is acceptable to God as well as man. The mouth of the wicked speaks frowardness according to the abundance of his heart; the good man speaks out of his good treasure, and this is Christ Himself.

The Proverbs: Chapter 11:1-23

Chapter 11:1-23

The saving grace of God instructs us to live righteously in the present age. It is far from all that He looks for in a saint. Sobriety He claims, and godliness also. But honesty in our dealings with men is indispensable, the lack of which wholly discredits any profession of piety. It betrays a covetous man, whom the Holy Spirit brands as an idolater (Eph. 5:5), and without inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. How hateful it was to Him of old, we see in the opening of our chapter.

"A false balance" is much more than an act of dishonesty; it implies the pretension to integrity, and withal deliberate purpose to cheat. It is therefore an abomination to Him whose eyes behold, whose eyelids try the children of men, as a just weight is His delight. Trickery in trade is a corroding evil, most of all fatal to such as gain a sullied or a seared conscience.

Pride readily comes in this poor world, where man poses as something when he is nothing and worse. But its shadow is close at hand; "shame cometh"; and this even here, before the judgment. For God resists the proud, and proclaims their abasement. But with the lowly is wisdom. He is not ever on the tenterhooks of self. He looks above the petty ways of men, and refuses to be irritated even if wronged. The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, without hypocrisy.

It is not only unworthy devices in trade, or a self-exalting spirit, that we need to watch against, but perverseness in our heart and ways. Christ could designate Himself as "the truth." He was absolutely what He also spoke. His ways and His words perfectly agreed. Are we begotten by the word of truth, and sanctified by the Spirit? Let us follow Him, finding it is our sin and shame if we turn aside in aught. How blessed to be truthful in love! "The integrity of the upright shall guide them; but the crookedness of the treacherous destroyeth them." A tortuous path ends in ruin.

Nor can "riches" avail to avert or stay God's displeasure, however they may shield and deliver in man's day. "Riches profit not in the day of wrath; but righteousness delivereth from death." The just have a special resurrection (Luke 14:14). "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: over these the second death hath no power." Death is now our servant (Rom. 8:38; 1 Cor. 3:22).

Nor is it only that righteousness delivers from death; "the righteousness of the perfect shall direct his way; but the wicked shall fall by his own wickedness." The man to whom grace has given a single eye sees the way straight before him, while the wicked needs no executioner, as he shall die by his own evil.

Death ruins the flattering expectation of a wicked person. In hades he lifts up his eyes, being in torments; they had been closed before, save to the lie of the enemy. "When a wicked man dieth, expectation shall perish; and the hope of evil ones perisheth." "Thou fool" is then heard and felt in his despair.

How different is the lot of the just! "The righteous is delivered out of trouble, and the wicked cometh in his stead." Even here the believer proves that God is his great Deliverer; how much more when the morning dawns without clouds! The wicked even here are not without evidence that God's eye is on them, to let them taste the fruit of their own way. "In the net which they hid is their own foot taken."

"With the mouth a hypocrite (or, impious one) destroyeth his neighbor; but through knowledge are the righteous delivered." Violence is not so dangerous as deceit, and no deceit is so evil as that which clothes itself with the name of the Lord and His Word. But God causes all things to work together for those that love Him, and this "through knowledge," through that which faith is now to learn, because God gives it in His grace. Thus is the righteous kept, yea garrisoned, by God's power, whatever ill will may plot to destroy.

The use and abuse of the mouth has a large place in the verses which come into review. Yet how small is the circle pursued compared with the vast range which Scripture touches elsewhere! There is much in the Old Testament which sets forth its evil; but in the New Testament it is exposed more deeply still, and in no part so much as the epistle of James.

The impious person of verse 9 described as ruining his neighbor with his mouth must have been as deceitful as mischievous. We can understand therefore why it should be narrowed to "a hypocrite." ("Hypocrite" here and elsewhere seems defined unduly. The cognate verb is rendered to "profane," "defile," "pollute." Why should another force be given to the appellative?) Certainly he covers his neighbor with his defiling imputation so as to injure and destroy, as far as his intention could. But God takes care of the righteous in their unsuspecting simplicity, and gives knowledge, so that they are delivered.

Again, whatever may be the ill will of men provoked by a course of life which silently condemns them, conscience is forced to justify the truehearted. Hence, when it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices. Compare Esther 8:15-17. Just so, when downfall comes to the notoriously wicked, men cannot disguise their loud satisfaction.

Further, good fruit is expected to others from the upright. "By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted, but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked." Here the public ruin is attributed to the same source as that which destroys private reputation. A veil of piety but adds to the iniquity and to the mischief.

Next, we are told where silence is golden, both by contrast and directly: "He that despiseth his neighbor is void of heart." Where is his sense, where is propriety, to say nothing of the love and fear of God? It is certain that the Highest despises not any. What can a creature's state be who forgets either the body made of dust, or the soul from the inbreathing of Jehovah Elohim? Least of all does it suit Him who died to save the lost. "A man of understanding holdeth his peace" in such a case, unless there be a divine obligation to speak out. "He that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter; whereas he that goeth about as a slanderer revealeth secrets." To receive nothing so said, and to reprove the talebearer, will soon check and put such to shame; to repeat slanderous tales is to share the guilt and the mischief.

On the other hand there are those whom God sets as watchmen, and who are therefore bound to warn; as again the humble rejoice to be helped in their difficulties, instead of decrying those who

have more discernment than themselves. "Where no advice is, the people fall; but in the multitude of counselors there is safety." Whatever the haughty spirit of independence may aspire to, there are chief men, or guides, among God's people; and none can ignore or slight them but to their own loss. The Holy Spirit does not lead to self-conceit, but to unfeigned humility and to cordial value for fellowship.

But to be surety for another is quite another thing from either giving or taking counsel. "It goeth ill with him that is surety for a stranger; but he that hateth suretyship is secure." Yet He who was best and wisest deigned to be surety for us where suffering followed to the uttermost; but as He knew beforehand, so He endured it all for us to God's glory. In our way and measure we too may incur the risk; but we should do it only where we are prepared to stand the forfeit, and can do it considerately and honorably. Otherwise it is right as well as safe to refuse. But speculation without or beyond means is wholly unjustifiable; it is not kindness, but rather dishonesty.

The next verses open with a contrast, a gracious rather than graceful woman, and violent men; but in verse 22 it is the very different image of a fair woman without discretion with its painful incongruity.

The spirit that is "virtuous" is quite distinct from "gracious"; but the picture given in the latter part of chapter 31 is of a woman of whom the latter might be predicated as the former is. They are but different aspects of the same person. How can there be found a more vivid answer to one who seeks the meaning of her retaining honor? In fact it is well illustrated in the history of Abigail the Carmelite, as her husband Nabal shows how the violent retain riches. For the one a meek and quiet spirit is not only of great price in God's sight, but a blessing that endures; whereas what are the stoutest in holding their wealth before death? There is no discharge in that war.

It is obvious to everyone how blessed mercy is to the needy and wretched. Here is shown the good it does to the man's own soul. Who that reflects can dispute this, or its moral importance? On the other hand, equally certain it is that the cruel person does trouble not only his victims but his own flesh. Far from meaning it, he becomes in divine retribution a self-tormentor even now.

The force of verse 18 seems to be not only the deceitful work that the wicked man does, but the kindred and disappointing wages he earns. It deceives himself as much or more than those he injures. But he that walks consistently with his relationship to God and man sows and reaps accordingly. He has a sure reward. How fully the New Testament bears both out, is evident from Romans 8 and Galatians 6.

This is carried farther in terms still more general but no less sure and weighty in the verse that follows. Righteousness certainly tends to life, as he that pursues evil to his own death. The devil is not only a liar but a murderer from the beginning till his end come; and those who are swayed by him must share his doom, as they reject the Righteous One who alone gives life to those that believe.

Then we hear of a class whose aggravated evil makes them offensive to God. For the froward or perverse in heart are declared to be "an abomination to Jehovah." But it is a comfort to know from Himself that such as are perfect (or, upright) in way are His delight. It was man, independent and rebellious, that departed from Jehovah Elohim, before He drove him from the earthly paradise. Yet does His goodness lead the guilty to repentance, and by revealed grace render him upright and

guileless, but this only through His Son becoming not only the pattern man, but the sacrifice for our sins. What a joy to the believer that His complacency in man is beyond doubt, and according to His Word! Yes, He delights in those whose way is marked by integrity.

"Hand to hand," here and in chapter 16, is a phrase open to a variety of explanations. Even, to all generations, and certainly, have been suggested by some, while another refers it to terms in making a bargain. Whichever it be, an evil person shall not be scatheless in one version; in the other, not only the righteous but their seed shall be delivered. Israel, as they have been, attest the one; Israel, as they shall be, will be the plain proof of the other. Jehovah can by redemption forget iniquities, but will remember and bless for the fathers' sake; in Christ He can afford to do so.

But how unseemly a sight is a fair woman without that discretion which the weaker vessel needs in the world and the race as they are! Truly a jewel of gold in a swine's snout - a phrase purposely framed to convey incongruity and disgust.

Again, the desire of the righteous is only good. Begotten as they are of incorruptible seed through God's ward, their affections flow from that new life. They have another nature prone to evil; but this they judge before God who watches over His husbandry for good and the repression of evil. The expectation of the wicked is according to their unremoved evil and their deadly opposition to God, which only vexes them to wrath, and must end in outer darkness with its weeping and gnashing of teeth. Who can wonder that in chapter 11 we read, "the hope of the righteous shall be granted," and that the fear of the wicked shall come upon him no less than his expectation?

Chapter 58

The Proverbs: Chapter 11:24-12:14

A deathblow seems struck at selfishness in the following verses. They open with a maxim expressly framed to startle souls and call for reflection. But the more the words are weighed, their certainty appears all the clearer and the more important.

Even agriculture, trade, and commerce illustrate faith in the unseen, however severed from that sovereign grace which is the spring of blessing in the spiritual realm. But increase as the result cannot be without judgment along the way. On the other hand, niggardliness and fear cannot ward off want, nor do they deserve it. He who is alone worthy of all trust, and even in a scene of confusion, holds the reins, is entitled to form and guide the heart, and He loves a cheerful giver.

Hence the blessing or liberal one is richly blessed; and the waterer of others, according to this expressive figure, gets watered himself. Have we not known it here and there, if we have not proved it as we ought? See its perfection in Him who at the well of Sychar touched the core of the fatal evil, that the Spirit might act as the fountain of His living water springing up to life eternal, Himself finding His food in doing the will of the One who sent Him.

Next we hear the people, on the other side, cursing the withholder of corn in the time of want and suffering to enrich himself, as surely as blessing does not fail to be on his head that fairly disposes of it. See it in the beautiful tale of Joseph during Egypt's years of famine. Alas! the sad story prevails today too often where the glad one should be heard.

Now we are shown a larger and higher application. He that is earnest, or rises early, after good seeks favor, nor does he fail as the rule to procure it. How pleasant it is in His eyes who alone is absolutely and essentially good! But what can one look for in divine government, but that mischief shall come upon him that is industrious in devising it? What a solemn and sudden witness of it in Haman, the Jews' enemy, during their servitude to the Gentile, as of no less favor is in Mordecai!

Precarious indeed is confidence in riches, as we are next told; for they certainly make for themselves wings and flee away as an eagle toward heaven. No wonder then that he that trusts in them shall fall. On the other hand, righteousness endures, whatever comes from without; so the wise man can say that the righteous shall flourish as the branch or green leaf. He, as David sang, is like a tree planted by rivers of water, that brings forth fruit in season, and with leaf also that withers not. "Your bones," said the prophet, "shall flourish like the tender grass." For the Christian, this is through abiding in Christ.

Verse 29 brings before us the man "that troubleth his own house." This might be by one or other of the aforesaid objectionable ways-undue scattering, or undue withholding. By either course, not only is his own house made a scene of vexation, but the end for himself is the wind, a heritage of nothing but disappointment. "The fool" seems to sink still lower, and becomes servant to those who are "wise of heart," the very reverse of his own heartless inconsiderateness.

How contrasted with persons so failing in righteous wisdom is that which is next set before us. "The fruit of the righteous is as a tree of life; and the wise winneth souls." A tree is a noble object in the landscape, but the fruit of the righteous is far beyond such a comparison; it is as "a tree of life." They are blessed and a blessing. But the wise rises yet higher, and wins souls; or he that wins souls is wise-a work impossible without divine love constraining, a divine fear communicated by the Word and Spirit of God. How richly the gospel of His grace now produces both! How sad where it does not!

The chapter closes with a vivid call to "behold"; and what then? A cardinal principle for Israel: "the righteous shall be requited on the earth: how much more the wicked and the sinner!" It has been but imperfectly seen, for rulers and subjects have alike fallen short. For a full witness it awaits His kingdom who will come in power and glory, whose right it is. He has spoken, and He will do it. And the time is short; the end of all things is at hand.

We have next the contrast distinctly drawn between the course, character, and end of those that are open to divine discipline, and of such as refuse it; of him that obtains Jehovah's favor, of the malicious too, and of the righteous unmoved by that which sweeps away the wicked. Nor is the woman of worth unnoticed any more than the one who makes ashamed. The thoughts and words of both classes are confronted with the dread issue.

As original uprightness was lost in the fall, even if there be a new nature by grace, soul discipline is ever needed, and blessed in the genuine humility that values knowledge from on high. Pride and vanity are alike disdainful of reproof, and therefore go from bad to worse. Those unwilling to own their faults or to submit to faithful dealing sink below humanity.

He that is good in his measure (Rom. 5:7) has been so formed by his faith in Jehovah's loving-kindness, and obtains fresh favor, whereas He condemns the man who yielding to his evil nature lives in spiteful devices.

Nor is it in the nature of wickedness to establish a man, for it makes slippery the high place he may reach; but the righteous have a root which, however assailed, shall not be moved.

If you wish a full-length portrait of a woman of worth, it is furnished in the last chapter of this Book. Such a woman is not only a blessing but "a crown" to her husband. For even if naturally or spiritually beyond him, she will not fail to hide herself behind and help efficiently under him as her head, to the good order of children and servants, as well as in the circle of their friends or foes. On the other hand, what a curse is she that makes ashamed, however it may be! It is an evil ever felt to be hopeless in itself. How truly described as "rottenness in his bones"!

As righteousness means consistency with our relationships to God and man, "the thoughts" are a main part of it. Self-righteousness is really its opposite, and consists of outward observances if there be any pretense of ground for it. What value can these have, where the heart is far from Jehovah, proving it by disregard of His Anointed, and by hopes resting on their own ways according to the precept of men? True righteousness is inseparable from being begotten of God; and thus the thoughts are right, as being the inward effect of a new life which comes from God's object of faith on whom they rest. The counsels of the wicked, who know Him not, are deceit; for they flow from an evil nature assuming to be good.

And what are "the words" of the wicked but, as they are here characterized, "a lying-in-wait for blood"? If they have not life in Christ, they are the habitual prey of him who is from the beginning a liar and a murderer. "My soul," says the Psalmist, "is in the midst of lions; I lie down among those that breathe out flames, the sons of Adam, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword." Smooth was the milk of his mouth, but his heart was war; his words were softer than oil, yet are they drawn swords. On the other hand, the mouth of the upright speaks to the conscience and heart, and God knows how to give it effect so that it shall deliver them.

As the wicked build on the sand, overthrow comes and is fatal; but the house of the righteous, being built on the rock, shall stand. Rain may descend, and floods come, and winds blow, but only to prove that it is founded and preserved. So is he who hears and obeys the Word.

There is no danger that besets men, and even the righteous, more than too keen a regard to their reputation. Here we begin with the secret of that which gives a quiet spirit, and of what calls forth contempt.

If the eye be single, the whole body shall be full of light, said the. Lord. This gives a man to have a godly aim, and to seek it by faithful means. The same spirit imparts a sound judgment, which commends itself and him who makes it. A perverse heart leaves God, likes to oppose, and seeks self only. Such a one only makes difficulties and stumbling blocks, and gets despised in spite of his vain efforts to rise.

As the rule, man walks in a vain show, and this deceives many. Hence he who despises appearances often gets despised, though of weight in a lowly way and able to relieve his labor by the help of a servant; while he who strains in paying honor to himself outwardly may come to want necessaries.

Next we find men tested by their treatment of the creation which God put into subjection to the race. Indifference to one's beast is unworthy; cruelty is worse. Hence the righteous is concerned for his beast's life, while even the wicked's tender mercies are cruelty. Jehovah's tender mercies are over all His works, and the day comes when everything that has breath shall praise Him.

We turn then to the contrast of diligence in one's duty with the companionship of idlers. He that tills his land shall have plenty of bread; whereas the follower of the worthless betrays his want of sense. In a fallen condition it is a mercy to eat bread in the sweat of the face. Idleness is not only profitless but a misery.

Verse 12 confronts the desire of the wicked with the righteous in this, that the former yearns after the net, or prey, of men still more wicked, for his own advantage; but the latter has a root of stability which does not fail to produce good fruit in its season.

Words too as well as doings have their just place in moral government here below. The transgression of the lips is not only a great offense in God's sight; it is an evil snare to the guilty (v. 13). Boast as they may that their tongues are their own, they learn to their cost that neither God nor man will suffer it. The righteous know what trouble is; but, instead of being snared by it, they come out of it. So of the Christian it is written that through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God.

On the other hand, the fruit of the mouth is of real account, not only for the good of others but for him who is enabled thus to speak. Giving of thanks becomes him who knows the Lord Jesus. It is no wonder if those who never speak for the use of edifying decry the communication of grace and truth. If it be so with our words, how much shall the excellent doings of a man be recompensed to him? God assuredly concerns Himself with our ways and our words. Let each of us please his neighbor for that which is good unto edifying. For Christ pleased not Himself; but as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached Thee fell upon Me. Hence the need of patience, and the value of the comfort of the Scriptures, while we wait for the fruition of our hope. The other side is no less sure; evil ways and words God will bring into judgment.

Chapter 59

The Proverbs: Chapter 12:15-13:6

A fool's way and a fool's vexation introduce the verses which now claim our heed, where the utterance of truth and wisdom follows with weighty instruction in righteousness.

For man with a fallen nature and in a fallen world to confide in himself is to play the fool. God is not in any of his thoughts. He is sure he needs no advice; he is right in his own eyes. What can his eyes do but help him to judge according to sight, which the Lord contrasts with judging righteous judgment? and what so dangerous as every question of self? For there is nothing a man dislikes more than thinking ill of himself, unless it is of believing good of God. Truly the way of a fool is right in his own eyes. He that is wise distrusts himself and hearkens to counsel; nor does he cheat God and his conscience by seeking counsel of the weak and easy-going, but of the godly.

The vexation of the fool breaks out in immediate and uncontrollable anger. He forgets God, himself, and everybody else. On the other hand, he is prudent who conceals rather than exposes shame; he feels the insult, instead of despising his brother, and steeling his own breast in worldly pride. But his quiet spirit adds no fuel to the flame, and helps the offender perhaps to judge his unbridled impropriety. How prudent to ignore such provocations, to conceal shame not only from others but from ourselves!

To utter truth simply and characteristically in a world where men walk in a vain show, is a real display of righteousness; and the righteous Jehovah loves righteousness. There may be higher and deeper truth now that the Son of God is come and has given us understanding to know Him that is true. But righteousness is indispensable; without it, pretension to grace is a delusion. Again, a false witness is an evident slave of Satan. To mistake we are all liable; but deceit is quite a different and a most evil thing, as mischievous to man as offensive to God.

Babbling or rash speaking is compared most aptly to the piercings of a sword; it inflicts wounds and pain; it flows from levity if not malice, and it has no aim of good. The tongue of the wise carries conviction to every upright heart. It may smite if duty call for it righteously, but it is a kindness; such wounds heal, as they prove and remove what only harms. The tongue of the wise is health.

The lip of truth may be gainsaid and disliked by such as have reason to dread it, but it shall stand forever. There is no need therefore to spend time in defending it or exposing those that are its adversaries. If one waits quietly, the more will its reality and importance appear; whereas a lying tongue is but for a moment save among such as love it; and where will the end be?

Of falsehood deceit is the essence; and here it is written that it is in the heart of those that devise evil. Thus it is equally akin to malice as to untruth. How awful that the heart that should be the spring of affection is really given up to devise evil! If others are deceived, still more is that heart. "But to the counselors of peace is joy." Blessed are they, said the Lord; they shall be called sons of God. Theirs is joy now- theirs to enter into their Lord's joy by-and-by.

How triumphant is the Christian answer in Romans 8, to verse 21! "No evil shall happen to the righteous." Suppose "tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? But in all these things we more than conquer through Him that loved us." Christ has changed all things to us. How terrible to reject, despise, or even neglect Him! For then all our evil falls on our own heads. Truly the wicked are not fuller of mischief now than of misery in that day and forever.

Jehovah concerns Himself about every lie. Lying lips are an abomination to Him, even as an idol that is set up to rival and ruin His glory. So those that not only speak but deal truly are His delight. How precious to Him was the One who, when asked, Who art Thou? could answer, "Absolutely what I also speak to you" (John 8:25). He is the truth.

In this group of moral maxims we have the value of prudence, and of diligence; depression compared with even a good word; the righteous contrasted with the wicked, the slothful with diligence; and the way of righteousness all through.

Few things betray the lack of common sense more than the habit of displaying any bit of knowledge one may have. But it meets just as habitually with a sharp and disagreeable corrective; for those who know more fully are apt to expose its shallowness and vanity. Ostentation characterizes such as have a smattering which often lets out how little is really known. The fault is more serious in a Christian, whose standard is, and ought to be, Christ the Truth.

The attention that takes pains is far more important and reliable than any ability where that is lacking. Ruling is the consequence without being sought. But the slothful neglect their duty and alienate their friends, gaining contempt and distrust on all sides, while sinking ever lower and lower. Who can wonder?

Heaviness in the heart renders the hand powerless, and hinders the eye from seeing the opportunities which God takes care to present. A good word gladdens the heart in the midst of manifold trials; and what an unfailing supply does Scripture afford! If it be so with the Old Testament, characterized as it is by the law, how much is it with the New Testament where the gospel gives the tone! The very word means glad tidings; and this is truly beyond question, save to such as, believing in their wretched and guilty selves, have no faith in God. Its blessedness is not only that it comes forth from the infinite love of God, giving His only begotten Son and in Him life eternal, but that He as Son of man meets all that could hinder or disable, in the cross where God made the sinless One sin for us. It is therefore directly and expressly for those who have neither goodness nor strength, but are sinners and enemies, breaking their hard hearts with grace, to fill them with His light and love. As He said who told it out with matchless simplicity and fullness, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."

Righteousness has great weight to man's conscience, aware if honest of his own failure, and keenly alive to its absence where he fondly expected it. For moral consistency is rare. Hence the righteous, not the bright, still less the crafty, guides his neighbor. It inspires confidence when a dilemma arrives or a danger threatens. But the way of the wicked does not impose on those who discern it. They may seek to flatter themselves, because it is easy, that it will pass and give them their desired ends. It misleads themselves, who often wake up to their own deceitful folly and sin

too late.

Another trait of the slothful man is here pointed out. He may be active in the pursuit of his pleasure, but his sloth prevents his turning what he may have gained to any good account. He roasts not what he took in hunting, and has to sponge on others, whereas the precious substance of men is diligence. This is what avails in the long run, where the means and the opportunities may be ever so small.

But industrious diligence, though it may go with righteousness, is not always righteous, and often misses what is still better. "In the way of righteousness is life." Therefore said the Lord, Take heed and keep yourselves from all covetousness; for not because a man is in abundance is his life in the things which he possesses. We cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore He bade us not be anxious about our life, what to eat, and what to drink, or what to put on. The very birds of the sky and the lilies of the field teach men a weighty lesson; yet the birds have no consciousness of God, though beholden to His continual care; and not a sparrow falls to the ground without Him.

Hence there must be total deadness toward God and His Word, heart indifference to Him whom God has sent, if there be not a life beyond the creaturely existence of the day and the earth; and it is in the way of righteousness, not merely at its end, though it will have a glorious character above the present shifting scenes. Its pathway has no death. We cannot talk of its end; or, if we do, we can say it is life eternal. The end of unrighteousness is death; and its pathway is strewn every step with those things whereof men who take note must be thoroughly ashamed. And how many souls has grace led by their sorrows to think of their sins, and to find in the Lord Jesus their Deliverer and joy, while awaiting another and enduring scene which has nothing to darken it!

In chapter 13:1-6, we have the temper, the means, and the traits of blessing in contrast with those of evil and shame; and we do well to weigh the words of Jehovah.

A wise son bows thankfully to the divine provision of the family circle, and heeds his father's correction, and the more when forced to feel folly is bound up with a child's heart, not excepting his own. But what hope can there be of a scorner? of one who cannot conceive himself to blame, and counts him as an enemy who is faithful enough to tell him the truth?

The next case is not the duty of receiving, but the privilege of communicating good. Yet here too a man shall eat good by the fruit of a mouth that utters what is good to the use of edifying. And Jehovah of old impressed this on Israel by Moses, and on their sons. "Thou shalt talk of them [his words] when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou goest on the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign on thy hand, and they shall be for frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and upon thy gates." Deut. 6:7-9. Were any words to compare with His? If this were irksome, what a tale it tells! The soul of transgressors brooks no superior, no restraint. Violence is its issue; and what can its end be?

But there is a bridle needed also. Hence he that guardeth his mouth keepeth his soul. As a good man said, one should think twice before speaking once. If any offend not in word, he is a perfect man (of thorough integrity), able to bridle the whole body also. How much of sorrow and shame he spares himself, and others who avenge a little folly by despising the wisdom they themselves lack! On the other hand, he that goes about blatant, opening his lips wide to tell all he thinks, feels, or

hears of others, shall have the destruction which his malicious folly deserves.

Then we have the person too indolent to take trouble for good or ill, the sluggard. "A sluggard's soul desires, and hath nothing." All begins and ends in wishes, with which the

Apostle dealt trenchantly in 2 Thess. 3:10. How different the lot of the diligent! They shall be made fat, says the wise man. In every sphere it is true in the main - unfailingly so in the things of God who raises above many a mistake, and values purpose of heart and ways.

There are men of the world who would be ashamed to lie in daily life, and are severe against it in others; yet they blink at it in politics and - religion! But "the righteous hateth lying" wherever it may be, and most of all in that which concerns Him who is the Truth. Nor can one wonder, seeing that "he is begotten by the word of truth," is sanctified by the truth, and grows by it day by day, as he is set here in the responsible testimony of the truth. Yet no one is more tempted by Satan to betray the truth. Never was there a more pernicious cheat than to fancy that a Christian has immunity from falsehood, and is sure to speak the truth always. Still he is called to be truthful in love. This goes much farther. He that does not hate lying is a wicked person, "maketh himself odious" to all right-minded souls, "and cometh to shame."

"Righteousness guardeth the upright in the way." Such a one is not only bold as a lion, for what is man to be accounted of? Consistency in his relationship with God and man is the shield which Satan assails in vain; yet, as a Christian, he loves to be kept by God's power through faith, for grace is dear to his soul, and he knows well that he is indebted to Him for all. On the contrary, "wickedness overthroweth the sinner." Self and sin are all that he takes pleasure in; and the end of those things is death. No one is so terrible to him as God, no name hated so much as Christ, if he only told out the secret of his heart. The more he hears of Him, the more he hates his Judge, and spurns the hand meanwhile stretched out to save even him.

The Proverbs: Chapter 13:7-25

Chapter 13:7-25

Walking in a vain show is natural to man as he is, but it does not always put on the same mask. The most prevailing snare is to pretend to have more than one possesses; but we must be prepared also for some pretending to have less than they have, in order to escape a duty, or from other selfish motives.

The knowledge of Christ who is the Truth is the only sure means of making the believer truthful in deed as in word. But even he has no force beyond the constant dependence of faith. To be content with the fact that one believed is a snare and may be ruinous; faith is unreal, if it be not a living faith and a believing life.

The richest and wisest of men was a fitting oracle to tell men how greatly they err that count riches to be happiness. They make him envied and plotted against; so a rich man's life, even if otherwise well spent, is one of exposure to dangers and deceits, and hence of no little uneasiness to the sensitive. What a sad use of riches to be the ransom of one's life! Here at least the poor man lives in peace. To the wicked, it is aimless to threaten him who has nothing to lose, nothing to excite the covetous. He that has mercy on the poor, happy is he; while he that oppresses them, reproaches his Maker, and shall give account of his ways. When Christ reigns, He will satisfy the poor with bread. Even in the evil day his poverty protects him largely, while the rich man is proportionately exposed.

What a true and striking contrast between "the light" of the righteous, and "the lamp" of the wicked! Their course and end are according to their source. There is no real righteousness in God's estimate apart from Him who revealed Himself and justifies us by the faith of Christ. The light of the righteous therefore rejoiceth, as in it sins are effaced, and sorrows turned into profit and consolation. The lamp of the wicked may flare widely for a while during the pleasures of sin for a season; but ere long it dims, flickers, and shall be quenched.

Pride is the root of contention. What is emptier than self-applause and self-seeking? What so rules, not only those who affect great things in high life, but among the most debased of mankind? So it works in every circle of the world, and still more disgustingly in the Church, to which Christ has given the exemplar of what perfectly pleases God and edifies man by love in the truth. Pride leads to confusion, contention, and every evil work. The old man is ever proud in one way or another, being as self-sufficient as he is regardless and forgetful of Christ. Faith alone makes a man "well-advised" in a divine, sense. With those led of the Spirit is wisdom, for Christ is before their eyes and their heart. He indeed from God is made to us wisdom, and all else we need; yet, whatever we have, what do we not need?

Then again we are reminded how wealth goes as it came. If got by light, unworthy, or dishonest ways, how it flies! For in such a case it has wings, not weight, and vanishes by no less vanity than it appeared for awhile. "But he that gathereth with the hand shall have increase." God honors

industry; and some that are great lords add luster to their rank by being more truly working men than those who live by it and are too apt to boast of it. Such should every believer be, and put to shame those that eat without work! How happy too when "increase" enables one to give to the needy! how sad that any should take advantage of grace, instead of seeking to eat their own bread!

Next we are told of the blight created by disappointment, and the cheer given by receiving what the heart sought. "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick; but [when] desire cometh, it is a tree of life." Some may have proved both experiences, and know how true it is. But we do well in the things of this life to judge our thoughts and desires before God by His Word, and ever to say in truth, "Thy will be done."

Slighting the Word is of the most serious import. It is near akin to unbelief in the Lord, and its commonest occasion is also akin. For men doubt the deity of the Lord, because in His grace He deigned to become man; and they, because they see Him to be man, refuse Him to be God. This is heinous iniquity; for it takes advantage of His love, in glorifying God and thereby saving our souls by His redemption by suffering for our sins, to dishonor Himself and deny His personal glory as the Son. Similarly, the word comes through the human vessel from Moses to the Apostle John; and men lay hold of the human element to deny the divine, thus depriving it, as far as the hostile will can, of its divine authority.

Verse 13 admits of an alternative rendering, though in effect it may come to the same sense. But competent persons understand the opening clause to mean "shall be held accountable" or "fall in debt to it." The Septuagint strangely translates the verse, and adds to it: "He that slighteth a matter shall be slighted by it; but he that feareth a command hath health. To a crafty son there shall be nothing good; but a wise servant shall have prosperous doings, and his way shall be directed aright." The Latin Vulgate departs still more widely from the Hebrew and hardly calls for citation save in a note.What God exalts above all His name man despises at the peril of his own ruin; but to stand in awe of injunction is to insure recompense in due time. What a man sows he assuredly reaps.

The word leads to and forms the teaching of the wise man, which is here described as a fountain of life. Such teaching refreshes as well as quickens, and guards from the destructive temptations which beset the path.

Again, the value of "good understanding" makes itself felt in a scene where folly abounds and the levity which so often veils our happiness. It procures favor, because it morally commends itself without an effort; whereas the way of the treacherous is indeed "hard" or rugged, as they themselves, and all that are ensnared by them. Fidelity is a jewel in a world of pitfall through deceit.

But "knowledge" has its use as well as a good understanding; and every prudent man works with it, instead of trusting himself unaided by it, or being content to go forward blindly. The foolish one spreads out folly; what else has he to lay bare? How blessed for Christians that, whatever be the personal deficiency of each, of God are they in Christ, who was made to them wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption! Yet no man is so foolish as one professing the Lord's name, who depends on and seeks himself to the dishonor of his Master.

Next, we have the strongly drawn opposition between "a wicked messenger," and "a faithful ambassador." The one comprehends the widest class of varying degree; but even its most insignificant member falls into evil, and he can do nothing but mischief. The other is not only a messenger of the highest rank, but discharges his office with integrity, as "a faithful ambassador." If the former by his wickedness can but fall into evil by his wickedness, the latter "is health" wherever he goes in a world of sin and misery.

Verse 18 contrasts the refusal of instruction with the readiness to take reproof to heart-a rare and precious trait in anyone. Poverty and shame must be his who has no ear for the instruction which enriches all, and which all need. But what honor falls to the wise and lowly mind that welcomes and weighs reproof! Grace alone can make it real.

As hope deferred makes the heart sick, so the fruition of what is desired is pleasant, but not unless the desire be governed by the fear of God. Without His will, not anything is wise, good, or sweet. Hence we read what follows, in verses 19-25.

There is no sweetness for the soul at God's expense. He it is that is looked to, instead of leaving Him out. But when He leads and sanctions, sweet is the accomplishment of what is desired. If He chastens what is wrong or leads to it, He has pleasure in gratifying His children beyond any earthly father. But to the natural heart, foolish in excluding Him and His will, what is so repulsive as to depart from evil?

As the fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom, so the heart values the company and counsel of the wise; and walking with them furnishes good lessons. But a companion of

the foolish too surely proves where his heart is, cannot avoid being depraved by their evil communications, and unless delivered shall be destroyed.

For who can evade the witness that "evil pursueth sinners," whatever their apparent prosperity for awhile? The leaving them for a season only precipitates and makes more terrible the end of unavailing sorrow and despair. How truly shall good be repaid to the righteous? God will be no man's debtor. The Christian without doubt is called to share Christ's sufferings, not perhaps for Him, but assuredly with Him. No such earthly prosperity is promised him as was to the pious Jew. On the contrary, they that desire to live piously in Christ Jesus must endure persecution. But the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to compare with the coming glory to be revealed unto us. In every way and time good shall be repaid to the righteous. God can never cease to be God.

A good man resembles Him who found him evil, and by grace made him a partaker of a divine nature, escaping the corruption that is in the world through lust. Blessed of God, he leaves an inheritance, if not of gold and silver, better still, and abiding to his children's children. The wealth of the sinner, great as it may seem, is laid up for the just. Ungodliness may Prepare, devise, and entail; but God cares for those who serve Him. Thus the just shall put on the clothing meant for others, and the innocent shall divide the silver if He think fit.

Again, how true it is, in God's ways, that "much food is in the tillage of the poor"! The soul that looks to Him does not murmur nor aspire after greater things. The little that is given is accepted with thankfulness: and diligent labor is applied, with the result of "much food." On the other hand, who does not know of great possessions squandered for want of judgment, if not for actual

injustice? There is that is destroyed for lack of judgment. The language is divinely accurate, and in no way exaggerated. It may not as yet appear always; but it is the fact, and often plain enough to warn the heedless.

There is another form of following God's ways in the due correction of the family. How many of the godly have spared the rod, and thus failed in love to their sons! Here is laid down the warning and the sort of love: "He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him, or seeketh him early with discipline." To spare is really to please oneself, and harm deeply one's son.

Further, the little things of daily life test whether we have God and His will before us. "The righteous eateth to satisfy his desire [or, soul]; but the belly of the wicked shall want," as the retribution even here of this selfish indulgence. "Whether then ye eat or drink, do all things to God's glory." This keeps us and pleases Him.

The Proverbs: Chapter 14:1-35

Here it is mainly a contrast between wisdom and folly in varied points of view, with no little instruction for such as fear the Lord and desire abiding fruit.

If man has his place in authority and external activity, not less real is that of the woman, and especially in the "home" of which she is the chief bond. Yet there is even there the need of a better foundation than man can lay, else it will surely fail, and it cannot be the house that the wisdom of woman builds. Keeping at home is good; working at home, as in the critical reading of Titus 2:5, is still better. And how true that folly plucks down the house with her hands!

Though wisdom be not expressly named in verse 2, yet does it underlie all walking in uprightness. As the fear of Jehovah is the beginning of knowledge, so he that walks in his uprightness, which is its fruit, does fear Him, out of whose mouth is knowledge and understanding, as He lays up sound wisdom for the upright. On the other hand, where there is perversity in ways, will be found despising of Him. To lean to our own intelligence is the very reverse of knowing Him in all our ways, who alone can and will make our paths plain.

Then we have to remember how large a part the mouth has in the display of folly as well as of wisdom. "In the fool's mouth is a rod of pride." Haughty as it may be in its self-indulgence, what retribution for the fool's back! The lips of the wise, as they help others, shall preserve themselves from strife, dangers, and difficulties.

No credit is due to the cleanness which attends idleness and shirking labor. "Where no oxen are the crib is clean"; but what of that? It is mercy, as well as a judgment, that a man is to eat bread in the sweat of his face. Not only is labor, but sorrow, and suffering, better than sin. Pride, fullness of bread, and careless ease lead to ruin and judgment; as industry, using means, such as the strength of the ox, brings in much increase; so God ordains for man that wisely hears and obeys.

Next, how often a person seeks to be thought wise by his independent spirit and detraction, which constantly expose himself to exaggeration and falsehood! It is folly and mischief all the while. Our own business is to do God's will; and "a faithful witness will not lie" to exalt self or to disparage others. But a false one breathes out lies - a remarkable and frequent phrase in Scripture. To breathe out lies is more effective and ensnaring than vehement denunciation, which would arrest attention and insure speedy refutation. But breathing them out spreads the malice effectively and widely too, through imposed-on confidants, while the maligned are kept ignorant of the mischief. It is a picture of utter corruption.

A scorner is more boldly evil and presumptuous; he "seeketh wisdom," but in his own way (which is as far as possible from the Lord); and hence, as is here said, there is none for him. "For Jehovah giveth wisdom" (chap. 2:6); and blessed is he that finds it (chap. 3:13). Even God Himself is no exception. "Jehovah by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding He established the heavens. By his knowledge the deeps were broken up, and the skies drop down the dew." He indeed scorns the scorners and gives grace to the lowly; the wise shall inherit glory; but shame

shall be the promotion of fools. Had not Verulam this sounding to his heart, when he wrote, "He that comes to seek after knowledge, with a mind to scorn and censure, shall be sure to find matter enough for his humor, but none for his instruction." How true on the other hand, "that knowledge is easy to the intelligent"!

What is one to do when in presence of a foolish man "in whom thou perceivest not the lips of knowledge"? Get away. He can do you no good and may do you no little harm. He will receive no reproof, and you risk provocation and loss of temper.

"The wisdom of the prudent" is not in lofty claims or unproved theories, but "to discern his way"; the pretended wisdom but real "folly of fools is deceit." For as there is no power, it lies in ever changing devices and tricks to evade.

The end, if not beginning, of such a path is that "fools make a mock of trespass," the road to destruction; whereas "among the upright is favor." It is the upright only who have true pity as well as horror of transgression. Grace alone made them upright, after being far from God; and they turn to Him, not only for the favor they need and have found, but to seek it for others too insensible to judge themselves.

At verse 10 we begin with moral truth as to the heart, and thence come to manifested words and ways.

It is an evil age, the world far from God and knowing Him not; and man, its chief, chief in guilt and pride, yet liable to wrongs and vexations without end. How exposed then is the heart, whatever the position, to bitterness, unknown to others! So too it refuses a share in its joys to a stranger. Yet if grief before God isolates to God, "every family apart and the wives apart," joy overflows willingly to congenial souls, as the man and the woman in the parables of Luke 15 call friends and neighbors to rejoice on regaining what was lost.

In verse 11 it is not "the heart" but "the house" which may rise aloft from deep foundations. But the wicked dwell there, and no security can be for them or theirs in the moral government of God. It shall be overthrown, though the fear of God would not hasten the moment. On the other hand, how exposed to wind and rain is "the tent of the upright"! Yet the unseen hand protects, and it shall flourish.

Next we come to man's "ways," and the danger of trusting his own estimate of it. If it seems right to him, men say, Why blame him? He is sincere; and none is entitled to judge him wrong. Is there then no divine standard by which we may try our thoughts, no means of forming a sound and sure judgment? Why did God then reveal His Word, and early enough in an experimental shape? And why did His Son as man tabernacle long enough among men to reveal his nature and relationship in living perfection to such as have eyes to see and ears to hear? No; man is accountable for his thoughts and his feelings no less than his words and his ways; "and the end thereof is the ways of death." Man departed far from God and disliked Him, as Christ fully proved. Though He never was far from each one of us, God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, for which the world gave Christ the cross. Man is accountable, whatever he thinks.

It is truly a dreary world of grief, where man seeks pleasure and mirth in lieu of a happiness which cannot be where the conscience is not purged after a divine sort, and the heart has not Christ

before it-God's object, as ours too.

"Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of mirth [is] sadness." So it is till man receives Christ. All otherwise is hollow, and the passing levity leaves its sting. "Rejoice, 0 young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart and in the sight of thine eyes; but know thou that for all these God will bring thee into judgment."

Still darker is "the backslider in heart." Terrible is the promise to him: he "shall be filled with his own ways"; and all the more terrible because he had outwardly known the lines in pleasant places, and the way of peace. On the other hand, "the good man" by grace shall have his boast in what belongs to himself alone, and not what belongs to another. He shall be filled from himself. God has freely given him all he values most, the unseen and eternal in the promised One.

In such a world as this, few greater follies can be than credulity. Believing God is the effectual safeguard. "The simple believeth every word; but the prudent heedeth his going." We are exhorted to "prove all things," but to hold fast the good (the comely).

Next, it is for us to use "fear and depart from evil," as a wise man does; to be "overbearing and confident" is arrant folly. "Honor all," says not the least of the apostles; as a greater still loved to style himself, and in truth was, "a 'bondman' of Jesus Christ."

And what folly to be soon angry? Even a wise man "deals foolishly" who is easily provoked; but "a man of mischievous devices" makes himself odious when found out as he is.

"The simple" again "inherit folly." This is what descends to man naturally. "The prudent" are lowly enough to receive and learn from the Highest; and theirs it is to be "crowned with knowledge." "He giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to those that know understanding."

Here we have not the simple or the foolish, but the evil and the wicked (v. 19); and their failure even before a King shall reign in righteousness, and princes rule in judgment. God is never without a testimony in the evil day, if it be only here and there, now and then. Yet things are as yet far from what they ought, and are, to be.

What men sow they reap, and soon sometimes. Nor are the evil without conscience, so that they bow to the good, as the wicked court the favor and the help of a righteous man.

Poverty is dreaded more than sin; and hence the poor is hated even by his own neighbor, while the rich man has many who make up to him. Such is the covetousness of the heart, and the hollowness of the world.

To despise one's neighbor, what a sin in His sight who despises not any? Let us lay to heart what Christ was to needy men, women, and children. What an example to us! Whoever showed such kindness to the afflicted? May we have the happiness found in grace like His!

Yet proud heartlessness may go to greater evil in despising evil, but not escape His eyes who sees cunning mischief and every secret of the heart. How profound and fatal the error! For judgment slumbers not, any more than His mercy and truth fail for those that devise good unobtrusively.

For man as he is, labor is as useful as idleness is worthless. Hence we are told here that in all labor is profit, while the talk of the lips tends to want.

The crown, not of the foolish, but of the wise, is their riches; for these turn their wealth to the account of unselfish goodness and the relief of human misery, and the furtherance of God's will and glory. They would be rich toward God. The folly of fools on the contrary is folly. God is in none of their thoughts, and all they express or do is folly all the more seen, if they have riches to attract a crowd of witnesses.

We pass through a world of evil and error. Hence the value of a true witness in delivering souls open otherwise to be mistaken and misrepresented by the false. But not many are willing to speak out at all cost. One there was who never failed, the Faithful and True Witness, and He the great Deliverer of souls. May we cleave to Him, and represent Him in this! But deceit, what can it utter but lies? It were sad to think that there could be no repentance for a deceiver; but it must be hard for a deceiver to gain credit for his self-judgment. Nevertheless, if real, God would not fail to vindicate what His grace effects.

So we read next, that in the fear of Jehovah is strong confidence. For this fear takes away all other fear, and becomes a tower of strength; and it avails for others who tremble at His word, especially His children. What place of refuge so sure and near?

But the fear of Jehovah is much more than a protection from enemies. It is a fountain of life-not a well that may fail when most needed, but a perennial spring of enjoyment to strengthen the heart, ever so timid and dejected without it, to turn away from the snares of death with which Satan overspreads the world, and which are dangerously nigh to every heart of man.

Next follow maxims, public and private, of great weight (vv. 28-35).

To have a numerous population is the king's glory; but David made it his pride, and persisted in a tainted public measure, notwithstanding the earnest protest of his chief servant, a mere worldling, to his own sin, shame, and chastening in the very point of his glorying. Yes, David who owed everything to God's favor, not to an arm of flesh! But a dwindling people prepares for a ruler's destruction.

Again, it is a sure sign of a great understanding morally to cultivate slowness of anger, though never to be angry before the Lord evinces total want of right feeling in the presence of evil. How slow was He Himself, yet could and did He kindle to God's glory. The hasty of spirit only exposes his own folly.

Then again, a sound or placid heart is a general healing power, just as envy rots even the bones - a corroding evil, without doubt.

And what is it to oppress the poor, but to reproach Him that made him and his lot? Whereas he honors the faithful Creator, that shows compassion to the needy.

It is his own evil that expels or thrusts down the wicked, while even in his death the righteous retains his confidence. Even if a feeble believer be before us, there is no moment in his life so happy as his departure to be with Christ. Gloom, on the other hand, is unbelief.

The intelligence here commended began with the fear of Jehovah, and grew by hearing and gaining wise counsels which fools despise. Wisdom accordingly rests not on the tongue merely, but in the heart which prizes it.

In the foolish, even when deeply wounded, is nothing to make known but lack of sense. Jehovah, God, is nowhere within such a spirit.

On the other hand, it is not only a man but a nation which righteousness exalts; and righteousness is a just sense of relationship to God and man, the very reverse of absorption in our own interest which ere long ruins those blindly devoted to it. Sin is a real reproach to peoples as well as to men.

It is also no small contribution to national well-being that the king should not forget, but heed and honor, a wise servant, no less than frown on him that causes shame.

Chapter 62

The Proverbs: Chapter 15:1-33

The chapter opens with the great moment of our words in a variety of ways, under the controlling sense of Jehovah's eyes, or indifference to Him.

In the first case fury is presupposed. As this dishonors God and misbecomes man, a soft answer disarms it. On the contrary, a grievous or mortifying word excites anger. Christ is our example, into whose lips grace was poured; and, when reviled, He reviled not again. Yet who so withering to the proud and hypocritical (Matt. 23)? Who so unsparing even of an apostle when a stumbling block (Matt. 16:23)?

Next, wisdom is requisite for the tongue in order to use knowledge aright or make it acceptable; whereas, what can be expected from the foolish but to sputter out folly? Such is the contemptuous rebuke. They should escape censure if they held their peace.

But there is a far mightier and worthier principle to guide wise or foolish - the realizing of Jehovah's eyes, which without an effort act on every place, beholding the bad and the good. How cheering to those that are wise! How solemn for the foolish evildoer!

Then benignity, or healing, of the tongue is a fruitful source in a world of death. How many pitfalls does it not save from, and rough places smooth? But perversity or crookedness in the tongue is provocative of griefs and wounds without end. How truly a breaking of the spirit!

God ordered the parental relationship to regulate the family; and as a father is responsible to instruct his children, so is he a fool who ignores his responsibility and despises that instruction. To regard reproof, though painful to self-love, is to get prudence. It is not confined to a father's reproof, and where incurred, to heed it is a real gain morally.

A righteous man secures much treasure, not in himself alone, but in his house; for it brings far better than much of this world's goods. A just sense and carrying out of relationship to God and man is the righteousness here intended, and never fails of blessing, even in the midst of trials however keen. On the other hand, what can the revenue of a wicked man be but trouble that disturbs and denies godly order and comfort?

Again, the lips of the wise not only exhibit and use knowledge, but disperse it in a world where it is as needed as rare. What a blessing to others! Far beyond the lavish giving of silver and gold, which might bring with it a curse. But the heart of the foolish, to say nothing of his lips, has nothing of the sort to bestow.

In verses 8-17 we have admonition of still graver character.

It was natural and a plain duty for a Jew, in case of a transgression, to bring the appointed offering to Jehovah. But this however was not only unavailing for the godless, but added fresh insult to God, unless with self-judgment before Him, and that hatred of the evil committed which would work deeper care and vigilance against repeating it. If it were only to get rid of uneasiness, the

man would be weaker than before, and more ready to sin afresh, and offer his sacrifice again. Integrity of repentance was indispensable. Accordingly, the heinousness of such self-deception as compounding with God for sin is here strongly pointed out. "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to Jehovah." This is as certain as that He has delight and favor in the prayer of the upright. He looks into the heart.

Nor is it only the perversion of a religious duty that is abominable in His eyes, but "the way of the wicked" in general; whereas He loves one that pursues righteousness, that is, practical consistency with his relation to God and man. This never was nor can be for fallen man unless he be born of God. Such were those that looked on to the Messiah. Blessed are all those who have their trust in Him, said Psalm 2:12; and only those.

Meanwhile there is a righteous government of God who ever concerns Himself with the state, and not only the delinquencies and iniquities. of His own, even if not within the Abrahamic covenant. This and its present consequences even the patient and pious Job had to learn, and yet more his three "comforters of distress" and "physicians of no value." He disciplines those He loves for their good. Here we read of "grievous correction for him that forsaketh the path," leaving the time and way rather indefinite; but all is plain for him that hateth instruction - he "shall die."

It is indeed a serious thing, but withal blessed if in faith, to have to do with a living God who searches, as the Lord Jesus does, the reins and the heart. When His grace is really known, it is a joy to welcome His search against unconscious self-love or levity; and one can plead, Search me, O God, and know my heart; prove me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any grievous (or idolatrous) way in me; and lead me in the way everlasting. Here it does not go so far as Psalm 139, but says, "Sheol and destruction [Abaddon] are before Jehovah: how much more then the hearts of the children of men!" All things are naked and laid bare to His eyes with whom we have to do.

A scorner is a bolder sinner against God and his own soul. He loves not to be reproved; "unto the wise he will not go." Self is his aim and practically his God, and folly his life, which makes him a contemptuous refuser of all wisdom from above.

But next we read that a joyful heart maketh a cheerful countenance, just as the spirit is depressed or broken by sorrow of heart. Otherwise life is hollow, and a vain show. There can be no reality in the joy, and no rising above sorrow of heart, unless we are open and right with God. He would have us depend on Him with confidence - in His mercy and favor in Christ. We wrong Him if we so yield to the sorrow as to break the spirit.

Then, how true it is that a man of understanding seeks knowledge! He knows his shortcoming, and desires to fill the gap. But the mouth of the foolish feeds on folly, as he has no care for, and no perception of, wisdom.

There is danger for the afflicted to give up all their days to their grief; but this is to occupy one with nothing but circumstances of sadness. How wise to turn to Him who makes all things work together for good! This makes the heart cheerful, which is or has a continual feast.

Then one proves that "better is little with the fear of Jehovah than great treasure and disquiet therewith"; and "better a meal of herbs where love is than a fatted ox and hatred therewith." The

fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom; and many waters cannot quench "love," neither do the floods drown it. Love, as the N.T. pronounces, is the bond of perfectness.

God is the God of peace, and Christ will be Prince of peace when He shall have taken His great power and reigned. Meanwhile He has made peace through the blood of His cross, that the believer should have peace with God and walk in the spirit of peace, whatever the turmoil of man. Nor need one wonder that man, in the misery and selfishness of sin unjudged and unforgiven, should be swift to speak and swift to wrath.

Whence come wars and whence fightings among you? asks James the Just. Is it not thence - from your pleasures which war in your members? Ye lust and have not; ye kill and are full of envy, and cannot obtain; ye fight and war; ye have not because ye ask not. Ye ask and receive not because ye ask amiss that ye may spend it in your pleasures. How truly a furious man stirreth up contentions! Whereas one slow to anger not only gives no occasion to strife, but appeases it. Peacemaking begins in the heart bowing to God in Christ through grace, and characterizes the spirit and walk.

The slothful fear a painful obstacle in their way, put off their duty, and seek not grace for seasonable help, if it were even a real difficulty or trial. The upright see a plain road, because the eye is single in obedience.

So in family life a father's heart is gladdened by a son who begins and goes on in the fear of the Lord. A foolish one shows what he is by despising her who bore him and watched over his years of weakness, who wastes his strength on himself or what is no better.

Again, how sad yet certain it is that folly is joy to the senseless heart! Not even a brute lives so despicably. A man of understanding looks up and walks straight with purpose in his heart.

Hence the importance of counsel (v. 22); for where there is none, purposes are disappointed. It is wise to be swift to hear, for in the multitude of counselors purposes are established. Self-confidence is a sorry guide.

Thus too one learns to help others, when speech is well considered, timely, and sought for. "A man hath joy (not pride) in the answer of his mouth." Others too reap the profit, as he desires; for "a word in season, how good is it!"

Nor does the good end in this life; for "the path of life is upward for the wise, that he may depart from Sheol beneath." The end is life everlasting, as all saints knew, though none could forecast that life now quickening the soul here below. This Christ revealed as clearly as a future hour when the body shall be instinct with the same life at His coming.

Jehovah is righteous and good in His ways; for He will pluck up the house of the proud who scorn Him, and will establish the border of the widow whom He compassionates in her sorrow and defends in her weakness and exposure.

Outward as was the life of an Israelite compared with that of a Christian, which had its first pattern and fullness in Christ Himself, God did not leave His people without the light of deeper things. So we find here in the first maxim (v. 26), and not less may we discern elsewhere on fitting occasion.

It is sad enough when evil appears, and we cannot but recognize it. But evil thoughts without a ground for them are the deepest offense to Him before whom all is manifest, and who will have His people simple concerning it, and confiding in Himself. Pure words contrariwise are pleasant not to Him only, but to all save the wicked.

Greed of grain troubles everyone with whom it comes in contact, and especially those nearest him that indulges it his own house. He that hates gifts, instead of looking out for them, has chosen the, good part. It is the path of faith, pleases God, and awaits another, a better, day.

Our answers need divine wisdom, for around us is an evil world; and neither. Law, Psalms, nor Prophets failed to warn of a nature prone to evil, though only the gospel pronounces us lost. Hence the need for the righteous that the heart should study to answer, lest a wrong or deceitful word should provoke a hasty word or elicit no better. Where fear of God controls not, from the mouth of the wicked flows a stream of evil things.

As the wicked has no thought of Jehovah, so is He far from such; but how precious and sure is His ear in listening to the prayers of the righteous!

Even before as well as after this, how much, how constantly, He supplies words of goodness to cheer and guide! Thus are the eyes enlightened from above and the heart rejoiced; good tidings make the bones fat, as is said here, without any counterpart of evil -to warn.

And so it is in the next adage. Very great is the blessing to the love that welcomes, instead of disdaining, the reproof of life; it ensures abiding among the wise. Otherwise it is an easy thing to turn, and turn again, to folly.

On the other hand, great is the danger and the sin of refusing instruction; but he that hears it even in the painful form of reproof acquires heart, which is surely better than silver and gold.

Then the fear of Jehovah is the instruction of wisdom. What can exceed or equal its gain? With it goes humility, and from it honor; as we read in the instructive trial of Job who had to unlearn every good thought of himself, and in the humiliation of his friends who trusted in their evil thoughts, based on appearances, and unrighteous. Thus let him that glories glory in the Lord.

The Proverbs: Chapter 16:1-33

The maxims brought together in verses 1-8 fitly follow up the fear of Jehovah as the discipline of wisdom, and the path of humility before honor. Heart and ways are alike affected thereby.

Too well we know how readily the heart devises this way or that, and how constantly this fails to meet the difficulty. Happy he that waits on Him who sees the end from the beginning, and deigns to guide aright when the need arises. Then one can speak the right words in peace, and humbly; but the answer of the tongue is from Jehovah.

The same reference to Him delivers from the bias that regards all the ways of a man as clean in his own eyes. Jehovah weighs the spirit; who but He? Dependence on Him and confidence in Him are indispensable to judge, as for all else.

What a comfort that it is He who bids one to commit his works to Himself (literally, roll them upon Him), "and thy thoughts (not merely thy works) shall be established"! His goodness answers to our trusting Him with what is outward, and graciously establishes our "thoughts," so apt to vacillate and pass away. How slow are even His own to learn the loving interest He takes in those that confide in Him!

Next is set before us the solemn truth, easily overlooked in the busy world of man, that Jehovah has wrought everything for His, or its, own end. Yet, is anything more certain? Is it not His reign? for evil abounds and the righteous suffer. Still His moral government is unfailing, whatever appearance may promise for awhile. The day will declare all. This is so true that He can add, "yea even the wicked for the day of evil." How manifest all this will be in the coming judgment!

But even now He would have His people feel how offensive "every proud heart" is to Him - "an abomination," and nothing less, to Jehovah. Yet how common pride is, and how little do men believe that God hates it, and will judge accordingly! The Highest despises not any. Hence, whatever the seeming support or the delay, beyond doubt one who so lives shall not be held innocent.

The next word is striking as only to be understood aright when a brighter light shone. Even before then no believer would have allowed that the mercy and truth were on man's part to atone for his sins. It is in Christ and especially in His cross that they meet for the purging of the guilty and defiled. Anywhere else they are irreconcilable. Men plead "mercy" to escape the condemnation of "truth"; but if truth pronounce the just judgment of the wicked, what can mercy do to arrest the execution? The Lord Jesus alone bore the curse in all its truth, that the iniquities might be blotted out in the richest mercy. The grace of God appeared in Christ that His merciful remission of our sins might be His righteousness now manifested in the gospel. Truly, by the fear of Him is departure from evil.

This is it which, by a new nature as well as redemption, teaches those who believe to walk so as to please God, worthily of His calling and kingdom. In spite of natural enmity, the fruit of

righteousness tells on conscience, so that even adversaries are made to be at peace with them.

Plain it is then that even here "better is a little with righteousness than great revenues without right." Much more when the veil was lifted by Christ to let in the light of the eternal day on the present scene of flesh and world, alike enmity against God.

In verses 9-15 are given a fresh cluster of apothegms, in which we start with Jehovah as the sole power of directing the Israelite's steps, and of maintaining equity in daily life. But there is next withal a striking enforcement of the honor due to the king.

The heart of man away from God is lawless; and, shaking off the restraint of Him to whom he belongs and must give account, is fruitful of devices. As he loves his own way, so he changes it according to the object before him, or, it may be, some passing fancy. Jehovah alone can direct his steps; but this supposes dependence on Him and obedience to His Word, when it is His way, and not the man's own. So Moses (Exod. 23:13), when Israel forsook him and bowed down to the golden calf, prays, Show me Thy way.

Jehovah would have His people honor the king, especially in Israel, and to look for a wise and righteous decision. "An oracle is on the lips of a king." It was no less a remembrancer to the king, that it should be said of him, his mouth will not err in judgment. How often alas! both king and people failed utterly. But a morning comes without clouds, when One of that very house shall rule over men righteously and in the fear of God; for man He is, though infinitely more. But David's house was not so with God, either when he lived, or after his death when succeeded even by the favored son who wrote these words. Judgment must act as well as sovereign grace, before Jehovah will make it grow. All honor to Him who once for all suffered for sins, and has given us life eternal, and will reign righteously.

Properly subjoined is that equity in the least things which Jehovah will have. "The just balance and scales are of Jehovah; all the weights of the bag are his work." If Jehovah showed His interest in instructing man aright, when it was even the details of the fitches and the cummin, of the barley and the wheat, and not in the sowing only but in their due treatment at the harvest, so did He feel for the constant administration of every day's exchange among men, to ensure right and guard against wrong. How much more does He feel their readiness to overlook sin and judgment for eternity!

Again would He set before all, that to commit wickedness is an abomination not to Himself only but to kings. What a standing rebuke if the throne were not established by righteousness! What an exposure if the king indulged in wickedness himself, instead of abhorring it in others! It is throughout here assumed that the king recognizes his place before Jehovah as His anointed.

Further we hear that kings take pleasure in those who in their speech vindicate what is right. "Righteous lips are the delight of kings; and they love him that speaketh right." Flattery is natural at court, but contemptible to him that rules in the fear of God. Righteous lips may not always speak agreeably; but righteous kings appreciate the man who cleaves to justice and sound principle.

Just as terrible is the wrath of a king. He holdeth not the sword in vain. That he is incensed "as messengers of death," especially to such as have reason to fear. "But a wise man will pacify it." So we see in both Jonathan and David, who appealed not in vain to the monarch, even though unjust

in his anger.

On the other hand, no less powerful is the effect of the king's favor after alienation. "In the light of the king's countenance is life, and his favor is as the cloud of the latter rain." But what is any such privilege to compare with the place of stable nearness and grace which the believer even now enjoys through the Savior, and looks on in assured hope of His glory! "Being therefore justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; through whom also we have had the access by faith into this grace wherein we stand; and we boast in hope of the glory of God" (Rom. 5:1-2).

The precepts and warnings impressed on us in verses 17-24 are of a wider range and a more general moral character. The upright, the humble, the heedful, the wise, the pleasant of speech are pointed out and encouraged, with grave admonition to those who are otherwise.

In a world of evil, and the multitude following evil, it is no small thing to depart from evil. For the believer was once like the rest; and it is the grace of God which acts on conscience through Christ, in whom was no sin, and who died for us and our sins, that we might be forgiven and delivered. It is indeed the highway of the upright to depart from evil; but there is the positive side too: he that taketh heed to his way (and Christ is the way to the Christian) keepeth his soul.

Pride on the other hand is most offensive to Jehovah, and dangerous, yea, destructive, to man; and he is apt to be most lifted up when the blow falls; as we may see throughout Scripture, a haughty spirit before a fall. So Nebuchadnezzar, where mercy interceded; so Haman, where was only judgment.

Next we have the good portion of the humble spirit with the meek; just as the Lord pronounced such souls blessed whether for the kingdom of the heavens, or inheriting the earth when the Heir of all things takes it, even He then sharing with the great, and dividing spoil with the strong. For it is the inauguration of the King reigning in righteousness, in contrast with this evil age.

Then we have a fine climax. He that gives heed to the word without a doubt shall find good; but if he also confide in Jehovah, which is better, happy is he.

The wise in heart is called intelligent; and so he is, and inspires confidence. It differs much from what men call a long head, feared rather than trusted. And the sweetness of lips which accompanies that wisdom increases learning all round.

Wisdom is truly a fountain of life to him that has it, as he begrudges not its waters for those that have it not. The instruction of fools can be nothing but folly, and is fully exposed, because of the vain assumption to teach.

How different when the heart of the wise instructs his mouth, as it does, and adds learning to his lips. For there is not only profit but growth.

Such are indeed "pleasant words," and they are as a honeycomb, sweet inwardly, and strengthening outwardly.

Verses 25-33. The first of these apothegms we have had before, in chapter 14:12. The repetition indicates its importance, and our aptness to forget it. We may therefore consider it again.

Self-love and self-will lead into self-deception, whatever be the honesty that would oppose a conscious wrong. We need therefore to look to Him who is greater than our heart. that we be guided by a wisdom above ourselves. How terrible to have trusted what one should have judged. lest, to one following a way that seemed right, its end should be only a way of death! He that hears and knows and follows the voice of Jesus finds Him not only the way but the truth and the life. Nor can one be too simple in listening to His words open to all. This is the Christian highway, and therefore is peace and joy, whatever the suffering and danger.

Humanly speaking, as idleness is a peril and misery, labor is good for a man as he is. He that is truly a working man has a need that impels him on his course of daily toil. His soul (appetite, or life) has wants that call for supply, or, as it is here put, "his mouth urgeth him on." Others understand that "the soul of him that is troublesome shall suffer trouble; for his mouth turneth it on him."

Verse 27 vividly sketches the ungodly. Not content with what appears on the surface, a man of Belial diggeth up evil, and on his lips is as a scorching fire. As James says of the tongue, it sets on fire all the course of nature, and is itself inflamed by hell. What can one think of the comment by a learned Romanist expositor (Maldonat), which Bishop Patrick cites? - "This is apparent by the example of the Spanish Inquisition, whereby he who speaks anything rashly against the faith is deservedly delivered to the fire, which I wish were done everywhere." Romanism ignores and reverses Christianity.

The next form of mischief is a perverse or froward man sowing contention, and a talebearer separating chief friends. May we have grace not only to refuse such a spirit, but to reprove it, whenever it betrays its injurious and often insinuating way.

The violent man may not be so insidious; but the openness of his course, with apparent honesty, may entice his neighbor, and lead him into a way that is not good, possibly beyond his misleader.

The picture in verse 30 describes one of those that shut the eyes in their evil work; but it is to devise froward things, and one biting his lips, that he may bring evil to pass.

Nor must one be deceived by age, though it claims reverence. But how deplorable if it help on evil! "The hoary head is a crown of glory; it is (or, if it be) found in the way of righteousness."

What a testimony to the patient and the self-restrained in verse 32! If he walk in the light, as every Christian does, even more than this should flow freely. Yet slowness to anger and self-control are admirable in their place.

The Jew resorted to the lot (v. 33), till the Spirit was given the believer in the gospel. But he was reminded that Jehovah directed. Christianity in this, as in all things, shows God providing some "better thing," faithful though God was of old, and is still, now that in Christ He is far more intimately revealed and known.

The Proverbs: Chapter 17:1-28

Chapter 17:1-28

The blessing of quietness at home, the value of wisdom there and elsewhere, the hearts tried by Jehovah, the evildoer's heeding wicked lips, and falsehood listening to mischief, the reproach done to the Maker by mocking the poor, the mutual honor of parents and children in their due place, and the congruity of speech with those who speak, are here (chap. 17:1-7) severally dealt with.

The opening word contrasts the immense superiority of a peaceful household with hard fare, over one where plenty is found, embittered by contention, or, as is here energetically said, "full of the sacrifices of strife." Love and peace may abound through Christ where is little else; only unhappiness abides where He is unknown, were all there that wealth can supply.

Then again, who has not known one from the lowliest place promoted for his wisdom over a son that bringeth shame, and even to share the inheritance of the family? A son crushes the family with his disgrace; a wise servant, especially in such circumstances, acquires love, respect, and honor with his full share.

But there is a moral government ever carried on by Him who is alone capable of trying the hearts, with a goodness and wisdom and patience not wanted for refining silver and gold, which man can do. For the Christian it is as Father; for the Jew it was and will be Jehovah, the one true God.

There is also no small trial from those who wish and do evil; and we are here shown how close is the connection between malice and falsehood. If an evildoer heeds false and unjust lips, falsehood listens to a mischievous tongue. Such is mankind without God, each in his own way, but all astray and malicious.

Nor is Jehovah indifferent to the pride that mocks the poor out of an overweening value for the passing advantages of this life. It is to reproach, if not to blaspheme, his Maker. There is another ill feeling hateful to God - gladness at calamities not our own. He that indulges in such heartlessness shall not remain unpunished.

Quite different from these is what follows, where family relations are maintained as Jehovah intended. "Children's children are the crown of old men, and the glory of children are their fathers." How blessed when the aged feel their descendents an honor, and they no less delight in their parents!

The last of these verses glances at a twofold moral incongruity: when a fool (in the serious light of that word according to Scripture) utters "excellent speech" out of all harmony with his character and life; and when a prince or noble, instead of being a pattern of probity in his exalted position, gives himself up to shameless deception. Yet such stumbling blocks occur in this evil day. What a contrast with Christ who is the truth, and came to do the will of God!

But it is not a question of speech only, excellent or deceptive. Acts are still more serious and influential; and to this we are now led on.

The law and the later Old Testament writings, the gospels and the epistles, bear ample witness to God's love of liberal and cheerful giving. But there may be a gift when it becomes a bribe, and even the law loudly warns in this case. Accordingly, here its influence is asserted to be as a precious stone in the eyes of him that obtains it, as the giver too knows its power, where Jehovah was not before the soul.

But in a world of contrariety and evil, there is a mightier power and of a. higher source. "He that covereth transgression seeketh" not a bribe, but "love"; as on the other hand, "He that bringeth up a matter again," without any motive higher than idle talk, with no positive aim of edification, "separateth chief friends." Love is not at work.

There might be error or evil, and this continued. In such a case to be indifferent for the sake of peace is a sin; and reproof is called for, especially where a man of sense was concerned. For a reproof penetrates such a one more than a hundred stripes would a fool. How timid even Christians are in this office of love, even when a worldly mind does not make them unfeeling!

It is an evil man that indulges a spirit of revolt; for rebellion is hateful to God, and His Word gives it no quarter. Circumstances on earth yield constant opportunity, and hence such a one "seeketh only rebellion." It gives an unhappy self-importance, which to vanity is irresistible. But God is not mocked, though it be the acceptable year, and not yet the day of His vengeance; and a "cruel messenger" will not fail to be "sent against him." Even now is there moral government.

But a fool in his folly goes a great deal farther and bursts through all bounds. To be met by a she-bear robbed of her cubs is a dangerous thing for any man; but a fool in his folly is worse still, as not the wise alone know to their cost. It is difficult also for the considerate to conceive what a fool may dare in his folly.

Ingratitude too is an evil of no small magnitude, and the face of God is set against such sheer baseness as rewarding evil for good. If one be thus guilty, evil shall not depart from his house. Even if it were but the snare of Satan for the highest in the land, himself most generous habitually, Jehovah did and could not overlook it; the sword departed not from his house, who gratified his passion at the cost too of a faithful servant's blood to hide his own sin. How Solomon must have felt as he remembered this!

And who has not seen to what a blaze a little spark may come, if godliness and grace do not rule? It is as the letting out of water when one begins contention; mere drops trickling at first till the opening enlarges for a flow that sweeps all before it. "Therefore leave off strife before it become vehement."

There is an evil still worse than the selfish love of contradiction or contest, bad as this is in itself and its consequences. Unrighteousness is ungodly.

On either side the guilt described in verse 15 is grievous in Jehovah's eyes. Not only is it sympathy with evil men and heartlessness as to the righteous, but direct antagonism to every principle of divine government. For men are put to the test in this life by the concrete facts of the wicked man here and the righteous there. To judge only in the abstract is to deceive oneself, injure others, and

be an abomination to Jehovah on both sides.

Jehovah is a God full of compassion and gracious, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy, even when man is under law. Thus He does not fail to put purchase money in a fool's hand. How kind to the unthankful and the indifferent, the infatuated and evil! To what purpose is it but that such may acquire wisdom? Seeing he is devoid of sense draws out his pity. What folly to frustrate all goodness by slighting Him who alone is good, and trusting the old serpent, the evil one!

Fine is the description of the friend and precious just as far as it is realized. He loves at all times; sad the blank of not having one uncapricious and constant, whatever the changes of this passing scene, nearer still of a brother born for adversity, where the strain is greatest! None fills up the sketch to perfection but our Lord Jesus, who indeed in His infiniteness went beyond what lips can utter or heart conceive.

Man's capacity and resources are so limited, and the changes of human life so frequent and fast, that it would be hard to name a more dangerous error than a rash pledge or suretyship. Grace no doubt is free to lose indefinitely for another, but not thereby to dishonor the Lord by one's own debt, or to injure others, whether one's family or strangers. This were indeed to play the part of a senseless man, not of a brother born for adversity.

How blind men are to their own spirit that love a quarrel under the plea of faithfulness to truth, right, or custom! He loves transgression that loves a quarrel, says the Word. It betrays itself in little and outward things, and stops not of ending in the ditch. Near akin to it is the aspiring spirit which seeks self-exaltation, or, as is here the figure, raiseth high his gate. In God's sight it is to seek destruction. So was the angel that, inflated with pride, fell, and became the devil.

Again, it is the just lot of him who has a perverse heart, so that, as he looks for evil, he finds no good; and he whose tongue shifts about in like perversity is doomed to fall into real evil. God is not mocked by bad thoughts or words, and he that indulges in either will surely have to eat the bitter fruit of his own ways.

Solomon had not to look beyond his father's house or his own in order to prove the truth of verse 21. Jehovah took pleasure in the families of His people. So we read in a well-known Song of degrees, "Lo, children are an heritage from Jehovah, the fruit of the womb a reward. As arrows in a mighty man's hand, so are the children of youth. Happy the man that hath his quiver full of them; they shall not be ashamed, when they speak with their enemies in the gate." Yet did David taste of bitter sorrow when he set his heart overmuch on them. What irony in the issue of him whom he called "Father of peace," who rose up as a vain and unscrupulous pretender against himself and to his own destruction? Nor was he by any means the only one that yielded a crop of sin and shame and blood. Yes, "he that begetteth a fool doeth it to his sorrow: and the father of a vile man hath no joy." Whether the father of such a one be prince or pauper makes little difference, save that the eminence of degree makes the grief more conspicuous and perhaps more poignant. Only he who is begotten of God has life everlasting.

In verses 21-28, folly, wisdom, and righteousness are compared in their effects on the heart and life of man.

The inspired writer has seen, without looking far afield or minutely, the humbling truth of which verse 21 reminds us. It received a manifest verification among his own brethren, especially those two who wrought sin and folly in Israel, and came to an end no less violent than disgraceful to themselves, and full of anguish to his father and theirs. He was spared the witness of its repetition in his own son and successor, whose folly rent the kingdom, never to be reunited till He comes to reign, who is the repairer of breaches, the bearer of sins upon the tree, whose name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Father of eternity, Prince of peace. For increase of the government and peace shall be no end, upon the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish and uphold it with judgment and with righteousness henceforth and forever. The zeal of Jehovah will perform this.

It is His purpose to glorify the Christ who at all cost glorified Him to His own shame and suffering, but moral glory, and this on earth, and especially the land where He was put to the death of the cross. It was God's wisdom in Christ, the blessed contrast of sin-stricken man, even in the highest place, who has so often to endure the pain of a fool begotten to his sorrow. But if here the responsibility is traced, and the father knew the reverse of the joy that a man was born into the world, because of his foolish son, the rejected Christ to his faith turns the temporary sorrow into a joy that never ends, though this was not the place or season to speak of it.

On the other hand, a joyful (not a vain or thoughtless) heart is an excellent medicine in this world of aches and bruises; as surely as a spirit shattered by affliction and charged with grief and fear dries up the bones, making one a skeleton rather than a human being (v. 22). Man lives not by bread alone, still less bitter herbs, but by God's Word that reveals His grace in Christ.

A gift to pervert the ways of judgment blinds the eyes, and betrays as a wicked man him who takes it, no less than him that gives it (v. 23). To take it "out of the bosom" ought to be a signal of danger. No other eye of man sees, but God who abhors the wrong is not mocked.

The wisdom here spoken of (v. 24) is that of a single eye, and is before the face of him that has understanding; for he has God in his thoughts, not persons or things to govern him, but all subjected to divine light. On the contrary, the eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth and liable to fluctuation under every breeze of influence. How blessed those to whom Christ is made to us wisdom from God, not the least of Christian privileges for present need, saving, and joy.

Again, in verse 25, is "a foolish son" brought before us; but here it is not only a grief to the father, but a bitterness to her who bore him; the father's authority thwarted and despised, the mother's affection tried and abused. How little such a son feels their anguish!

The next maxim bears on more public matters, and supposes a totally different fault, to which "also" appears to be the link of transition. Those who bear the character of just men must incur obloquy, and should be esteemed. To punish such in any respect is not good; to smite the noble for uprightness exhibits an unworthy spirit; it is a man forsaking his own mercy, and base enough to lower what is above himself. Men, not some only but as a class, are senseless, as we read in 1 Pet. 2:15. Sin breeds independence, which chafes and blames, rails and rebels, against excellence and authority, formal or moral.

The chapter closes with two verses which show the value of that silence which is said to be golden, and even of that which is but leaden, not positive but merely negative or seeming. He that

has knowledge spares his words, aware of what is far better; the man of understanding is of a cool spirit, knowing the mischief of inconsiderateness and impetuosity. And this is so true, that even a fool, when by his experience of many a buffet profits to hold his tongue, gains credit for wisdom he does not deserve; as he that shuts his lips habitually is counted prudent. The day is not yet come for the earth when a king, the King, shall reign in righteousness, and princes rule in judgment. Then a man, for indeed there is but One on whose shoulder the weight of such government rests, shall be as a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. Then the fool shall no more be called noble, nor the crafty said to be bountiful. But the day is at hand, dark as its dawn must be and terrible for the ungodly, Jews, Gentiles, and above all those that now name the Lord's name in vain.

Chapter 65

The Proverbs: Chapter 18:1-19:7

The first verse seems difficult, and certainly has been rendered differently. The sense in the A.V. does not resemble that given by the revisers any more than the ancients. The Septuagint and the Vulgate construct alike, but Leeser has another view.

The separation with which the chapter opens is in no way from evil, but rather from others to indulge his own desire and pleasure. Such selfishness enrages him against all wisdom.

This is confirmed by the verse that follows. For such a one is pronounced to be a fool, and to have no delight in understanding, but only that his heart may reveal itself. How far he is from knowing himself! His heart is the chief seat of his folly.

But there is worse among men than vanity; for it is truly said, "when the wicked cometh, there cometh also contempt, and with ignominy reproach." God despiseth not any; but what care they for God? They have only contempt for their betters, and ensure it for themselves, or, as it is here said, "with ignominy reproach."

The contrast appears next. "The words of a man's mouth are deep waters, the fountain of wisdom a gushing brook." Here it is a man who has looked up and learned wisdom, instead of trusting himself. His words are therefore deep waters; and they are fresh as well as deep, even as a gushing brook. For Jehovah is the living God, and man under the power of death.

But there are dangers too even for the wise. It is not good to favor the person of the wicked, and just as bad to subvert the righteous in judgment. Strict integrity is a jewel. Prejudice must not be allowed, any more than partiality. Our sufficiency is of God.

There is another way in which folly displays itself. "A fool's lips enter into (or, with) contention, and his mouth calleth for blows." The way of peace is unknown. His words are for war, and his mouth therefore calleth for blows, even if he escape sometimes. But it is all the worse for him in the long run; for "a fool's mouth is his destruction, and his lips the snare of his soul." Had he profited by rebuke and other humiliations, it might have been otherwise (vss. 6-7).

Quite as evil as the foolish talker is the tale-bearer, of whom we next hear. "The words of a tale-bearer [are] as wounds, and they go down to the chambers of the belly." Even if they were strictly true, which is rarely the case, they are in every respect injurious, and fall under the censure of evil speaking. They wholly lack a moral object or a loving way. It is at best gossip, and for the most part the mere indulgence of talking of things which right feeling would rather conceal. The issue is to inflict wounds which pierce very deep, and where they are least curable.

Then we have a maxim of great force in verse 9. The slothful also, or slack in his work, is near akin to the destroyer, or great waster. Both arrive at the same end of misery, one by idling, the other by careless prodigality. See the blessed contrast of Christ as Mark traces His service; "and straightway," "and immediately," "and forthwith."

What a resource in such dangers, and in all others, is the name of Jehovah! A strong tower truly, whither the righteous betakes himself and is secure (v. 10). For the enemy is still in power, and those who return to God need protection.

How poor in comparison is the rich man's wealth (v. 11)! He thinks it a strong city, and a high wall in his own conceit. But it will fail him utterly when his need is extreme.

So when the heart of man is haughty, destruction is nigh; whereas humility is the pathway to honor that lasts (v. 12). Here Christ is the blessed Exemplar. For He. as high as the Highest, took the lowly place of bondman to obey, and having gone down so low that none could follow to the utmost, is now indeed exalted. The Christian is called to follow; and on none did the Lord lay it more than on the apostles who by grace were faithful.

The weakness and need, the dangers and difficulties, as well as the helps, of man are here remarkably set out (vv. 13-24).

Haste or vanity leads men to confide in themselves and to slight what others have to say. Thus it is that they get the discredit of folly and shame to their surprise and pain.

When one is enabled to bear up courageously in conscious integrity, it is all well; but when the spirit is. broken, despair is apt to ensue, and all is over, while that lasts.

Everyone can see that those who lack intelligence ought to get knowledge, and that the unwise should seek it. But in truth the reverse is the fact as here. The intelligent have it at heart to get knowledge, as the wise do seek it. So the Lord assured when here: Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. Who seeks of God in vain for our real good?

But now we hear of the way of a man with men, and without God, as we heard in the chapter before. Gifts go far with most, and make way for the least honorable before great men, who are often, like those who court them, neither good nor wise. There are marked exceptions.

The next apothegm is a sort of converse to verse 13. It is a man first in his own cause; what can be plainer than its justification? But his neighbor comes and searches him; and how does the matter look then?

There are cases however where both sides have so much to plead, that a fair decision is beyond men, who if stiff give themselves over to contention, as there are those outside the dispute whose sad interest it is to keep it up. The Israelite had the resource of the lot, no matter how mighty the contenders might be; for Jehovah did not fail to decide thereby. But the Christian is entitled to look to his Father in Christ's name, and never without an answer of grace if he wait on Him. How great the value of the written Word and of free intercourse with Him who is higher than the highest!

But there is as there ever was a great difficulty here; and it might seem strange, if we were not too familiar with the fact, that it is with a brother offended. How unapproachable and unreasonable! Yes, he is harder to win than a strong city; and such contentions are as the bars of a castle. What strength is needed to break through!

"The belly" has a bad name in both Old Testament and New; but not always, as John 7:38 conclusively proves. And so it may be here, where it seems employed in its twofold application for the innermost affections, good or evil. The mouth indicates the heart, as the Lord tells us both of the good man and of the wicked. Out of its abundance the mouth speaks. Here it is the other side-a man's inwards satisfied with the fruit of his mouth, with the increase of his lips. How weighty then our every word if we bring in God! But if this satisfies man, the child of God can be satisfied with nothing less than God's Word and grace. Hence too are life and death said to be in the power of the tongue, and so the issues in both good and evil. All Scripture declares it; all experience confirms and illustrates it.

Does the finding of good in a wife, in one worthy of that name, join on to this? Certainly no one has such opportunity of intimate knowledge and of giving help. She can avail as none else; and if for God, what a treasure to her husband, who might resent fidelity in another! What a favor from Jehovah!

The poor naturally resort to supplication, the rich as naturally answer roughly. Grace exalts the one, and abases the other, to the happiness of faith, and to the Lord's pleasure who sees and weighs all.

A man who depends on many friends pays for it to his own ruin; but One is become more than a friend, a lover beyond all others, that sticketh closer than a brother. Well we know Him; yet how little, alas!

Chapter 19:1-7. In a general way these maxims of divine wisdom are meant to comfort the upright and considerate poor, apt to be despised by others of less moral worth. They are instructive to all who have the fear of God. and to the Christian especially, who is told to honor all men as such (1 Pet. 2:17). There is nothing akin to the assertion of man's rights and the exclusion of God's, seeking one's own will, advantage, honor, and power.

To walk in integrity is the fruit of divine grace. Faith alone can thus enable anyone in a world of vain show and with a nature corrupt or false, and vain or proud, either way given to self-complacency and open to self-conceit. If ever so poor, how much better is the upright walker than the man however rich that talks crookedly and is a fool (v. 1).

There is no excuse for anyone who hears the Scriptures to be without knowledge, and knowledge of the deepest value, perfectly reliable and accessible. What is to be compared with the written Word of God, even when it was but partially given? To be without that knowledge was not good but evil in an Israelite; how much more in a professing Christian! Without knowledge, one is apt to act precipitately and fall into sin- how often through haste! Man needs to weigh his words and ways (v. 2).

The foolishness of a man exposes him to evil ways; and all the more, because the more foolish, the less is there self-judgment. If one but felt his folly before God, and therefore looked up for wisdom, how surely He would give it without upbraiding; if he trust himself, he perverts his way more and more. What is worse still, his heart frets or rages against Jehovah. His folly grows impious at length even to casting the blame on Him who only is absolutely wise and has never done him harm but good. It is a common case (v. 3).

The covetousness of man betrays itself in the eagerness of men in general to be friends of the wealthy; nor less in the coolness that separates the poor man from his neighbor's interest and care (v. 4). How little is God in their thoughts! Yet withal they may flatter themselves with loving God and man. Let them think of the good Samaritan.

False witness is a heinous sin in Jehovah's eyes, who pledges Himself that it shall not go without punishment, and that the untruthful man shall not escape. A Jew was no doubt more guilty than a heathen if he thus boldly ignored Him who hears every word; and much more inexcusable is the Christian, now that Christ has come, the true and faithful Witness. Israel was called to be the arena of Jehovah's government; but it utterly failed through their forgetting the ground of promise to faith, and resting all on their own obedience of the law. No sinful man, nor indeed any, can stand on such a tenure. For as many as are of law-works are under curse, as it had been so strikingly anticipated in Deuteronomy 27 where the Spirit records the curses on Ebal, and does not notice the blessings on Gerizim, though no doubt proclamation was made historically on the latter as much as on the former. But all men who take this ground of their obedience reap not blessing, but curse. Blessing for a sinful man can come only by faith. And we find men after the law even more heedless of truth than they were before the law, yea, even saints. But in Christianity we have not only the truth, but truthfulness consequently, as never before.

The selfishness of human nature is shown out in verses 6 and 7 "Many court (or, entreat) the favor of a prince; and every man is a friend to him that giveth" (v. 6). It is not all that can get the ear of a prince to curry favor. But a liberal man is as the rule easy to reach and ready to listen. No doubt it is a temptation even to a Christian in distress. But why forget that He whose is the earth and its fullness has His heart ever open to his cry? How comely then it is to be anxious for nothing; to let our gentleness be known to all men, self-assertion to none; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving to make our requests known to God!

What a graphic picture verse 7 presents in following up hateful self-seeking! "All the brothers of the poor hate him; how much more do his friends go far from him! he pursueth with words: they are not." Even the nearest ties of relationship break before the needy one. Still less are friends faithful to him who sinks into poverty. The very sight of such a one is a bore, and a signal to be off. In vain the debtor pursues with his words of appeal. The old friends disappear, and all fails. Such the prodigal found the world, when his profusion left him nothing more to spend; no man gave to him. God is the gracious giver, and the only One changeless and effectual, when every resource is gone, and the sinner bows to Him, though he have nothing but sins. But for him, however ruined, that believes, God has Jesus and with Him freely gives all things, as the day will manifest. It is of importance to realize this by faith now, that we may honor Him in thanksgiving and praise, and in willing service, as it becomes every Christian to do.

The Proverbs: Chapter 19:8-29

The value of right feeling ("heart" literally, or sense) is enforced and contrasted with the folly and evil of deceit, both for the life that is, and for that to come; the uncomeliness of self-indulgence, and the admirableness of forbearance; the comfort of royal favor, as against the fear of its displeasure; the grief where family relationship is in disorder, and the manifest blessing where she who shares the guidance walks and judges wisely.

It is not only lax and dissolute ways that lead to ruin. How many perish by the indifference which gives a loose rein to folly! There is no fear of God in either; and where this fear is lacking, all must be wrong. Before, we were told that the fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom, as it also tends to life. This may be even now before peace with God is enjoyed; for such peace comes only through the faith which rests on Christ and His work. But it remains true, that he that heareth reproof getteth sense; and he that getteth sense loveth his own soul. The other word that accompanies this is of great value-"he that keepeth understanding shall find good," and good better than silver or gold. It is well to get, and better still to keep, what is so excellent.

Those who hear and say much have to lay to heart the next solemn warning: "a false witness shall not be held innocent, and one uttering lies shall (not merely be punished, but) perish." It is most hateful to God and most injurious to man. No one can say where the evil may spread, or how it may end here; but we do know how the Lord judges it forever.

Luxury is good for none; but it is above all unseemly for the fool who makes it his enjoyment and his god. The wise man was given to add that worse still is it for a servant to have rule over princes: who so vain and tyrannical?

To indulge in anger hastily is ever a danger, as it is true discretion to be slow in yielding to it. Better still is it to pass over an offense however real. It is his glory. He that is higher than the highest sets the pattern of grace.

On kings it is peculiarly incumbent how they dispense their censure or their favor. If they mistake either way (and there is no small danger of it), the effect is pernicious beyond measure. How happy for the believer to have to do readily and directly with the Highest who never errs, though we are so prone to make mistakes.

The next words take up the afflictions of family life, and give us salutary judgment. It is not merely a fool here, but "a foolish son," and he surely is "the calamity of his father." There is another who brings the calamity nearer still and more constantly, a contentious wife. Her cross and fractious spirit is a continual dropping. Not a spot in the house is safe from her turmoil.

Hence the importance of so looking to the Lord for a gracious and faithful counterpart. If house and wealth are an inheritance of fathers, as it generally was in Israel, a prudent wife was from Jehovah. What were the rest, however choice or abundant, where the meekness of wisdom failed in her who shared it all? If all else materially lacked, what comfort and happiness in having one

from Jehovah who had His light within and around her!

Dangers and helps are plainly pointed out; for the fallen earth is full of the one, and Jehovah fails not for the other. There is a great need of vigilance, and man is shortsighted, to say the least.

Even when man was unfallen, he had responsibility. He was called to till and keep the garden, planted exceptionally by Jehovah Elohim with every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. When fallen, as the ground was cursed on his account, he had to eat of it all the days of his life with toil. Thorns and thistles it yielded unbidden, so that man had to eat bread in the sweat of his face all his diminishing life. Slothfulness therefore ill became his position, and all the more when he faced adversity through his own fault. The sun arises, and the wild beasts get away to their dens, but man

goeth forth to his work till the evening; and, as he is, it is well ordered for him. But slothfulness traverses all, and casts into a deep sleep while it is day, and pays the penalty. If any will not work, neither let him eat. The idle soul shall suffer hunger.

Man was made in God's image, after His likeness. He had dominion given him over fish and fowl, cattle and reptile, and over all the earth too. Yet was he put under commandment. And "he that keepeth the commandment keepeth his soul; as he that despiseth," or is reckless of, "his ways shall die." So Adam proved, and no less Adam's race. Even when no open sin was, man must bow to God. To seek independency of God is his ruin. To look up in gratitude and obey Him is not only the first of human duties, but vital to man whose breath is in his nostrils, and his life but a vapor. When sin entered and death through sin, how very evident and urgent it was that he should be dependent on that God who forthwith held out a Deliverer from the power of evil before banishing him from the paradise he had lost by his disobedience!

In such a world of disorder, of violence and corruption, we have always with us the poor, whom no man that has eyes or ears can fail to meet. This tests the heart practically; for to say, Go in peace, be ye warmed and filled, and to give them not the things needful for the body, is to cheat ourselves quite as much as them. Man was to represent God who loves a cheerful giver in a wilderness world, and here encourages the man to pity those that have not. "He that pitieth," or is gracious to, "the poor lendeth to Jehovah," as He deigns to count it; "and what he bestoweth He will pay him again." What security can match this? Think too of the honor of being creditor to Him!

But there is also another duty in which a parent ought to resemble Him, care for his offspring. "Chasten thy son, seeing there is hope." The young twig is pliant, and may be bent aright or pruned to bear fruit. Love is not indifferent but takes pains; and chastening is a greater sorrow to a father than to the son that needs it. To allow evil, whatever the plea, is to set one's soul on causing "him to die." We, Christians on earth, endure for chastening, which, though painful for the moment, afterward yields peaceful fruits of righteousness to those exercised thereby.

Look next at one not accustomed to bear the yoke in his youth. He is "a man of great wrath," overcome by any word or work which does not please his rash mind; what is the result? He "shall suffer punishment"; and the sad thing is that neither he nor anyone else can say what may come next. Love him as you may, his hasty temper is constant danger. "For if thou deliver, thou must do it yet again." Christ is the sole adequate Deliverer, and this not only by His redemption but by the virtue of abiding in Him. "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will,

and it shall come to pass for you."

Very fitting accordingly is the next word: "Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end." What counsel can compare with that which God gives; what instruction equals the Scriptures? Speculative men talk of the Bible as fragmentary and occasional; but under such an appearance there is the completest provision, and suited to every need that ever did or can arise. Men of faith find it out to their everlasting comfort, and are responsible to show its treasures to those who fail to see; but they reap the blessing in wisdom from the first to their latter end, as every believer proves.

Outside the field of divine teaching is the perplexity of man's thoughts, let him be ever so abundant in ideas or devices. "Many thoughts are in a man's heart, but the counsel of Jehovah, that shall stand." This is what makes wise; and firm as well as happy is he who learns and cleaves to His counsel. It is the great lie to deny the truth; and Christ the Personal Word, Scripture the written Word, is the truth, which the Holy Spirit makes a living thing to the believer.

Nor is this all the comfort he enjoys. "The charm of a man (or that which maketh a man to be desired) is his kindness." There too he is privileged to follow in the wake of God, who is good and doeth good. For this reason its claim too often is substituted for the reality; and good words usurp the place of good deeds. Nor do any fail more than those whose large purse accompanies a narrow heart and a polite tongue. Hence we have the pithy adage that "a poor man is better than a liar." It is God's Word which strips men of their robes and lays bare their true character. May we have grace to be truthful and loving, without pretension.

As it has been already laid down that the fear of Jehovah is the beginning and the discipline of wisdom, so does it prolong days, whereas the years of the wicked shall be shortened. Here (vv. 23-29) we have more said of its virtue.

Now that we know the manifestation of life eternal in Christ and its gifts to the believer, how greatly is the maxim enhanced! What satisfaction can there be outside Him? "He that hath the Son hath life"; and Christ is the food of that life, both as the true bread out of heaven, giving life to the world, and not to Israel only, by faith, and in raising up at the last day. But there is the further privilege since His death, even to eat His flesh and drink His blood, and thus to dwell with Him, as He dwells in the Christian. He is the Deliverer; what shall man or Satan to do hurt? How shall not God also with Him freely give us all things?

The faith that fears Jehovah is earnest. The sluggard on the contrary is so besotted to self as to bury his hand in the dish, and will not so much as raise it to his mouth again. So he lives, dies, and perishes.

To smite a scorner may and will be lost on him; but the simple take heed, gather profit, and become prudent. The man of intelligence lays admonition to heart, and apprehends a knowledge before unknown. Thus simple and wise are gainers.

As a scorner is worse than a sluggard, more guilty still is the son that plunders a father and chaseth away a mother and her loving appeals. What shame and dishonor he brings!

In such a world of sin the enemy finds no lack of mischievous men and women, who not only stray away from the words of knowledge, but take pleasure to misguide the unwary. Cease, my son, to

hear such fatal instruction.

Still more daring a witness of Belial is he that mocks at judgment; and the mouth of the wicked drinks down iniquity. But soon or late God is not mocked, if man is deceived; for whatsoever a man shall sow, that also shall he reap.

Therefore it is true that "judgments are prepared for scorners, and stripes for the back of the foolish." It is not that God desires any man to be reprobate; but what if He, willing to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much long-suffering vessels of wrath fitted unto destruction? They gave themselves up to their own will, which is nothing but sin, and had a ready helper in the arch enemy who makes them his slaves. But that God might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, He in His grace prepared them before for glory. All the sin is in and of the creature; all the good is of God. This is the truth as to both God and man, whose only resource is by grace in Christ.

Chapter 67

The Proverbs: Chapter 9:7-10:10

Chapter 9 began with wisdom, or the wise woman; the Holy Spirit turns aside to point out how disappointing it is to instruct the scorner-a very aggravated form of evil, though increasingly common as Christendom hastens in its unbelief and moral ruin to judgment.

Every scripture, we know, is not more surely God-inspired than profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for discipline that is in righteousness; but we need wisdom to apply it. Faith needs not only the Word, but the God who gave it, to direct the heart and mouth livingly; and for this we have by grace the Holy Spirit's guidance. So the Apostle commended those who watched over souls to God, as well as to the word of His grace. While the simple and unintelligent are invited, the foolish must be shunned and the way of understanding followed. Then freely we are warned against meddling with the scorner. To correct such' is vain; they willingly put on you shame. Let them alone, said the Lord to the disciples. You may only gain a blot in reproving a wicked person. They have a deeper need-to be born again. Where no life is, hatred is the result. There is no wisdom in reproving a scorner, more than in giving that which is holy to the dogs or in casting pearls before the swine. The upshot may be that they will trample the misdirected word under their feet, and turn and rend you.

Now the Christian has the gospel to urge on the heedless; but this is the glad tidings of what God has done in Christ for him, wicked as he may be, to bring him to Himself. Thus all is harmonious. Correction and reproof are for those who have an ear to hear, that they walk not inconsistently with their profession. Hence we are told here to "reprove a wise man, and he will love thee." A wise man may not always pursue the path of wisdom; he may need reproof. A fool is one who never hears, though always ready to find fault. A wise man listens and weighs; when he recognizes what is of God, he will love you.

Another thing which distinguishes wisdom is the appreciation of what is good and helpful. Egoism is necessarily unwise and evil, because man is sinful, and God is unknown and entrusted. It is self-satisfied and refuses to learn, having no distrust of its own dark, selfish, and sinful state. On the other hand, "impart to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser; teach a righteous man, and he will increase learning." It is not the great that are wise, nor does age of itself understand judgment. Every good giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation nor shadow of turning. Dependence on God is our only right attitude habitually, and hearing from one another what approves itself to our consciences as His truth; for we are members of one another; and He despiseth not any, let him be ever so lowly. But He hateth the proud and will punish the scorner.

The secret of it all is plain. "The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom; and the knowledge of the Holy is understanding." Creature intelligence is of no value for the soul, for eternity, for relationship with God. It begins, and must begin, with fearing Him, the True and the Good, the Righteous and the Holy. There is repentance no less than faith, and therefore trembling at His Word, the direct reverse of judging it and trusting in self, justifying ourselves instead of God. But

growth belongs to life in our present condition; and growth is by the right knowledge of God, who has communicated it in His Word for this purpose. The Christian readily knows why "Holy" should be in the plural, without allowing that it means "holy things." The knowledge of such things is not the intelligence that grows from the enlarging knowledge of God.

The pious Jew addressed looked for long life here below, through divine favor. As things were, much might come in to modify this, as we see in Josiah and many another. But when divine principles have their just and unimpeded result, every word will be fulfilled, as when Christ reigns over all the earth.

We Christians have a far different calling now, and look for a higher glory. Nevertheless, we can say and do believe that piety is profitable for everything, having promise of life-of the present one, and of that to come.

It remains true also that "if thou art wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself; and if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it." God remains in changeless majesty; but in His righteous judgment, each shall, bear his own burden, and reap as he sows, from the flesh corruption, from the Spirit life everlasting.

In full contrast with wisdom, and quite distinct from the scorner, is "the foolish woman." Here we have the picture of herself and her ways, her guests, and their end. Only we must not think that the folly in question means a feeble intellect, but rather the absence of care or thought, of heart or conscience, toward God, which Satan fosters in benighted man. "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God," and therefore neither seeks nor calls on Him. This at the last is antichrist. Here it is "the foolish woman," the state of things that entices, fleshly corruption rather than the haughty antagonist that sets it up.

Wisdom pleads for Jehovah and therefore in the true interests of man, no less than for the divine glory. The foolish woman is zealous only for the indulgence of sinful pleasure, regardless of all consequences. Yet it is remarkable how similar are the thoughts and words the Holy Spirit uses in speaking of each. Not that wisdom is "clamorous" as is folly; but she does cry and put forth her voice, for understanding is hers, and the immense value she has to communicate from God and for Him, no less than/ to man. She does not sit on a seat or throne at the door of her house. But she yet more than folly stands in the top of high places by the way, a cheerful giver, who knows the ample resources for all that come. Not so the foolish woman. What house had she built? No pillars had she hewn out. She had neither beasts to kill, nor had she mingled wine, nor furnished her table, like wisdom with a heart delighting in good and in doing good where need abounded and dangers are without end and evil without measure.

Wisdom had her maidens to send forth, as she herself cried; for she was earnest to win for Jehovah and warn from Him, and sought the highest places of the city. Folly had no such maidens, any more than the generous provision of wisdom. Maidens indeed! She might well be ashamed and blush if she could before maidens, as they would assuredly blush for her words and ways. Yet both are represented as making appeal in terms of strong resemblance, but how opposite their wish and aim! "Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither" (vv. 4 and 16). And it is to be remarked, that the foolish woman in particular addresses her call to those that pass by, who go right on their ways. What malicious pleasure to lead such astray!

The difference comes out strongly in what wisdom, as compared with folly, says to him that is void of understanding. "Come, eat ye of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled. Forsake follies, and live; and go in the way of understanding." All was open, sound, holy, and unselfish on wisdom's part. How sinister the speech of the foolish woman! "Stolen waters are sweet, and pleasant is the bread of secrecy." But the appeal of wisdom needs grace to make it palatable; her rival's invitation is just suited to the dark heart of man as he is. He enjoys what is prohibited, and can only be snatched guilefully or by cunning; he suspects what is given freely, and cannot understand the greatest good as a matter of grace. Wisdom's gifts are therefore distrusted and despised; folly's call to stolen waters is as sweet to fallen nature as to drink them, and the bread of secrecy is as pleasant in prospect as to the taste.

How solemn when the curtain is drawn enough to let us see the dread reality! "But he knoweth not that the dead (or departed, shades) [are] there; that her guests [are] in the depths of Sheol." As the language about wisdom rose in the chapter before into a living and glorious person, an incomparable object of delight to Jehovah, and with no less incomparable delight of love going out to the sons of men, so here chapter 9 ends with a more awful view than is at all usual in the Old Testament of the lot that befalls those that lend their ear, and follow the tempting words of the foolish woman. What a contrast with leaving off folly and going on the way of intelligence!

Chapter 10 begins with the less consecutive communications of the Book, after the rich presentation of sententious wisdom of more general character seen in the previous nine. We are now introduced to those detached and pithy moral axioms given to instruct the mind and fasten on the memory for profit day by day.

In the first verse is stated the importance of cultivating wisdom in a son, not the acquisition of such knowledge as distinguishes among men, or promotes the interests of the family or of himself. Vanity and pride, selfishness and greed, are thus guarded against. That is commended which cannot be without the fear of Jehovah. How sad if God's people were as indifferent as the Gentiles that know Him not! Is Christendom really better now? Is wisdom the aim of the school board or the education council? It makes "a glad father"; as its absence cannot but fall as grief to the "mother" especially. How many sons, bright, applauded, and successful, end in shame and ruin!

The second carries out the warning of the first verse. "Treasures of wickedness profit nothing." They may dazzle, and furnish the amplest means of self-gratification. But the end of these things is death; and God is not mocked, who will judge by Him in whom was no sin, but only obedience in love. Righteousness is consistency with our relationships, the first of which is with Him who is out of sight and forgotten. Now, as Solomon owned publicly when at the height of his earthly blessing, "there is no man that sinneth not"; righteousness cannot be for any man without looking out of himself to Him whom God ever meant to send, as all that feared Him knew. The prophets here but emphasized what the faithful acted on from the beginning. To be self-satisfied, or indifferent, is to be unrighteous radically. To believe God and look for the Savior is alone right. He gives one to be righteous as well as justified; "he shall live by his faith"; and there is no other way. Righteousness, therefore, it is that "delivereth from death."

Verse 3 appropriately adds the comforting assurance that Jehovah, who tries the righteous for their good in an evil age, "will not suffer the righteous to famish; but he repelleth the craving (or, the desire) of the wicked." There is a righteous government in the midst of all sorts of difficulties,

snares, and moral contradictions; the most willful finds himself checked, as the most tried is sustained and cared for.

In verses 4 and 5, heedlessness is shown to work ruin, no less than more pronounced evil. It was not for such indifference that God made man in His image after His likeness; and when he fell, he got a conscience to know good and evil, as was not nor could be in a state of innocence. So we have, "He cometh to want that dealeth with a slack hand; but the hand of the diligent maketh rich." As man, it is good for him to eat bread in the sweat of his face. An idler is open to evil as well as poverty; the diligent works not in vain. Again, when all is bright and abundant, folly takes its ease and enjoyment; but he is a wise son that gathereth in summer. Thus, he that sleeps when he ought to reap diligently, must inevitably cause shame, whatever the love of those who are nearest.

Then verses 6 and 7 contrast the portion and the memory of the righteous with the wicked. While blessings are upon the head of a righteous man, to adorn and protect him, the mouth of the wicked is covered by violence, or violence covers it. They proceed farther in ungodliness, and their folly at length becomes, evident. Whereas the memory of the righteous man lives as blessed, and the very name of the wicked shall rot.

Wisdom is manifested in lowly obedience (vv. 8, 9). "The wise in heart receiveth commandments; but the foolish of lips (the marked contrast) shall fall." Man's true elevation is in looking up to Him who deigns to guide the needy by His counsel. The foolish of lips proves that he neither knows whence wisdom comes, nor distrusts his own emptiness; and therefore shall he fall. But wisdom of heart does not stop at hearing, but receives to obey, and is blessed in his doing; and so we are told here, "he that walketh in integrity walketh securely; but he that perverteth his ways shall be known." He may be sly, and hope to lie concealed; but He who sees all discloses the evildoer even in the dark day or night.

Very pregnant is verse 10. "He that winketh with the eye causeth grief." He may be ever so on his guard, he may not go beyond a sign of his evil eyes; but he "causeth grief," and without defining it farther. It may be grief to himself as well as to others. As before, here it is added that the foolish of lips shall fall. He is not a crafty dissembler, but falls through his outspoken folly.

Chapter 68

Reciprocal Affection: Song of Solomon 4

It is a blessed thing to cultivate in our hearts not only the sense of what God has done for us, but also what He in grace has made us to be for Himself. It is most blessed to get away from ourselves, and entering into the secret of God's presence, there learn what those sentiments are which fill His heart. The Spirit of God makes those who believe in Christ to rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory; so the Apostle Peter says in his first epistle, chapter 1:8. That is our side of this joy, but it is "meet that we should make merry, and be glad" is His, for the Father has His joy as well, and it is boundless. He rejoices to have children near to Him - children who can enjoy God. "Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God"; and "we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement [reconciliation]." Rom. 5:11.

It is that we may enjoy Himself that we are made nigh by the precious blood of Christ. It is not merely what He gives us, but Himself, who is to be the portion of our souls, and this is the fruit of the new birth. Because born again, we enjoy God Himself. "We... joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ." But what is this new birth? It is our getting a new nature which has the capacity to enjoy and understand and know God. The soul gets this as the fruit of His grace. We are made to enjoy God, but then He has His side as well. His joy is to have His children near to Him, and we are to have the sense that there is nothing between our hearts and Himself. Thus we see there is the joy of the Father, and the children's joy likewise. In chapter 4 of the Song of Solomon we see Christ's part in this joy. The relationship here presented is not that of father and children. Of that the words of our hymn speak:

"Thou the prodigal hast pardoned,

`Kissed us' with a Father's love;

`Killed the fatted calf,' and called us

E'er to dwell with Thee above.

"Clothed in garments of salvation,

At Thy table is our place;

We rejoice, and Thou rejoicest,

In the riches of Thy grace."

In the 4th chapter of the Song, it is the bridal relationship which comes out. It is the joy of the Bridegroom and of His bride. We are prone to read this book so as to find Christ in it, and our hearts glow as we trace Him in its various scenes; but it is very sweet to turn for a moment and learn what the bride is to Christ. No language could be more lovely than that which we find He uses with regard to her. Listen to Him! "Behold, thou art all fair, my love" - "all fair" - "there is no spot in thee." Yet the more we know of Christ, the more we know of ourselves; and as we walk

with God, as the years roll by, we take lower and lower estimates of ourselves. Each year we think less of ourselves than we did the year before. So much is this the case that the heart is apt to become legal. The exceeding worthlessness of what we find within us, is so apparent to us. How blessed then, notwithstanding all we see ourselves to be, that Christ says of us, "There is no spot in thee." "Thou art all fair, my love."

It is blessed to dwell upon the Lord's thoughts of His people - to think of the Lord's pity and of His compassionate love, though that is not the love referred to in the Song. Here it is the love of complacency. He is rejoicing over His bride, and He speaks of her beauty and of her comeliness. But how can He find in us that which can delight Him? He does find that which is the joy and rejoicing of His heart, though not because of what we are in ourselves. It is all the result of what He Himself has invested us with. Jacob found in Rachel that which met the desires of his heart; and we find in Christ that which satisfies us; and Christ finds in His bride, the Church, that which delights His heart. "Ah!" you say, "it may be so when He will have presented us to Himself 'a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.' Then the Church will be holy and without blemish. Then all that which is worthless shall have been dropped, and only that which is His own perfect workmanship will abide."

But that is not the moment to which this chapter points. That day of glory and exceeding joy will come, but what we find here is something more wonderful than what will then be shown forth. Here we learn that even now, while we tread the sand of the desert, on our way to the glory that awaits the bride and Bridegroom, He finds in the Church that which delights His heart. He waits in heaven at the Father's right hand for the nuptial day. While then He is the portion of our hearts, He finds in us the portion of His heart. Look at what He says. As the Bridegroom speaks of His bride, the expressions of His love and appreciation deepen. He says to her, "Thou hast ravished [or, taken away] my heart,... thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes." Do we think of this? Do we believe it, beloved, that we are a joy to Him? We might well say of Him, that He has stolen away our hearts; but when He says we have ravished His heart, surely it is a wonderful thing. His delight is found in us, in the one He calls His bride.

It is not the individual believer, but the collective thing that is here spoken of. It is always the body of believers when the bridal affections of Christ are referred to; but in order that our souls, as a whole, may walk in the power of this wonderful truth, we must each individually be in the enjoyment of it. Each saint must dwell on that which Christ is seeking for in the assembly of His saints. It is through grace alone, I need not say, that any of us can enter into this - His joy concerning His own. But, I repeat, unless each one is individually enjoying it for himself and herself, we shall not, as a whole, answer to that which Christ is seeking us to be for Himself. There must be in your soul and in mine the sense of what we are to Christ. When this is known, and the heart has tasted it a little, we sigh to know it more deeply.

Look now at the response He gets from the bride. In chapter 1 she is heard to say, "Thy love is better than wine." She knows His love, and it is better to her than all beside; but His language exceeds hers. Hear what the Bridegroom says to her: "How much better is thy love than wine!" (4:10). What grace in Christ to say this of such poor heartless ones as you and me! Yet this is the estimate Christ forms of any little love He now finds in our souls to Him. "Thy lips," He continues, "O my spouse, drop as the honeycomb: honey and milk are under thy tongue." Every word that

falls from the lip, all that is the fruit of grace in the soul, is to Him like the droppings from the honeycomb. In Scripture honey indicates that which is food as well as refreshment. How such a scripture as this judges us! What has our conversation been? Has it been that which could feed as well as refresh the heart of the blessed Lord? "A garden enclosed," He says, "is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed." All this means she is entirely for Him, only for the Bridegroom. Ah, beloved, it is blessed when the soul gets to this! All that I am, and all that I have, belong to Him - to Jesus only. I am to be for Him here, and He says I am His own. He wants me for Himself. Is not His desire enough to make each soul surrender fully to Him? "He died... that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again." 2 Cor. 5:15.

But the Bridegroom enlarges on what the bride is to Him. "Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits; camphire, with spikenard, spikenard and saffron; calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices: a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon." Such is Christ's appreciation of "His own," and we should have the sense of all this in our souls, of what He sees His people to be. If we carried in our souls more the thought of what we are to Christ, He would be more to us. The eye would then be more off ourselves, and off one another. Then would our gaze on Him be more steady, and the joy of our hearts would be more calm and holy. Then we should be more jealous of that which would cause any distance between our souls and Christ. We would watch with concern its approach, and be able to shun it.

But He cares for His glory, and does preserve us for Himself; so we read, "Awake, O north wind." He sends His north wind, bearing its wave of trouble to rouse the careless one. We do not like this, but it is good and wholesome for the spices in His garden. It shakes them out. The wind gets through the branches, and the fragrance is poured forth. Trouble checks us. It casts us on God, and presses out that which is of Christ in us. Thus we learn what He would teach us. Then He can vary His dealings; the wind is changed. He says, "Come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out." He gives deep enjoyment of Himself. He makes the sun of His presence to shine in upon our souls, and the heart turns to Him, and says, "Let my beloved come into his garden."

The joy of communion is then known and enjoyed. Then the heart says, I am all for my Beloved. "I am my beloved's, and his desire is toward me." "Let him eat his pleasant fruits." The soul enters into His thought as to His bride. And how does He respond to her desire to have Him near her? "I am come," He says, "into my garden, my sister, my spouse." He appreciates that which is devoted to Him. He says, as it were, "It is all mine"; or, "I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk." As the soul enters into communion, and is conscious that He draws near, the heart goes out more and more to Him. "Drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved."

But as we thus muse on this joy of communion between the Bridegroom and His bride, we may well bow our heads in humiliation, and say, How little have we known of it! How little can we have been the joy and rejoicing of His heart! True, very true; yet faith lays hold of God's estimate of things.

Turn for a moment to 2 Cor. 11:2, and see how the Apostle sums up this matter. "I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." The Song of Solomon does not go beyond the day of espousals, but Paul points to the nuptial day, when the espoused one will be presented as a chaste virgin to Christ. What does he mean by a chaste virgin? It is one who is true, about whom a breath of reproach could not have been; so he warns them: "I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." We need more of this simplicity, brethren-the simplicity that is in Christ. Let our souls awake! Let us say before Him, He is everything to me, and I am everything to Him.

Chapter 69

The Recompense of His Love

The Day of Judgment, which will execute the just judgment of God, has been anticipated, for faith, by the clear and distinct declaration of the gospel. "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness." Rom. 1:18. But the "righteousness of God is revealed" also "on the principle of faith, to faith" (v. 17; J.N.D. Trans.).

It is the death and resurrection of Jesus which reveal to us these things. His death terminates the history of responsible man; His resurrection begins anew the history of man according to God. His death is the point at which evil and good meet in their full strength for the triumph of the latter. His resurrection is the exercise and the manifestation of the power which places man in the Person of Christ who has triumphed, and, by virtue of that triumph, in a new position, worthy of the work by which Christ has gained the victory, worthy of the presence of God. In this new state, man is clear of sin, and outside its empire and the reach of Satan.

In the position in which the resurrection of Christ has placed us, we see man living in the life of God, where redemption, purification, and justification have placed him, and fit for the state in which the counsels of God intend to place him; that is, for the glory which is attached to this resurrection. Man is also pleasing to God as the new creation of His hands, the fruit of the work in which God has perfectly glorified Himself. Let us examine this a little more closely.

I have said that good and evil met in all their force in the cross. It is well to seize this fact in order to understand the moral importance of the cross in the eternal' ways of God. The cross is the expression of the hatred, without cause, of man against God manifested in goodness. Christ, the perfect expression of the love of God in the midst of the wretchedness that sin had brought into the world, had brought in the remedy for this wretchedness wherever He met it. In Him, this love was in constant exercise, notwithstanding the evil; He was never wearied, never thrown back by the excess of evil, or by the ingratitude of those who had profited by His goodness. Sin, disgusting as it was, never arrested the course of Christ's love; it was but the occasion of the exercise of this divine love. God was manifested in the flesh, attracting the confidence of man by seeking him, sinner as he was - by showing that there was something superior to evil to misery and defilement. This was God Himself. Christ, perfectly holy, of a holiness that remained always unfailingly intact, could carry His love into the midst of evil, so as to inspire the wretched with confidence. If a man touched a leper, he was himself defiled; Christ stretches forth His hand and touches him, saying, "I will, be thou clean."

Man, who might fear to approach God on account of his own sin, found in grace, which was seeking the sinner in perfect goodness, which made of sin an occasion for the testimony of God's love toward man, that which was fitted to inspire confidence in his heart. It could relieve itself by unburdening the load of a guilty conscience into the heart of God who knew all. All was of no avail. The cross was the recompense of this love. Man would have none of God.

Chapter 70

Resting on the Rock

Perhaps there are few seasons more profitable to the Christian than those which are spent in the chambers of the departing, particularly of those who go hence to be with Christ. Both visitor and visited are often alike consoled by the intercourse that takes place on such occasions; and even where there are circumstances to sadden, the heart is taught to acknowledge the truth of the saying, that "sorrow is better than laughter" -the house of mourning more salutary than the house of mirth (Eccles. 7). I have been led to this reflection by the recollection of one or two interviews with Hannah B not long before her entrance into the rest that remains to the people of God (Heb. 4). Her brief history was related to me by a Christian lady, in whose household she once lived as a domestic servant. The way of salvation had often been set before her; but although convinced of the importance of the subject, she was unwilling to yield herself to Him who alone is able to save the lost, until it became evident to her that she was the subject of an incurable disease. Then, indeed, she turned in earnest to the Lord; and He, who is full of compassion and mercy, even to the most reluctant, did not "cast" her out (John 6:37), but pardoned and accepted her in the riches of His grace. It was after this important change that I heard of her desire to see me, and the first occasion of visiting her convinced me that the work in her soul was of the Holy Spirit. The serenity with which she spoke of Jesus as her peace, and all her peace, left no room for doubt as to this; and though she said but little, in consequence of the weakness of her frame, that little left the full impression that it was "well" with her for time and for eternity.

Not many days elapsed before I saw her again. I shall not soon forget the words with which she greeted me. "O Mr. -, I have been quite wishing to see you. I am so happy, resting on the Rock which can never be moved." She said this with a bright smile on her countenance, which witnessed, even more than words could, to the joy she felt within. "It is grace," she added, "all grace. I seem as if I could go round and tell all that I am a sinner saved by grace." Thus she went on, rejoicing in the Lord, so that I felt there was only room for thanksgiving. Prayer seemed out of place - she possessed already everything we could have asked.

The next time I looked in upon her, she was much weaker in body, but resting still in Jesus. I reminded her of Heb. 13:8: "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever." "Yes," she remarked, "we change, but He never does."

I asked her if she had found any change since my last visit - anything like conflict. She replied, "Yesterday I had a little cloud; but I resisted it, and it passed"; and then added, "0 if we walked more with Him in life, how much happier we should be!" Allusion having been made to the Lord's faithfulness, she said, "Yes, I do not for a moment fear that He will leave me now; but what a mercy for us that He is so patient with us!" She spoke of His chastenings not being in anger toward her, and I repeated 2 Cor. 4:17: "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." "Yes," was her reply, "He bears me through the very little suffering I have to endure - little indeed compared with what He has endured for me." She then alluded to her past life, saying, "I have had many convictions-many loud knocks- have been

raised from many beds of sickness; but I was never converted then; I never experienced the change I do now. We must be converted." "Yes," I said, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). "You are born again, dear Hannah, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, of the Word of God which liveth and abideth forever." She seemed to feed upon the Scriptures with great delight, and her views of truth were particularly clear and sound. She knew that to be once in Christ was to be ever in Christ, and this gave solid comfort to her soul. I read to her Heb. 6:13-20, and prayed for a few minutes, after which she said, "How comforting! This is meat to my soul."

She spoke with great calmness of her approaching departure, and of the blessedness of realizing the Lord's presence at such a time. And surely it is blessed, in circumstances like hers, to be able to say with one of old, "I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me." This was my last interview with her on earth; for not long afterward, calling at the cottage to inquire for her, I was told that she had fallen asleep.

Chapter 71

Revelation 11:18 and 19:5

Think with comfort on Rev. 11:18 and 19:5. I have enjoyed and been strengthened by the thoughts that have arisen in my soul from such verses, having a legal tendency to measure myself with others. Be willing to be among the "small"; heaven has fitted itself for the accepting of "small" and "great" together. Do not be uneasy if you judge yourself little in either fruitfulness, or devotedness, or grace, in comparison with others. Be willing to enter heaven as a "small" one. The glory has made its reckoning accordingly. The millions of the saints are there, as well as apostles, prophets, and martyrs. All the congregation, the small ones of Dan, as well as the princes of Judah, were alike in the shout of triumph when the glory appeared (Lev. 9). Clement and others were not Paul in the measure of their labors, in the love of Christ, and energy of the Spirit; but they were Paul as having their names alike written in the book of life (Phil. 4:3).

It is indeed a happy thought; the system of the glory has counted upon the small as well as the great, as John 14:2 intimates that the Father constructed His house on the very plan of receiving the saints as well as Christ. It was part of the original design. It was built as a many mansioned house, because all that trust in Jesus were to be there just as surely as Jesus Himself. Oh the solid and deep consolation of faith in these great and precious mysteries!

Chapter 72

Romans 12 and 1 Peter 4:10

In all this teaching (Romans 12 and 1 Peter 4:10) we find nothing about office; the subject is simply the members of the body of Christ, who all take their part in the edifying of the body, and who are held responsible to do so. All do not speak -all do not preach the gospel-all do not teach-because all have not these gifts. But all are obliged, according to Scripture, to do (according to the spiritual order of the house of God) that which God has given them to do. When once it is understood that all Christians are members of Christ, and that each member has his own proper work-has his own service in the body - all becomes simple and clear. We all have a duty to fulfill, and that in the strength of God; and the less seen is perhaps the most precious, while exercising itself before God, and not before man. But all have something to do. J. N. D.

Chapter 73

Romans 6, 7, 8

In the 6th chapter I understand the Apostle to be reasoning upon the claims which sin has on the believer. And the Apostle tells us sin has been disposed of. Sin was once the master, or king, holding dominion. It issued its commands through all the members, which were thus instruments of unrighteousness unto sin.

But sin has now, as such master, paid its wages. Its wages was death, and we have died in Christ; and thus sin is disposed of, or, we have done with it; for Christ has done with it; when He died, He died unto sin. It is true, He had to do with sin in His death; for His death owned the dominion of sin, being the wages it paid. But in resurrection Christ had to do with God, and not with sin; He rose by the glory of the Father, and by resurrection lived unto God, as in His death He had died unto sin. So the believer, now one with Christ in His death and resurrection, has done with sin, and has to do with God. Sin in its wages is disposed of, and so should it be in all it claims; for if we no longer receive its wages, so no longer are we to do its service.

It is as those who are alive from the dead that we should walk; and if that condition be rightly apprehended (alive from the dead, or risen), continuance in the doing or service of sin will be found a thing not even counted upon, or reckoned; such indeed have rather to reckon themselves dead unto sin, and alive unto God through Jesus Christ. Such truths their baptism reads to them. If, indeed, sin be willingly served, we own that sin is still alive, and not thus disposed of; and we deny the whole of this truth and our standing in Christ. For when we died to sin; that is, when sin paid us its wages (in Christ put to death), then "the old man," or, the "body of sin," was destroyed. That is, all our members and faculties, once the sphere and instrument of sin's dominion and service, in that character, were put to death also. So all our members and faculties now should own, assert, and exercise themselves in a risen character.

In the 7th chapter the Apostle in like manner entertains the claims of the law upon the believer, and in like manner he shows that they also have been disposed of. He does this very simply. He says that the authority of the law addressed itself only to a living man; that is, a man in the flesh, or man as born of Adam - that the law was given to him as such, but the believer has ceased in this sense to be a living man - has ceased to be of Adam, inasmuch as he has died and been raised again. And, consequently, being a dead and risen man, and not a living man, the law does not address its claims to him-he is not the object for the law. But in this the law is not spoken of in the same relation to us as sin has been. Sin has been spoken of as a master, or a king; but the law is here spoken of as a husband; and the result of our being dead to sin was life to God; but the result of our being now dead to the law is, marriage with Christ, as here shown. These distinctions, you will find, have their beautiful moral forms and meaning.

Then, at the close of the chapter, having shown how that sin and the law have been disposed of, or set aside - the one as a master, the other as a husband - the Apostle tells at the same time that they have been discharged with very different characters. Sin has been discharged with as bad, the law with as good, a character as ever the pen of an apostle could write for them. All evil in us is

said to have come from the first, while from the other nothing proceeds but that which is "holy, and just, and good"; and the moment that the real character of the law was understood by the quickened soul, this grievous stage of things arose - the commandment came, sin revived, and the man died. The law was felt to urge one thing before the conscience; sin was felt to exact another thing in the old man, or the members; and this state of things drew forth the sense of death in the soul, and the cry for deliverance. And the answer came in Jesus, revealed in the power of His death and resurrection.

In the 8th chapter of Romans we get the believer escaped thus from sin as a master, and the law as a husband, and in his new place in Christ. Being in Him, the believer has become a spiritual person - no longer in the flesh. Thus the flesh is discharged, as well as sin and the law; that is, we are neither under the old master, with the old husband, nor in the old nature. And, by the way, the Apostle shows that the flesh, thus discharged, could never (let God have done with it what He might) have yielded any fruit or allegiance to Him. So, as we speak, it was sad rubbish in itself, and to be free from it is good riddance.

Having thus cleared his way to look at the believer in his new place in Christ, the Apostle then with delight traces the holy prerogatives of such a one. 1) He is nothing less than a son, having the spirit of adoption, and not the spirit of bondage, as a servant. 2) Being thus a son, the Spirit, the Holy Ghost, is in him as at home. 3) Being thus a son, he is also an heir, having an heirship of God, with Jesus Christ. 4) And as the great principle of this coheirship, he is to shine in the same personal glory by-and-by as Jesus, on the hope of which manifestation of glory in us the whole creation now waits. 5) And though all this condition of the believer may cause him to groan under the sense of his present state in the body, and that he is still only in hope, like the whole creation; yet the Spirit given to him, and being in him, groans also, and groans with so pure a groan, that God has entire fellowship with it. 6) And even more than this. God in His sovereign rule of all things, constrains them all to work together for the believer, that without, as well as within us, He may be for us. And finally, the one great original purpose of conforming the believer to the model or image of the glorified Son, is that which has been the spring-and is ever the constant and abiding spring-of all the divine procedure and action.

This is the train of glorious privileges which flows forth from the believer's union with Christ. Nothing is too excellent for God to do or devise for such a one. All the joy that the fullest love can inspire, all the dignity that the brightest glories an put on us, are ours, thus, according to the counsel of God in Christ Jesus.

"God is for us"; who can be against us? This can easily account for all this train of joys and glories. But if He be for us, who can be against us? Is there an accuser, a judge, or an executioner, still standing out? The first may go away rebuked by this - that God has justified us. The second may go away rebuked by this-that Christ has died- has already suffered the judgment, and His work has been accepted. The third may go away rebuked by this-that all the malice of earth and hell together shall never drag us from the embraces, the firm embraces, of our God in Christ Jesus our Lord. And if there be neither accuser to charge, nor judge to condemn, nor executioner to punish, the court is cleared; we have left the scene, and now wait to be forever with the Lord.

Chapter 74

The Saint's Dying Hour

The opening of 2 Corinthians 5 is seasonable light and comfort in the presence of such a scene, when the body of a saint is paying the wages of sin, and taking the sentence of death into itself.

We are not, dear brother, kept only for the triumph that is to be shouted in the day of the resurrection. That will be blessed indeed: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" That triumph will be sung in the hour of the translation of the quick and the sleeping saints; but there is another triumph that faith celebrates beforehand, and it is this: "Absent from the body,... present with the Lord."

God, who has wrought us for the eternal house in the heavens, has even now given us "the earnest of the Spirit"; and that Spirit received from the living God is independent of both the earthly house of this tabernacle, and this house, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. It is spirit and faith; understanding it and its virtues, again I say, sings this triumph in the moment of the saint's departure: "Absent from the body,... present with the Lord."

It is not a grand, displayed, self-manifesting victory, I know. "We walk by faith, not by sight." Such a victory will be in the day of the resurrection, when the corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and death and the grave shall be spoiled of their prey (1 Cor. 15). But if not a displayed victory, it is a secret triumph; and faith sings (again I say) "Absent from the body,... present with the Lord"; yea, and in its exultation has this additional note of joy, "Therefore we are always confident."

What various strength and consolation are thus provided for us! What final victory, and what intermediate triumphs! - secret, but real - not submitted to sight, but sung and celebrated by faith. We want to live Himself a little more, surely we do. We want to know the Lord, with whom we look to be, as chief in the rising, kindling affections of our hearts; and then, whether it be the victory of the hour of the resurrection, or the triumph of the spirit in the hour of departing, we should then be more ready.

While our days on earth are lengthened,

May we give them, Lord, to Thee;

Cheered by hope, and daily strengthened,

May we run, nor weary be,

Till Thy glory,

Without clouds, in heaven we see.

Then in worship purer, sweeter,

Thee Thy people shall adore,

Tasting of enjoyment greater

Far than thought conceived before-

Full enjoyment,

Full, unmixed, and evermore.

Chapter 75

Satan and His Ways

Satan is a fallen creature, and cannot possess either omniscience or omnipresence. John 8:44 is a distinct testimony. But Satan has a whole multitude of demons under his authority - so much so, that in the poor Gadarene there was a legion - he is the prince of demons.

With respect to the knowledge of thoughts, he does not know them intuitively, as God does; but he, as a spirit full of intelligence and subtlety, discerns with the greatest clearness the motives of the heart, and has gained experience of the practice of many thousand years; but I believe that he understands nothing of the power of love.

He was able in his malice to raise up the Chaldeans, through the desire of plunder, against Job; but, not knowing the purpose of God to bless him by this means, he did nothing but fulfill it.

He did all that he could to get Christ put to death, but he only fulfilled the wonderful purpose of God for our salvation.

However, when he has to do with the evil heart of man, the case is different. He can present objects to awaken lusts. If we (Christians) reckon ourselves to be dead, dead to sin, and alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord, he is not able to tempt us. At least, the temptation remains without effect; but if the flesh is not held as dead, then he can present objects which the flesh likes, and suggest to a man the means of satisfying his lusts. Thus he put it into the heart of Judas to betray Jesus for a little money.

But man is responsible, because without lust Satan could do nothing. He has nothing to offer to the new man, or if he offers anything, it only produces horror in the soul. The soul suffers as Christ suffered at the sight of evil in this world, or else it overcomes as Christ overcame in the wilderness.

But, when the soul is not set free, he can indeed insinuate wicked thoughts, and unbelieving thoughts, and words of blasphemy, in such a way that these words and thoughts seem to proceed from the man himself.

Nevertheless, if the man is truly converted, we always find that he has a sense of horror at the things that arise in his mind; and we see that they are not really his own thoughts. If he is not converted, he does not distinguish between the demon and himself, as we find in the gospels. But if he is converted, it is a proof that he has opened the door to the devil by sin - hidden sin it may be - or by negligence.

Furthermore, Satan is the prince of this world, and its god; and he governs the world by means of the passions and lusts of men; and he is able to raise up the whole world against Christians, as he did against Christ, and so try their faith.

He can seek to mingle truth and error, and thus deceive Christians if they are not spiritual; and also, as the demon at Philippi did (Acts 16:16-18), get Christians mixed up with the world in order to destroy the testimony of God; he can change himself into "an angel of light."

Satan has but little power over us if we walk humbly, close to the Lord, following faithfully the Word of God, having Christ as the only object of the heart. Satan knows well that he has been conquered; therefore it is said, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."

His influence in the world is very great through the motives of the human heart, and he acts on men through each other. Likewise, from the rapidity of his operations and actions, he appears to be everywhere; and then he employs a great multitude of servants who are all wicked; but in fact he is not present everywhere.

But God is really present, and if we are under the influence of the Spirit of God, and the conscience is in the presence of God, Satan has no power.

"He that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not." 1 John 5:18.

However things m ay be with us, if we are truly the children of God, he will fulfill the counsels of God in respect to us; it may be by chastisement, if need be. But God knows all things; He, in the most absolute sense, penetrates everywhere; He orders all things - Satan's efforts even-for our good; and if we are armed with the whole armor of God, the darts of the evil one do not reach the soul.

Chapter 76

Seed on Good Ground

"That on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience." Luke 8:15.

There may seem to the world to be fruits bright and blessed; but if people do not have Christ, they tire. There will be no enduring unless Christ has possession of the soul; but if He has, there will be abiding motive, and people will go on and "bring forth fruit with patience."

They that hear, keep going steadily on, having their motive for action in the Lord. Trouble may come into the Church, disappointment may arise, even from brethren; but they go on just the same, because they have Christ before them. For the Word they have heard and keep, connects them with Christ; and He is more than anything else.

Chapter 77

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 will serve it will best learn to do so by knowing His heart and purposes toward it. In a word, it is Christ who 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 toward Christ and Him alone! How often may sentimentality and natural feeling affect us in our service, instead of simple love to Him.

Chapter 78

The Sin Offering: Leviticus 4

I would not now make many remarks on this instructive type of our Lord Jesus as the substitute for our sins, but would content myself on such an occasion as this with drawing attention to a few points of great interest which might be overlooked. In the sin offering, the grand matter was this: the removal of the sin from the offerer to a sacrifice that was able to bear it and suffer in his stead. It was the contrast of the burnt offering. Hands were laid upon the head of the offering in both cases. But when a Jew brought his burnt offering, the point was that the acceptance of the victim should be transferred to him. Thus, as that unblemished offering ascended up to God, the sweet savor in which it arose before Jehovah was to be accepted for the man who had none of his own - who was nothing but a poor sinner. Hence we see the value of the offering in that case was transferred to the offerer, while in the sin offering the converse appears - the offerer's evil was charged on the victim. His hands too were laid on the offering, but the guilt of the offerer was transferred to the victim - not the value of the victim transferred to the offerer. The consequence of this was that the victim when offered for sin did not as such rise up before God; because if the sin was transferred to the victim, the victim must be dealt with in judgment to the uttermost. Both are true to faith in Christ. But the result was very striking in this latter case, for God would show that the evil which was taken away from the sinner who offered (and yet more, what was laid on Christ) involved the gravest consequences. Grace, righteousness, obedience - nothing in Christ -could hinder the effect of this substitution in the judgment of God. His was a real suffering for sin. If sin was a real thing, the judgment of it was no less real; and God has marked this.

Now there was just the difficulty-to maintain the proof of Christ's perfection, even where God shows the consequences of our evil laid to His account. These two conditions had to be met, and equally met in the sin offering. Man could never have done it; indeed he is uncommonly slow to learn it, even where it has been written by God before his eyes. We have all read and have all passed by these most striking lessons; but let us now notice that in the sin offering where the victim was identified with the guilt of the offerer, this was provided: "the skin of the bullock, and all his flesh, with his head, and with his legs, and his inwards, and his dung, even the whole bullock [the animal as such with a very slight exception] shall he carry forth without the camp unto a clean place, where the ashes are poured out, and burn him on the wood with fire: where the ashes are poured out shall he be burnt." There was this sign in taking it without the camp, that the victim identified with the evil of the offerer had to be put away far from God. The camp was the place where the people of God were, as the sanctuary was where He Himself dwelt. To express thus the holy abhorrence of evil, not only could the sin offering not be burned near the sanctuary in the court, but not even in the camp. It must be taken without the camp and there burned solemnly in a clean place. This surely shows the transfer of the evil of the offerer to the victim in a most striking way.

But how is the sense of the perfection of Christ kept up here? It would be an awful thing if, through any thought of deliverance from guilt by its transfer to Him, Christ got lowered in our souls. All the wickedness that man is capable of doing to his fellow is nothing like so bad as allowing the

smallest injury to Christ. Beware of lowering the name and glory of the Son of God! God could easily replace all the men that ever were; but God Himself could not replace Christ. He is nearer to God than all the creatures of His hand and will; and He ought to be so to us. Anything that sullies Christ is in itself fatal. Now Scripture in this most remarkably guards the honor of His name; for not only was there the greatest care that the sin offering should be without blemish, but the blood of the bullock for sin was brought in, and put on the horns of the altar of sweet incense before Jehovah. Some was carried thus into the sanctuary, as well as the rest of it poured out "at the bottom of the altar of the burnt offering, which is at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation." The object was to give the assurance to the offerer that his sin, being atoned for righteously, was forgiven.

In the first and second of the cases mentioned in this chapter (that is, for the anointed priest, and for the whole congregation), some of the blood was put upon the horns of the altar of sweet incense. Thus it was manifest that not a priest could enter there without being able to see the witness that communion was restored. Its blood was put upon the horns, the most conspicuous part of the altar. But there was another provision also: "He shall take off from it all the fat of the bullock for the sin offering; the fat that covereth the inwards, and all the fat that is upon the inwards, and the two kidneys, and the fat that is upon them, which is by the flanks, and the caul above the liver, with the kidneys, it shall he takeaway; as it was taken off from the bullock of the sacrifice of peace offerings: and the priest shall burn them"- where? outside the camp?

No, "the priest shall burn them upon the altar of the burnt offering" - the altar, where whatever was for acceptance with Jehovah, whatever was a savor of rest to Him, was burned. Thus we see God intimates how far from the truth it is that the offering was not intrinsically acceptable, for part of it was burned upon the altar that speaks of acceptance, as certainly as the rest was taken without the camp and burned there.

But let us remark another point. The part that was burned was exceedingly significant, "the fat that covereth the inwards, and all the fat that is upon the inwards." If there is anything wrong with the creature, it is sure to be found in the inwards. There may even be a fair outside, but wherever there is thorough corruption, the more you go within, the more you find the evil core. On the other hand, where it was meant to show the good condition and the acceptability of a victim, it could not be done more expressively than by the burning of the fat of the inwards on the brazen altar. So with Christ. Outside He might be treated as the object of God's judgment, bearing our sins in His own body on the tree; but His blood was ever fit for God's acceptance and that which expressed the energy of His most inward feeling could not but rise as a savor of rest before Him. Never was Christ more the object of God's delight than at the moment when God abandoned Him for our sins upon the cross.

But another feature of the chapter may be noted before I close. There is no case except one where the sin is not said to be forgiven and an atonement made for it. When the whole congregation sinned and brought a bullock for the sin offering, the sin was forgiven; when the ruler brought his sin offering, the sin was forgiven; when one of the common people sinned and brought his offering, his sin was forgiven. Observe too, it is only in the case of a private man that God made an alternative. Only such a one might bring a kid or a lamb. When the high priest or the congregation sinned, it must be a bullock-nothing less sufficed. When the ruler sinned, it must be a

he-kid and nothing else. But when one of the common people sinned, God's tender mercy provides for their need. They might happen to have only a kid or only a lamb; and God would take either. Such was His way of dealing with the poor, even under the law; what is it now in grace through Jesus Christ?

Now in one case it is remarkable that forgiveness is not stated, and in what circumstance is this? The priest that is anointed. Can there be anything more striking? The great point was both to provide adequately for one like Aaron, and to set forth Christ without dishonor to the spiritual mind. Now inasmuch as Christ had nothing to be forgiven, we can understand that this should be left out. Yet, as Christ made Himself responsible for our sins, in this sense He could not be forgiven, but must go through the judgment of God for the sins He undertook to bear. Thus in a twofold way the absence of the mention of forgiveness in this instance only seems most notable. In His own Person He had of course no sin to be atoned for or forgiven; whereas, becoming responsible for us, He must bear all and could not be forgiven. He must suffer for sins, the Just for the unjust. Thus the Spirit of God has united the fullest comfort for the soul that believes, so that we may know our sins put away by a true atonement for them and ourselves forgiven. Grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

Chapter 79

Songs of Degrees

Recovery, or The Return Journey As typified by the "Songs of Degrees," Psalms 120-134

Part 4

Psalm 132. It is nice to see in David's vow recorded here about finding a habitation for the mighty God of Jacob, how he realized that, as much as it meant to Israel and himself, it was the place that Jehovah desired in dwelling amongst His people. It is very noticeable how Jehovah answers in a fuller way than David desired in the prayer, and declared that it was His rest, and here would He dwell, for He had desired it (v. 14). The blessing also went beyond what had been voiced in the prayer.

The ark in 1 Sam. 4:4 is spoken of: "The ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts, which dwelleth between the cherubim"; but had they really considered who dwelt there, they would never have attempted to bring it into the battle and say as they did, "It may save us out of the hand of our enemies." They were treating it as an idol. How different David's thoughts of it and who dwelt there. Do we not learn from David's exercises why he was called "a man after His own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14)?-the only one who showed such exercises about God's thoughts of dwelling in the midst of His people.

In that first song sung on the banks of the Red Sea (Exod. 15:17, 18), just after redemption was accomplished, we have these words: "Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of Thine inheritance, in the place, O LORD, which Thou hast made for Thee to dwell in; in the sanctuary, O LORD, which Thy hands have established. The LORD shall reign forever and ever."

Centuries had passed by since the above inspired words had been sung. The people have been brought in and planted, the Lord has taken His place among them. But we read in Psalm 78:56-70: "Yet they tempted and provoked the most high God, and kept not His testimonies: but turned back, and dealt unfaithfully like their fathers: they were turned aside like a deceitful bow. For they provoked Him to anger with their high places, and moved Him to jealousy with their graven images. When God heard this, He was wroth, and greatly abhorred Israel: so that He forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which He placed among men: and delivered His strength into captivity, and His glory into the enemy's hand." (We read the historical account of this in 1 Sam. 4:3-11.) "He gave His people over also unto the sword; and was wroth with His inheritance.... Then the Lord awaked as one out of sleep, and like a mighty man that shouteth by reason of wine. And He smote His enemies in the hinder parts: He put them to a perpetual reproach. Moreover He refused the tabernacle of Joseph, and chose not the tribe of Ephraim: but chose the tribe of Judah, the mount Zion which He loved. And He built His sanctuary like high palaces, like the earth which He hath established forever. He chose David also His servant, and took him from the sheepfolds." That was in David's early years.

Some eighty to ninety years had elapsed since the ark had been delivered into captivity. Truly it did not remain in captivity very long. The enemy was glad to get rid of it in a few months, but it had

never been returned to its former place in the tabernacle at Shiloh. We learn from the above quotation from the 78th Psalm the reason why. It was neglected in the days of King Saul, as David says in 1 Chronicles 13:3, "We inquired not at it in the days of Saul."

Is it not beautiful to see the spirit that he manifests here? He did not say, "They sought it not," or, "Saul sought it not," but, "We sought it not." He takes his place among the people as having neglected it.

This 132nd Psalm seems to be more about David's exercises than his utterances. Perhaps we might gather from 2 Chron. 6:41, 42 (Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple), that verses 8-10 of Psalm 132 are Solomon's utterances, giving us the exercises of his father concerning the ark.

"Lord, remember David, and all his afflictions:" v. 1. "How he sware unto the LORD, and vowed unto the mighty God of Jacob;" v. 2.

"Surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed;" v. 3.

"I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids," v. 4.

"Until I find out a place for the LORD, a habitation for the mighty God of Jacob." v. 5.

In these five verses we have David's vow, evidently made after his being anointed as king, but during his rejection before he came into power. We see how this subject consumed him.

In Psalm 69:9 we have the words that David uttered concerning the house: "The zeal of Thine house hath eaten me up." These words are remembered by the disciples in John 2:17, and applied by them to the Lord when He drove out of the house the defilement that the unbelieving nation had brought into it.

"Lo, we heard of it as Ephratah." v. 6.

That simple expression should speak volumes to us! What was Ephratah? We learn from a footnote in our J.N.D. Translation that this is the same as Bethlehem-Judah, David's home where his early years had been spent. We say, early, because soon after his anointing he was called into Saul's court to play the harp before him when the evil spirit from God came upon him, after which the evil spirit departed from him. Later, he was home for a brief period, then sent to the camp of the army where he met and slew Goliath. After this mighty victory, we read that Saul would let him go no more to his father's house. Then came Saul's jealousy, and David was compelled to flee from him for several years. When he finally began to reign, we are told that he was thirty years old. So his years spent at Ephratah were early ones, and perhaps we can conclude that David, learned of the state of the ark from his parents who evidently mourned over the condition of things in Israel, and particularly concerning the ark.

"We found it in the fields of the wood." v. 6.

We also learn from a footnote in J.N.D.'s Translation that this is perhaps a poetical expression for Kirjath-jearim. It was there that David went to get the ark on first attempt to bring it up to Jerusalem (1 Chron. 13:5-6). Evidently then this expression, "the fields of the wood," speaks of its being in a totally neglected state.

It is evident that very few at that time had proper thoughts as to the ark's rightful place amongst them, or how could it have remained so long being separated from the altars and the order of worship brought out in Exodus and Leviticus? It is nice to notice in this respect what is said concerning the arrangement of the courses of the priesthood and of the Levites. It is stated in 1 Chron. 9:22, "Whom David and Samuel the seer did ordain in their set office." Here we have these two, the old prophet and judge, Samuel, and the youthful anointed king meeting together during David's rejection before he came into power, communing over the order of worship. Samuel we know died before David came into power.

Pause and consider the words:

"We will go into His tabernacles: we will worship at His footstool." v. 7.

"Arise, O LORD, into Thy rest; Thou, and the ark of Thy strength." v. 8.

Does not this expression take us back to that in the song of Exodus 15, as to His inheritance and dwelling place?

It would seem that soon after the tabernacle was set up in Shiloh in the days of Joshua, it became neglected. When we read of that dreadful circumstance that arose in Judges 19-21, in the days of Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron, there had evidently elapsed not more than thirty-five or forty years after its setting up; yet minute instructions had to be given to the men of Benjamin, as to how to find Shiloh. This place should have been familiar to all Israel, for it had been commanded that "Three times a year shall all thy males appear before the LORD thy God in the place which He shall choose." Deut. 16:16.

Let us again pause and consider. Has there been anything analogous to this in the history of Christendom? Has the Lord held His true place among His people? After the days of the apostles, did not the Church lose the sense of this? Did not something take place similar to Josh. 24:31?-"And Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that overlived Joshua, and which had known all the works of the LORD, that He had done for Israel."

It is very easy to see that in the days of what is known as "the fathers," which were in the second century, departure came in. Not only did the Lord lose His place in the hearts of His people, but they also lost the enjoyment of Him and those exceeding great and precious promises. Soon the fundamental truths became clouded, and darkness settled over all of Christendom. Here and there, there was through His mercy, a remnant preserved who clung to Him with a certain measure of light that was above that of the majority of Christendom. It would seem that what was lost at that time was:

The place that the Lord had in the midst of His people (Matt. 18:20). Very early human arrangements were brought in that denied Him His place, and also substituted human regulations which deprived His people of the liberty of the Spirit of God amongst them.

The coming of the Lord for His own as a present hope for the Church and what consequently followed.

The giving up of the heavenly calling of the Church, which brought in worldliness.

The loss of assurance of eternal security of the believer. "Therefore being justified by faith" was given up, and that which the Church was warned of in Galatians was substituted: "Justified by the law" (chap. 5:4).

(5) The Word of God was taken from believers and placed in the hands of the clergy, with a resulting darkness.

What recovery has there been? We all know and can thank God for that which was recovered at the time of the Reformation when the Lord raised up certain instruments such as Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, and others. The Scriptures were translated into the tongue that the common people could read, and the truth of "justification by faith" was proclaimed. But the Spirit of God was still hindered by human arrangements, though not as seriously as before. The ministry of the Word and the arrangement of worship were still largely in the hands of the clergy. We hear nothing of the heavenly calling of the

Church, nor do we have the hope of the coming of the Lord to take His own out of this scene.

Let us return to our Psalm 132 and see how the Lord's place amongst His own is emphasized. We have mentioned the call to the Lord to enter into His rest, in verse 8; but is not the answer to it in verses 13, 14 full of significance for us? Have we ears to hear it?

"For the LORD hath chosen Zion; He hath desired it for His habitation." v. 13.

"This is My rest forever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it." v. 14.

Then there is the abundance of blessing to be poured out in verses 15-18, far beyond what David had requested. The human heart cannot rise up to the fullness of that which the Lord is pleased to dispense to His people:

"I will abundantly bless her provision: I will satisfy her poor with bread." v. 15.

"I will also clothe her priests with salvation: and her saints shall shout aloud for joy." v. 16.

"There will I make the horn of David to bud: I have ordained a lamp for Mine anointed." v. 17.

All this is promised in the giving of the Lord His true place. This no doubt will be very precious to the remnant of Israel in that day when, after the mourning produced by recognition of having rejected the Messiah, they will find and revel in the plenteous redemption mentioned in Psalm 130. Abundance of blessing will flow out of giving Him His true place. They will no longer be cast off, but will be cleansed of the filthy garments (Zech. 3), and clothed with salvation. The promises long considered dead are seen to bud when "My servant, the Branch" is brought forth.

This blessing continues to the end of the series of the Songs of Degrees. There is now no going back, but praises ascending to the Lord on high.

(To be continued)

Songs of Degrees

Recovery, or The Return Journey As typified by the "Songs of Degrees," Psalms 120-134

Part 5

Psalm 133.

"Behold, how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!

"It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments;

"As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of? Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore."

This beautiful little Psalm from its setting here is but the natural outflow of the activity of the Spirit of God now untrammeled and unhindered, the Lord having been given His rightful place.

Sometimes the condition of things as mentioned in this Psalm are spoken of as something to be attained by builders unheeding the exhortations of Psalm 127. If these things are not true, does it not call for repentance-doing the first works and getting back to first love? No doubt, in its future application, it refers to Israel as mentioned in Ezekiel 37, brought forth from the dust amongst the nations. Then the two sticks, Judah and Joseph, will become one in the hand, and the King shall be to them all.

To give it a typical application, is not this the "unity of the Spirit" (Eph. 4:3) and connected with chapter 2 where God is looked at as the Builder of the house? (Ephesians 3 is a parenthesis.)

"And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone:

"In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord:

"In whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit." Eph. 2:20-22.

What a unity, brought about by the Holy Spirit! But it can only be kept in the uniting bond of peace, by heeding the exhortations given us by "the prisoner of the Lord." "I therefore,... beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called."

"With all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love;

"Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Eph. 4:2, 3.

It is well to remember another exhortation:

"For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints." 1 Cor. 14:33. What is needed is:

"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law." Gal. 5:22, 23.

Is not this what we find in our Psalm in the description of the anointing oil poured upon Aaron? Would it not be typical of our Great High Priest from whose ways ever arose that precious odor of the ointment which caused the heavens to open and say, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"? "That ran down upon the beard"; men wondered at the gracious words that proceeded out of His mouth!

"That went down to the skirts of his garments."

Peter tells us He "went about doing good"; and is not He the only One who fits the description in Psalm 1 as that "Blessed" One?

Aaron's sons were also anointed with him (Exod. 29:41). We have received an anointing too-1 John 2:20 and 27: "Ye have an unction from the Holy One" -"The anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you," etc. Also 2 Cor. 1:21, 22: "Now He which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; who also hath sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts." We are to "show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." We are subjects too of the ministry of Christ to this end: "That He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." Eph. 5:26, 27.

In our Psalm 133 we have then, this fragrance going up from those who have sought Him and given Him His true place, and their lives corresponded to the step which they had taken. The Lord's answer to this was blessing coming down.

"As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore."

v. 3.

Here we have a lofty mountain with its head reaching up into the heavens and bringing down the blessings from above.

When the Lord Jesus was here on earth He spoke of Himself as the "Son of man which is in heaven" (John 3:13); also "the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father" (John 1:18).

"Who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." Eph. 1:3.

This is the same position where Christ is as brought out in verse 20:

"Which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places." Again, in chapter 2:6: "And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

Psalm 134-the last Psalm of this series. We see Israel now in their true place as worshipers and called upon to bless the Lord:

"Behold, bless ye the LORD, all ye servants of the LORD, which by night stand in the house of the LORD. "Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and bless the LORD.

"The LORD that made heaven and earth bless thee out of Zion"; that is His earthly dwelling place among His people.

In verse 1 there seems to be special significance attached to the servants "standing by night in the house of the LORD." Is this the recognition of those who had praises for Him ere the "Son of righteousness" arose "with healing in His wings"?

During the night season alluded to in 2 Peter, "before the day dawn," would include the "Simeons" and "Annas" of Luke 2 and those of the remnant in Rev. 7:14, 15-those who came out of the great tribulation and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Israel will find in that day also a heavenly leadership in the praises to the Lord as shown by the heavenly company of Rev. 5:9: "And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation."

The returned remnant are now in the place of being worshipers:

"The LORD that made heaven and earth bless thee out of Zion."

This last verse of Psalm 134 shows that the blessings for Israel, and in fact all the earth, will flow out of Zion from the sanctuary where He dwells.

In this present time or interval of His dealings with the Church, all blessings should be expected to flow out to His people both in ministry and the gospel, as in Acts 4:31-34 where it was very manifestly God's center here below. We cannot hope to duplicate that except in principle only, for great failure has come in. Is it not a principle in Scripture that where great failure has come in, the Lord does not restore to its original place, but does restore in a measure so that faith can go on in a simple dependent way before Him?

The next two Psalms, 135 and 136, seem to be attached to this series, as has already been observed by others. Psalm 135 would give us the praises that ascend from those standing in the courts of the Lord. The last verse is specially significant:

"Blessed be the LORD out of Zion, which dwelleth at Jerusalem. Praise ye the LORD" blessing from the Lord in the divine center.

In Psalm 136 we have a continuance, but more of His mercies being recounted, as we have often sung together: "Desert ways rehearsed above."

Now in summing up the typical application of Psalms 133 and 134, have we anything that answers to the Church's history? We have already mentioned a certain recovery at the Reformation, but has there been anything since? That there is much truth current among evangelical Christendom that was not taught at the time of the Reformation, is well known: the coming of the Lord for the Church, taking her out before He comes to reign; the heavenly calling of the Church; the eternal security of the believer emphasized in a way that has not been since the days of the apostles; the truth as to the one body of Christ - all believers being members of this one body.

Were these truths brought out at a certain time, or has there been a gradual bringing of them out? If a search is made (and I believe that the Lord would have us search them out), we would find that they were brought out about a hundred years ago when there was a remarkable movement of the Spirit of God.

At first there was a searching of the Scriptures as to prophecy, and this led to other searchings of the Word. Finally, after much exercise, a group of men found that they were privileged to meet together in the name of the Lord alone, which they did in much weakness and dependence. This was followed by the separating effect of the Word in their lives, answering to the anointing oil

mentioned above. The result was that the Lord blessed them in the bringing out of long lost but hidden truths concerning Christ and the Church, answering to the "dew of Hermon."

The children of God were delivered from the many burdens of the law, and were set free to enjoy their privileges as the children of God. There was a definite reproach to going on simply in this way, apart from all the organizations as brought out in Heb. 13:13: "Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach." The Lord has made up for all this in the joy of His approval, not only in the recovery of the precious truths already mentioned, but also in the unity and fellowship of the Spirit.

But even with all this, there could be no such thing as a perfect company of Christians. Acts 20:28-35 is a solemn warning as to what we should be on our guard against, and this very scripture shows that the Church will never be free from it. May there be the crying to the Lord on the part of all, that we be neither those who speak the perverse things, or the followers of those that do.

There is much confusion resulting from the speakers of perverse things, but "The meek will He guide in judgment: and the meek will He teach His way." Psalm 25:9. "The secret of the LORD is with them that fear Him; and He will show them His covenant." Psalm 25:14.

If Acts 20:30 is true as to distracting and confusing elements coming in, 2 Timothy 2 also remains true: "Follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart." v. 22. It still remains true, "There is a path which no fowl knoweth, and which the vulture's eye hath not seen: the lion's whelps have not trodden it, nor the fierce lion passed by it." Job 28:7, 8.

Under plea of escaping the confusion that has come in, or of being able to help those still in the camp, some have sought to introduce into the camp the precious truths recovered to the saints in the going forth unto Him.

In Matt. 9:16 we have the Lord's warning: "No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment; for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse." "Neither do men put new wine into old bottles: else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved." v. 17. Eloquent men can put a polish on these truths that may be pleasing to many an ear, but at the same time they neutralize them.

This is not said in a spirit of criticism, for every man is responsible to walk before the Lord according to the light he has. There are many sincere men going on in this way, and we can be thankful that Christ is preached (Phil. 1:18). Where this is the case there will be a lacking in depth of the truth, but God is sovereign and will bless His Word; but if there is a resisting of the truth as to shunning the reproach, or reasoning coming in, there will be a lack of real spiritual power and finally a giving up of the very truths once held and enjoyed. There will be for a time an intellectual grasp of divine things, but 1 Cor. 13:2 says, "Though I have all faith,

so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing." "And this is love, that we walk after His commandments.... That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it." 2 John 1:6 I believe we can say that the enjoyment of that love is the fruit of communion. "But

whoso keepeth His word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in Him." 1 John 2:5. Love is one of the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22).

Scripture assures us of only one place where the truth can be preserved: "But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground [base] of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15) - that which the Lord spoke of in Matt. 18:20, "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them."

In Psalm 122 there is a reference to the thrones of judgment or justice. This is alluded to in the context preceding the well-known verse of Matt. 18:20. (See verses 15-20.) This principle is also referred to in 1 Cor. 14:29: "Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge"; also 1 Cor. 5:12, 13: "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." Then again, in chapter 6:1-6.

Where is there any stay for the truth when popular men take these truths and polish them up and organize a congregation to support them in the giving of it out? Is there anything of "the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge"? Is the Lord the Center of such a gathering? Is this the way He gathers to Himself? Is the Spirit of God free to use whomsoever He will?

What does "follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart" mean? What is a pure heart in this sense? Is it not simply walking in the path of faith in simple dependence upon the Lord, without reasoning as to the consequences as to one's usefulness or path of service? How often have there been reasoning and fears that the path is too narrow for one's field of service.

"Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach." Heb. 13:13.

Are we not to gather from the above-mentioned scriptures that the Lord has a path marked out for faith, and that there will be those walking in it in however much weakness?

"Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." Rev. 3:11.

If the above principles we have been considering in our meditations on the path of ascent in these Psalms are true, then we should be able to go on in fellowship with those whose hearts have been exercised in a similar manner.

"I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD." Psalm 122:1. There He has said, "I will abundantly bless her provision: I will satisfy her poor with bread." Psalm 132:15.

"We will go into His tabernacles: we will worship at His footstool." v. 7.

"The hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. "But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him. "God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." John 4:21, 23, 24.

If we have been attracted by the truth, let us not forget the spirit that goes with it which is necessary for suitable worship, and that our feet will continue in the path marked out for faith.

This reminds us of the time in John 1 when John Baptist stood and two of his disciples:

"And looking upon Jesus as He walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God!

"And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.

"Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto Him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest Thou?

"He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where He dwelt, and abode with Him that day: for it was about the tenth hour." John 1:36-39.

It was in a secret and unnamed, place, away from the multitude; and the invitation is still held forth to this day, Come and see. He would have us continue "the day" with Him - the remainder of the time we are left here.

Chapter 80

Stand Fast

If ever there was a day when it was important for every professed follower of Christ to stand fast and to be true to his profession, I believe it is the present day. There is no answer to infidelity like the life of Christ displayed by the Christian. Nothing puts the madness of the infidel and the folly of the superstitious more to shame and silence than the humble, quiet devoted walk of a thoroughgoing, heavenly minded, divinely taught Christian. It may be in the unlearned and poor and despised; but, like the scent of the lowly violet, it gives its perfume abroad, and both God and man take notice of it.

In the experience of almost every believer, there is some turning point, where he either goes onward in devotedness to the Lord, or sinks down into a mere commonplace Christian. Not one of us is too obscure to be tried as to whether we will seek God's honor or present things first.

God is very jealous of all man's substitutes and imitations of the power of the Holy Spirit. 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"? It is doing the will of God.

"Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God." Rom. 12:2.

Chapter 81

Thanksgiving

We can give thanks that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ "hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love." For this we give thanks.

"For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, whom He did predestinate, them He also called: and whom He called, them He also justified: and whom He justified, them He also glorified." Rom. 8:29, 30.

We can thus look back into eternity and give thanks that our salvation is according to eternal purpose. Yes, giving thanks to Him "Who hath saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began." 2 Tim. 1:9. What a theme for thanksgiving!

"But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law." Gal. 4:4. For this again we can surely give thanks. And what God purposed in eternity, Jesus accomplished in the fullness of time, or in the due appointed time.

And further, for the believer's thanksgiving, redemption is not only accomplished, but we have it.

"In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." Eph. 1:7. Again, we have not to pray for redemption or the forgiveness of sins, when we have both, but surely to give thanks.

If we believe God, we have justification and peace. Believing God we are justified. It is written, "By Him all that believe are justified from all things." Acts 13:39. We are reckoned righteous, believing God who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead.

"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Rom. 5:1. All this is distinct cause for thanksgiving.

But now as to the present journey through a world where everything is against Christ, and therefore against us as believers, and we, like sheep, ever ready to turn aside, how can we, and for what can we, now give thanks? We can each one give thanks because, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." Psalm 23:1.

We have not to pray for a shepherd, but to give thanks. O to know Him and trust Him more! Think of what He does for us. "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures," etc. Is not every verse in Psalm 23 a wondrous theme for thanksgiving?

But in the midst of so much temptation, and needing someone to sustain, succor, and help us, that we fail not, can we now give thanks? Yes, we can give thanks for our great High Priest. "For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succor them that are tempted." Heb. 2:18.

"For we have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without [apart from] sin." Heb. 4:15. "Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them." Heb. 7:25.

But if we fail, can we, besides confessing our sins, also give thanks? Yes, we can give thanks because "We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and He is the propitiation for our sins." 1 John 2:1. O what marvelous themes for thanksgiving!

But if we are about to die, as to the body, can we give thanks, or is all uncertain in that crucial moment? We can surely give thanks, for we well know that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. Concerning this the Christian alone can say, "We are confident... and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord." 2 Cor. 5:8.

In the immediate prospect of the coming of the Lord, that which will so terrify the world, can we look forward to His coming and give thanks? Yes, with fullest joy, for come what may, Jesus has given this divine assurance: He has said, "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." John 14:2, 3.

Now, beloved reader, if you are a Christian, you can give thanks for every one of these things; and if not, you cannot give thanks for one of them. We might go on and add greatly to the list of matters of thanksgiving.

O how blessed that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ!

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3).

Chapter 82

There Is Nothing Better: David Flees to the Philistines

"There is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines" (1 Sam. 27:1).

This was the language of David immediately after God had delivered him in a most remarkable manner from the hand of Saul. For a long while Saul had been hunting David from place to place, with the full intention of putting him to death; and now, for the second time, God had put Saul into David's power, so that, had David wished it, he could have taken Saul's life and put an end to his own dangers. But, as on the previous occasion, David refused to hurt the anointed king; and Saul was so touched by his magnanimity that he was constrained to say, "I have sinned: return, my son David; for I will no more do thee harm, because my soul was precious in thine eyes this day" (1 Sam. 26:21). And in fulfillment of this promise, Saul abandoned his pursuit of David, and "returned to his place" (v. 25).

One would have thought that all this would have been the means of encouraging David's heart, and inspiring him with fresh confidence in God's watchful care of him. But strange to say, it was just the other way, for the next chapter opens thus: "And David said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul: there is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines." Think of it! The man who years before had gone out in the name of the Lord of Hosts to meet Goliath the giant champion of the Philistines, and had slain him, now says that there is nothing better for him than to seek a refuge among those enemies of the Lord and of Israel. Nothing better for him? - oh, what a little step there seems to be between faith's triumphs and a complete downfall! When the danger was pressing and imminent, David was cast upon God. and God delivered him; but as soon as the danger was withdrawn for a time, David began to look at circumstances and probabilities. "It is not to be expected," he seems to say to himself, "that I shall always escape so fortunately. I shall be sure to fall into Saul's hands some day." Why so? Would the Lord change, or cease to be able to protect His servant? Oh, no! but David was forgetting God now; and the next moment he was turning in heart to the Lord's enemies for help.

Has it never been so with us? In time of pressing need, we have cast ourselves upon God, and He did not fail us; but when the pressure was past, we got our eyes off God and upon the difficulties. It seemed as though we could not always expect help and deliverance; and then we began to parley with sin, and to try to justify ourselves for yielding. "There is nothing better," we thought, than a compromise; and we settled down to a position that was wholly dishonoring to God. While the Lord lives, and reigns, it is downright unbelief on our part that would lead us to be satisfied with anything short of a real and complete obedience. "There is nothing better" means, in effect, the Lord is no longer able to hold me up.

May the Lord help us to ever be conscious of the fact that we always have in Himself a sure resource. In this connection it is nice to see what David himself brings before us in the 27th Psalm. "The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" v. 1. "Though a host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear"

(1st half of v. 3). "For in the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion: in the secret of His tabernacle shall He hide me; He shall set me up upon a rock." v. 5. "Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD." V. 14.

Chapter 83

Threshing Floor of Ornan the Jebusite: Part 1

It is an affecting and solemn truth presented to us by Scripture, to which we desire that our thoughts may ever be fully subject, that our God has, through our transgression, been separated from His due place, as over the work of His own hands-that this world, which is all His handiwork, has acknowledged another god and prince (John 14:30 Cor. 4:4). Since the day when the Lord God walked with Adam in paradise, He has had no abiding place among us. He has visited the earth in divers manners, to bring mercies to His chosen in the midst of it; but when His errand of love has been finished, He has, as is said, gone "His way" again (Gen. 18:33). He would, it is true, have found a place among His chosen Israel; but He was even by them too speedily disowned, and His tarrying there proved to be but that of a wayfaring man that turns aside to tarry for a night (Jer. 14:8). "The ox knoweth his owner," said the God of Israel by His prophet, "and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, My people doth not consider" (Isa. 1:3).

But the Lord's title to the earth of course stands unimpeachable; "the cattle on a thousand hills" are His, "the earth, and the fullness thereof"; and accordingly in one way or another, He has been making continual claim to it in the face of the usurper, so as to express His purpose of finally taking it into full possession again. This indeed was so clearly intimated by the first promise, that the whole creation is represented as hoping and waiting for it. (Gen. 3:15; Rom. 8:19-21.) And so in the day of the kingdom of our God, these hopes of the creation shall not be ashamed, for the heavens shall rejoice, and the earth be glad, the sea and the fullness thereof; the field shall then be joyful and all that is therein; the floods, and the hills, and the trees of the wood shall rejoice before the Lord (Psalm 96:11-13).

By tracing for a while the dealings of the Lord with this world of ours, we may discern the ways in which He has been pleased, since the day when man sold himself and his inheritance into the hands of a strange lord, thus to claim the earth as His. When the giants of old had finished the antediluvian apostasy, corrupting the earth and filling it with violence, doing with it as if it were their own, the Lord asserted His right by judging that generation as oppressors and wrongdoers (Gen. 6:1-13).

Then in the new world He witnessed His title to the earth by making man the tenant of it under Himself, delivering it into the hand of Noah, under express condition imposed according to His own good pleasure (Gen. 9:1-7). And again, when these children of men, doing the deeds of their fathers, affected independency of God their rightful Lord, as they did in the matter of Babel, He again asserted His right in the way of judgment, scattering the confederates over the face of the earth (Gen. 11:1-9).

But the Lord in His fruitful sovereign wisdom had now another mode of continuing His claim to the earth. This scattering of the nations from Babel, He so orders as to have respect to His setting up one of them as the future witness of His name and rights (Deut. 32:8, 9). And in the meantime He separates the father of this nation to Himself (Gen. 12:1), making him also personally the witness of the same truth- that let the peoples imagine what vain things they might, Jehovah, and He

alone, was "possessor of heaven and earth" (Gen. 14:18-22).

Accordingly then, when in due course of providence Abraham's nation was manifested, the Lord who had chosen them to be His witnesses, puts them into possession of a portion of the earth, to hold it under Him their Lord, thus showing that He, who took what portion He pleased, had title to the whole, as He says, "Ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people: for all the earth is Mine." Exod. 19:5. And Israel thus established as God's people should have continued in the midst of, but separated formally from, the nations, reflecting the light of God's glory as King of all the earth. But again and again they revolted, and rejected Jehovah Christ from being King over them. The nation first (1 Sam. 8:7), then the house of David (Isa. 8:13; Jer. 21:12), give up their testimony to God; and at length the wicked husbandmen cast the heir himself out of the vineyard, and slew him (Matt. 21:39).

Abraham's seed thus refused to do the works of Abraham, and then Abraham's God abandoned their land, leaving the boar out of the wood to waste it, and the wild beast of the field to devour it. But the Lord has had pity for His holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the heathen, and has called forth another witness to the glory of it. By the voice of heralds He is publishing Jesus and the resurrection, opening the heavenly places and the Father's house to all believers, and letting all men know that the kingdoms of the world are to become His, and that all things are to be put under His feet again (Heb. 2:8; Rev. 11:15).

But how is the kingdom of the world to become the Lord's? And how is His presence to be preserved among us? We can prepare Him no habitation or dominion, for we have been found unable even to retain that which in His love He once committed to us. The Lord then must, and so He will, prepare Himself a place over and among the children of men, so as to secure His presence and authority (0 blessed expectation) from ever being clouded or denied again.

When the Lord took Israel of old, as we have seen, to be His peculiar people, of course He prepared Himself a place among them-the tabernacle first, and then the temple. The tabernacle was but a movable pavilion; there Jehovah dwelt as between curtains, and walked as in a tent, refusing with infinite grace to enter into His rest while His Israel sojourned from one nation to another people (2 Sam. 7:5-8). But the temple was fixed, for when Israel was brought into the land of their covenant, and all their enemies had been reduced, then the Lord would enter into rest among them. In their affliction having been afflicted, He would now rejoice in their joy (Isa. 63:9); and He, whom the heaven cannot contain, seated Himself in the midst of His chosen nation.

But where was the honored spot? Who of us that clings with all desire (as, if we be saints, we at least should) to the hope of God's restored presence and kingdom in this world, that would not but know something of it? I speak not of what travelers have told us of it, but how the oracles of God mark it out. And from them we learn this simple story of it, that it had been the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite; and it was the place where the angel of God stayed his destructive course through the city of Jerusalem, whither he had been summoned by the sin of the king and the people. It was this spot which became the place of the temple, and most fitly so, as we shall see, if we can a little more narrowly survey the ground, as it is spread out before us by the Spirit of God in 1 Chronicles 21.

"And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel. And David said to Joab and to the rulers of the people, Go, number Israel from Beer-sheba even to Dan; and bring the number of them to me, that I may know it. And Joab answered, The LORD make His people a hundred times so many more as they be: but, my lord the king, are they not all my lord's servants? why then doth my lord require this thing? why will he be a cause of trespass to Israel? Nevertheless the king's word prevailed against Joab. Wherefore Joab departed, and went throughout all Israel, and came to Jerusalem. And Joab gave the sum of the number of the people unto David. And all they of Israel were a thousand thousand and a hundred thousand men that drew sword: and Judah was four hundred threescore and ten thousand men that drew sword. But Levi and Benjamin counted he not among them: for the king's word was abominable to Joab" (vss. 1-6).

At the time when this scene opens, the sword of David and of Israel had been victorious over all their enemies. The Philistines had been subdued-Moab had brought gifts-garrisons were put in Damascus-and the Syrians, as also the Edomites, had become David's servants. With all promised blessings the house of God's servant had been blessed, and naught of the goodness of which the Lord had spoken to him had failed. "The fame of David went out into all lands; and the LORD brought the fear of him upon all nations." 1 Chron. 14:17.

But Satan, we here read, too soon serves himself of all this; and Israel proves again that man, utterly without strength, is unable even to hold a blessing. The gifts with which their gracious Lord had thus endowed Israel, and which had been ordained for their comfort and His praise, became, through the craft and subtlety of the devil, an occasion to them of self-congratulation and pride, as to Adam of old (Gen. 3:1-8). For David's heart in all this was moved by the old lie-"ye shall be as gods." Anything for poor fallen man but the living God! "Nay; but we will have a king over us," said Israel to Samuel of old, rejecting Jehovah Christ, "that we also may be like all the nations" (1 Sam. 8:19, 20). But the Lord will not give His glory to another; none have ever forsaken Him and prospered, as it is written: "Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the LORD!" Isa. 31:1. "The Egyptians shall help in vain, and to no purpose" (Isa. 30:7). David here, like Hezekiah afterward, in the pride of his heart, would exhibit his magnificence, would survey his resources.

The infatuation in which David was sunk is marked by the fact of Joab expostulating with him; for (though a man of blood and evidently one of the children of this world, as all his policy bespeaks him, yet wiser far in his generation, looking not to the ungodliness so much as to the impolicy of this purposed wickedness of the king) Joab at once discovers that which his master refuses to see.

The whole system of Israel, by this national transgression, was now defiled and tainted, and ripe for severity or judgment. This pride was the giving up of God, and God would have been dealing righteously had He at once laid Israel aside, as He did Adam in such a case-"dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return."

"And God was displeased with this thing; therefore He smote Israel. And David said unto God, I have sinned greatly, because I have done this thing: but now, I beseech Thee, do away the iniquity of Thy servant; for I have done very foolishly. And the LORD spake unto Gad, David's seer,

saying, Go and tell David, saying, Thus saith the LORD, I offer thee three things: choose thee one of them, that I may do it unto thee. So Gad came to David, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Choose thee either three years' famine; or three months to be destroyed before thy foes, while that the sword of thine enemies overtaketh thee; or else three days the sword of the LORD, even the pestilence, in the land, and the angel of the LORD destroying throughout all the coasts of Israel. Now therefore advise thyself what word I shall bring again to Him that sent me. And David said unto Gad, I am in a great strait: let me fall now into the hand of the LORD; for very great are His mercies: but let me not fall into the hand of man. So the LORD sent pestilence upon Israel: and there fell of Israel seventy thousand men" (vss. 7-14).

For nine long months the pride of the king's heart deceived him (2 Sam. 24:8), as, alas! lust had before dimmed his eye for the same time. He had too long walked in the ways of his heart and in the sight of his eyes; but after his hardness and impenitency was but treasuring up unto himself wrath against the day of the righteous judgment of God now about to be revealed. Sinners should be stopped in their course by the remembrance that God, though He suffers long, "hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness" (Acts 17:31).

But David, as a child of God, might be tempted, overtaken in a fault, and thus brought to shame and grief, but could not be left impenitent (Luke 22:32). And so Israel as God's nation could not be consumed, because God's gifts and calling are without repentance (Rom. 11:29), because His compassions toward them could not fail (Lam. 3:22). Their transgressions were to be visited with a rod, and their iniquity with stripes; but the divine loving-kindness was not to be utterly taken from David and his nation (Psalm 89:33). Correction is ever in covenant love. "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." Amos 3:2. To walk comfortably and without interruption in an even path, we must walk watchfully as with the Lord. Had David walked in his integrity, and humbly with his God, he would have been spared this discipline; but now he must bear the "rod." And he is required to choose the rod; by this, much grace might be exercised in his soul; he would by this be brought to consider well the fruit of his transgressions, and thus be more humbled and broken in spirit, and he would also have occasion to encourage himself afresh in the Lord who was slaying him, as we find he did.

But corrected he must be, and that too, just in the place of his transgression; having boasted of his thousands, his thousands must be diminished. God would now number to the sword whom David had numbered to his pride. And so the day of the Lord is to be upon every one that is proud and lifted up

(Isa. 2:12).

Chapter 84

Threshing Floor of Ornan the Jebusite: Part 2

"And God sent an angel unto Jerusalem to destroy it: and as he was destroying, the LORD beheld, and He repented Him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed, It is enough, stay now thine hand. And the angel of the LORD stood by the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite." 1 Chron. 21:15.

In this verse we have the threshing floor of Ornan first brought within view, a mean spot in itself, but destined of the Lord to be the joy of the whole earth - the place of the glory, the rest of God and His Israel. It presents itself to us at once as the witness of that blessed precious truth which is the sure ground of all our hopes, that with our God "mercy rejoiceth against judgment" (Jas. 2:13). The whole system of Israel had, as we have observed, exposed itself to the severity or displacing judgment of the Lord; He might have broken it at once as a vessel wherein was no pleasure; He might have taken away His vineyard from His unthankful and wicked husbandmen. But "mercy rejoiceth against judgment" in the bosom of their God. He repents Him of the evil with which His people "because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted" (Psalm 107:17); and He commands the destroying angel to stay His hand by this threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite.

Here the same mercy displays itself as that which shone out on ruined condemned Adam in the garden. He had there no plea to plead with the Lord; all that remained for him was to fly and be concealed, if that were possible, when in the bosom of the Lord mercy rises over judgment; and He decrees that the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head (Gen. 3:15). Often do the Scriptures, as here, present our faithful God and Father, opening as it were His own heart, and showing His thoughts to His people, how kind they are - as He says within Himself concerning the husbandmen of His vineyard, "What shall I do? I will send my beloved son" (Luke 20:13; see also Jer. 3:19). Oh! that we may drink at this fountain of Israel, the love of the Father - the springhead of all the healing waters that visit us.

"And David lifted up his eyes, and saw the angel of the LORD stand between the earth and the heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders of Israel, who were clothed in sackcloth, fell upon their faces. And David said unto God, Is it not I that commanded the people to be numbered? even I it is that have sinned and done evil indeed; but as for these sheep, what have they done? let Thine hand, I pray Thee, O LORD my God, be on me, and on my father's house; but not on Thy people, that they should be plagued" (vss. 16-17).

David as yet was not given to read the secrets of his God and Savior; the grace that was rejoicing in the bosom of his covenant God over him, was not as yet opened to him; all that he saw was the fearful agent of death and ruin hanging over his city and people. And, oh! how often an afflicted soul is thus reduced; how often does the eye fix itself on the cloud that darkens all around, without a single glimpse of the bright and peaceful heavens that lie beyond it, not knowing or refusing to know,

"The clouds ye so much dread

Are big with mercy, and shall break

In blessings on your head."

"Then the angel of the LORD commanded Gad to say to David, that David should go up, and set up an altar unto the LORD in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite" (vs. 18).

"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. The relief for David in this dark hour is announced by the angel of destruction. The eater himself yields meat, the strong man sweetness; the law itself prophesied of Jesus who was to displace it, as here the altar was to displace the angel who directed it.

An altar needs a priest or an accepted worshiper. The Lord would not have directed the one if He had not provided the other. "The LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering" (Gen. 4:4). His person was first accepted, and then his sacrifice; and here the Lord's readiness to receive an offering at the hand of David was a pledge that David himself, through mercy rejoicing against judgment, had been received, and his iniquity put away. If the Lord had been pleased to kill him, He would not have received a burnt offering at his hand (Mal. 1:10-13).

"And David went up at the saying of Gad, which he spake in the name of the LORD. And Ornan turned back, and saw the angel; and his four sons with him hid themselves. Now Ornan was threshing wheat. And as David came to Ornan, Ornan looked and saw David, and went out of the threshingfloor, and bowed himself to David with his face to the ground. Then David said to Ornan, Grant me the place of this threshingfloor, that I may build an altar therein unto the LORD: thou shalt grant it me for the full price: that the plague may be stayed from the people. And Ornan said unto David, Take it to thee, and let my lord the king do that which is good in his eyes: lo, I give thee the oxen also for burnt offerings, and the threshing instruments for wood, and the wheat for the meat offering; I give it all. And king David said to Ornan, Nay; but I will verily buy it for the full price: for I will not take that which is thine for the LORD, nor offer burnt offerings without cost. So David gave to Ornan for the place six hundred shekels of gold by weight. And David built there an altar unto the LORD, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, and called upon the LORD; and He answered him from heaven by fire upon the altar of burnt offering" (vss. 19-26).

These verses present to us David's thankful believing acceptance of the mercy revealed to him. He received not the grace of God in vain. He at once went up at the saying of the prophet, while Ornan and his sons hid themselves from the angel. Here we may observe, that while no flesh can stand naked, as in its own resources, before the Lord, yet that sinners may come fully up to His heavenly presence in the power of simply believing in His grace. Ornan and David here illustrate this. Ornan had not the grace of the Lord revealed to him. he knew nothing of the altar that was to be set up in his threshing floor, and therefore - as nakedly a creature in the sight of God, like Adam before in such a case - he hid himself. But David knew the remedy which mercy rejoicing against judgment had provided, and therefore he dares to stand, though shamed and humbled; without distraction he fulfills his appointed service; he purchases the threshing floor, prepares the altar, offers his offering, and calls upon the Lord. The sword still unsheathed has no alarms for him now; believing, he is not ashamed or confounded; he stands to see God's salvation; his soul is brought simply to be a receiver of grace which God Himself brings nigh to him. Hence we see, in all his

action, no disturbance or motion of the flesh; but all is the assurance and quietness of faith resting in the word of the Lord. And the Lord gives him his answer before he calls, and hears him while he is yet speaking (Isa. 65:24).

"And the LORD commanded the angel; and he put up his sword again into the sheath thereof" (vs. 27).

The reconciliation was complete; being justified by faith, there was peace for David with God. As the accusings of the adversary, the demands of the law, the complaints and howlings of conscience, are all and forever silenced by the voice of the blood) of sprinkling, which tells us that with our God "mercy rejoiceth against judgment," so, as soon as David had trusted in this grace, as soon as he had built his altar in the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite, where mercy had thus rejoiced, the angel of destruction puts up his sword again into the sheath thereof, at the commandment of the Lord.

"At that time when David saw that the LORD had answered him in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite, then he sacrificed there. For the tabernacle of the LORD, which Moses made in the wilderness, and the altar of the burnt offering, were at that season in the high place at Gibeon. But David could not go before it to inquire of God: for he was afraid because of the sword of the angel of the LORD" (vss. 28-30).

David was given grace to interpret the writing on the Jebusite's floor. That mystic sacred plan had brightly reflected the glory of forgiving love; there he had seen that with his God "mercy rejoiceth against judgment"-the oft repeated but ever sweet and blessed truth. Close therefore by this floor he keeps.

The corn which his faith had trodden down there was the finest wheat, the very fat of the kidneys of wheat; and, having tasted it, he dared not to forsake his own mercy; having fed at an altar whereon had been spread for him the dainties of a Father's love, he could not return to serve the tabernacle (Heb. 13:10). He had not feared to prepare his altar in the angel's presence, but he does fear now to return by the way of the angel's sword. "This is the house of the LORD God," said he of Ornan's floor, "and this is the altar of the burnt offering for Israel." 1 Chron. 22:1. His heart, by the Spirit who ever witnesses to grace, was knit to the spot; and he proceeds at once to make preparation to link the name of the God of Israel inseparably with it also. What Moses had given them should be no more remembered or sought unto; in grace the system should be set and confirmed; and Israel and their God should meet forever where mercy had rejoiced against judgment.

Here, with David, we also meditate for a While, and trace our interest in all this precious truth. Our souls, if we are saints of God, will breathe, "If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O LORD, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared [or worshiped]." Psalm 130:3, 4. All service of the name of our God comes of this; and our thankful acceptance of forgiveness, sealed as it is to all who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, is our entrance into His temple, our assumption of that character in which alone we can do service in the heavenly temple, that is, of pardoned sinners. We are to know no affection at variance with such a character. None else gives full glory to God. We stand in presence of a mercy seat, before a throne of largest, richest grace, and yet of brightest, untainted righteousness, because of blood

in which God smells a savor of rest is on it, through which He can be just, and yet let mercy rejoice against judgment (Gen. 8:21; Rom. 3:26; Eph. 5:2). "The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb" are the temple in our heavens. ("Salvation to our God" is the burden of worship by-and-by; "Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever," will "every creature" say in that day.)

And as mercy through the Lord our righteousness has thus "raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places" (Eph. 2:6), so in the day when "all Israel shall be saved," mercy shall in like manner rejoice in the lower parts of the earth. As the Church is now set in grace, so will the people then be. That covenant, and that alone, which takes away sin through the Deliverer, shall establish them as it now establishes the saints; "For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon all." (Rom. 11:2632.) Exodus 32 exhibits this truth, and most interestingly presents Israel as drawn forth, from their standing under Mount Sinai, to take their stand in the last days in and under Christ. And their last tenure of the land by grace will be the accomplishment of the promises made of old to their father Abraham; for the land and its accompanying blessings were given to him and to his seed, not as through the works of the law, but by promise or grace. The closing scenes of that lovely portion of the divine Word give us the same truth in mystery. Moses veiled typifies Israel as they are now, and the flesh under law, or in blindness of heart (Isa. 6:10). Moses unveiled typifies Israel as they shall be (Rom. 11:27; 2 Cor. 3:16); and when the heart of the Jewish people shall thus "turn to the Lord," and the veil shall be taken away, this turning of Israel to Jesus shall be followed by the unveiling of the nations, or the life of the world (Isa. 27:6; Rom. 11:15).

This in the end shall all be established by grace, not only with the children of the resurrection in the Father's house in the heavens, but Israel and the nations, "from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof," on earth.

"Mercy shall be built up forever" (Psalm 89:2). "With everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee [Zion], saith the LORD thy redeemer"; and then shall Zion's children be many, and her seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and the redeemer of Israel shall be called the God of the whole earth (Isa. 54:5-8). The Gentiles shall be embraced in the same mercy, for it is written, "In Thee shall all nations be blessed" (Gal. 3:8); and it is written again, "Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with His people." Rom. 15:10. Thus shall the whole earth be the extended floor of Ornan the Jebusite, and be the altar and dwelling place of Him with whom mercy has rejoiced against judgment. Thus shall our God show the rich fullness of His wisdom, providing a way whereby He can be just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus-whereby He can preserve the righteousness of His throne in all its brightest glory, and yet allow mercy to rejoice against judgment, seating Himself in the earth as in His temple and kingdom. Mercy with righteousness, peace with truth, shall rear that temple, and uphold the kingdom; His shall all things be, not only by title, by creation, but by purchase-His "peculiar treasure," His purchased possession. Thus will the Lord fully repossess Himself of the world, and walk again among the children of men; the saints, who have acknowledged Him while absent, shall be acknowledged in His glory; "The righteous shall see it, and rejoice: and all iniquity shall stop her mouth." Psalm 107:42.

Chapter 85

To a Couple Just Married

May our loving, gracious God and Father bestow His richest blessing on you in your new, divinely appointed relationship. I trust it is of the Lord, as it is in the Lord. You certainly can walk happily together, being of one mind, so "that your prayers be not hindered." You have everything to thank and praise God for in this. A household where the Lord has His rightful place is blessed indeed. Nothing attainable here can exceed it for real abiding good; for "The blessing of the LORD, it maketh rich, and He addeth no sorrow with it" (Prov. 10:22).

With the Lord "at hand" to help us at every turn, what have we to fear? "If God be for us, who can be against us" (Romans 8:31)? What strength is ours! So too, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him" (James 1:5).

When we recount our mercies, we find them more than the hairs of our heads, and can sing-

"When all Thy mercies, O my God,

My rising soul surveys,

Transported with the view, I'm lost

In wonder, love, and praise."

To begin your married life together, with divine intelligence through grace, is blessed indeed and hopeful. The trials of the wilderness will be tasted but only and all for highest good and blessing. Only give the Lord the first place, His rightful place, doing all heartily as to Him, and all must be well.

We wait His coming - that blessed hope. It cannot be long, and then forever with the Lord!

Chapter 86

To Me to Live Is Christ: Philippians 1:21

It is a wonderful thing that we should be let into the thoughts of the Apostle, wherein he innocently tells us about himself. He was taken up with Christ, and could say, "To me to live is Christ." He thought of nothing but Christ; if it was a question of himself, to him to die was "gain." But he did not think of himself at all; he left everything to the Lord. If we think of ourselves, and take ourselves in hand, we take upon ourselves the responsibility which God keeps Himself if we leave all to Him. The vantage ground of the Christian is, that he has not to think of himself. The Apostle could say, "To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Some have tried to say that on a deathbed, but they left out the first part altogether. He was "in a strait"; he was sorry he had to stay, though he was willing to stop a little longer for their sakes; to die was positive gain to him. Nor did he speak of going to a place; it was a Person he was going to. Nor was it a relief, as some say, when the body is racked with pain (even a worldly man can say that); it was no relief to him, but positive gain, to be with that Person, though, even then, not yet in the state of perfection, for that would not be till he had his glorified body.

Which of us could say that? We have not only an example to follow in Christ, but to follow a man with like passions as ourselves. "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1).

Chapter 87

Types of Antichrist: King Saul and Absalom

As Saul holds a considerable place in the first book of Samuel, so Absalom occupies not a little space in the second, and both of them in collision with David. Now the nature of inspiration supposes that God, in selecting such persons or facts as are regarded there, had a divine object before Him. It is the main business of an interpreter to learn and set out according to his measure the design that the Spirit of God appears to have had in view.

It is clear on the face of it that the chief feature of Absalom's history is, in the end of it at least, opposition to David; he stood in the nearest relationship to the king, but he was nonetheless an antagonist. Now as David all through, whether in the first or in the second book of Samuel, is a type of the Lord Jesus, there ought not to be a question, as it appears to me, that the Spirit of God is giving us, in the adversaries of David, antichrists. Only the antichrist has qualities in his type which differ quite as much as those of the antitype will, in express scripture or in reality.

Thus in the New Testament, where he is brought before us directly and as a matter of doctrine or prophecy, John describes the antichrist first as one that denies the Christ; then as going on with a growing audacity (and this is more particularly his opposition to the Christian revelation) to deny the Father and the Son. For he is the liar and the antichrist. He denies Christ both in Jewish relations and in personal dignity. He sets aside therefore in Him the glory of Israel, and also the fullness of divine grace as now shown in Christianity. For we must remember that the Lord Jesus in the variety of His glories displays God in many ways; for instance, as Messiah King of Israel, and when rejected by the Jews, as the Son of man, ruler of all tribes, peoples, nations, and tongues in the world. The unbelief of the Jews in rejecting the Lord was and will be thus used by God still more fully to display Christ's glory and His own counsels.

Now as John refers to the two characteristics of the last antagonist of Christ, so I think it will be found that in the first book of Samuel Saul stands forth as the chief adversary of David before he came to the throne. After it Absalom holds a similar place in the second; and of the two, Absalom was the more dangerous and daring, as the enormity in him was incomparably worse. The nearness and character of his relationship to the king made the guilt of his conduct the more dreadful before God and man. It is this to which my mind explains the large space that is given both to King Saul's jealous persecution on the one hand, and to Absalom's attempt at usurping the power of David on the other. It is true, that at first Absalom by no means shows out the violent form which his wickedness was finally to take. He uses a certain craft which no doubt succeeded with the simple though repulsive to the upright.... It will be so with antichrist. All his evil will not come out fully at once.

Surely then it is a most solemn consideration for all our souls - the moral principle which we see in these cases. Nearness to what is good invariably develops evil in, its worst features. There could be no such thing as antichrist if there were not Christianity and Christ. It is the fullness of the grace and truth that is revealed in the Person of the Lord Jesus that brings out the worst evil in man. And even Satan himself could not accomplish his designs against the glory of God save by rising up

against the Man who is the special Object of God's delight and of His counsels in glory.

Hence we find a pretty full answer to all this in the twofold type: first, Saul the adversary of David in his earlier career, when he had not yet been seated on the throne; then Absalom, not all at once, but by degrees coming out, though no doubt full of craft and bloodthirstiness before he turned against his father. The liar and murderer is betrayed even in the earliest account of him which Scripture brings before us...

The Spirit of God gives us the description of the person of Absalom. There was everything to attract the eye, everything to meet the natural desires, of one who would Wish the comeliest person in Israel to be the king. Nature had wrought formerly in the choice of Saul. It was repeated again with Absalom....

It was not till the banished one had found means in the grace of the king to return; it was after that which answers as much as anything could to the grace of God in the gospel. Then, consequent on all the mercy shown him, does a more terrible character of antichrist display itself in Absalom than had ever been seen in King Saul.

What then appears to be the distinction intended? Is it not that Saul shows us antichrist more as the consequence of Jewish apostasy - Absalom more as the consequence of Christian apostasy? Both these traits must be found in the antichrist of the last days; and this is one reason too why, although there were anti-Christian features when the Lord Jesus was found here below, the full display of the antichrist could not be until after all the grace of God in Christianity had been fully brought out.

This also explains why there should be a double type of antichrist - one in each of these two books of Samuel. We have the display of the fullest possible evil of man - one in pride and real envy and affected contempt, and at last of murderous hatred toward David. All this was found in Saul. But in Absalom's case there was a still deeper character of lawlessness, as there was a nearer and more dependent tie to the king. Besides, there had been the richest manifestation of mercy to himself. The most dreadful wickedness on his own part had been met by greater love and grace on the part of David. After all this then we find Absalom laying his plots and carrying out his schemes for the purpose of supplanting the king, his father....

Another character is here which was necessary to complete the character of antichrist; that is, the combination of kingly power in Israel with spiritual pretension. Ahithophel, David's counselor, followed Absalom. There will be the highest assumption of a religious sort. The antichrist is not barely infidel. Infidelity there will be, but always a show of religion along with it, whether in the same personage or in one that is joined with him in type. That which brings in an evil spiritual power is necessary to give the true and full character of the antichrist. So, as we know, the second beast, or false prophet, in the Revelation, symbolizes this same personage. Notably he has two horns like the lamb. There is a double character of power. It is not simply that he is or has a horn. He is not a mere king, but a beast with two horns. And at this time it would seem that it is no longer a question of imitating the priestly power of Christ, but he will pretend to have not only a kingly place but a prophet character, an understanding of the mind of God, just as Ahithophel here, as we see, who had been David's counselor before, but is now Absalom's. There is thus a combination of the false prophet with royalty. These at the close will be united in the antichrist.

I am not now speaking of the great imperial power, the beast in those days that brings on judgment. For this we must look elsewhere; for it will not have its seat in Jerusalem, nor will the sphere of its dominion be the land of Israel. There will be the place where the final conflict takes place; there the scene of the destruction of the beast and the false prophet, and of the associated kings that are with them.

Such are a few of the leading points which may help, not only to guide souls, but also to preserve from mistakes too often made, to which we are as liable as any. There is no power of preservation in the truth except by simple subjection to the Word of God. W.K.

Chapter 88

Unveiled Mysteries

"What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter." John 13:7. Much is baffling and perplexing to us in God's present dealings. "What!" we are often ready to exclaim, "could not the cup have been less bitter, the trial less severe, the road less rough and dreary?"

"Hush your misgivings," says a gracious God; "question not the rightness of My dispensations. You shall yet see all revealed and made bright in the mirror of eternity!"

"What I do" - it is all My doing-My appointment. You have but a partial view of these dealings-they are seen by the eye of sense through a dim and distorted medium. You can see naught but plans crossed. and gourds laid low, and beautiful rods broken. But I see the end from the beginning "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?"

"Thou shalt know!" Wait for the "hereafter" revelation! An earthly father puzzles not the ear of infancy with hard sayings and problems. He waits for the manhood of being, and then unfolds all.

So it is with God! We are now in our childhood - we shall learn the deep things of God in the manhood of eternity. Christ often shows Himself only behind the lattice - a glimpse and He is gone! But the day is coming when "we shall see Him as He is!" A flood of light will break upon us from the Sapphire throne. "In Thy light shall we see light." Psalm 36:9. The "need be," muffled as a secret now, will be revealed to us then, and become luminous with love.

Perhaps we may not even have to wait till eternity for the realization of this promise. We may experience its fulfillment here. We not infrequently find, even in this present world, mysterious dispensations issuing in unlooked-for blessing. Jacob would never have seen Joseph, had he not parted with Benjamin.

Often would the believer never have seen the true Joseph, had he not been called on to part with his best beloved! His language at the time is that of the patriarch, "I am bereaved." "All these things are against me." But the things which he imagined to be so adverse, have proved the means of leading him to see the heavenly King "in His beauty" even here. Much is sent to "humble" us and to "prove" us. It may not do us good now, but it is promised to do so "at thy latter end."

I shall not dictate to my God what His ways should be. The patient does not dictate to his physician. He does not reject and refuse the prescription, because it is nauseous; he knows it is for his good, and takes it on trust. It is for faith to repose in whatever God appoints. Let me not wrong His love, or dishonor His faithfulness, by supposing that there is one needless or redundant drop in the cup which His loving wisdom has mingled.

"Now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known" (I Cor. 13:12).

Chapter 89

Vows

Vows were one character of communion under the law. There were required sacrifices, vowed sacrifices, and voluntary sacrifices. In these three ways the worshipers approached the Lord. We have a long scripture on the persons who, under the law, were competent to make vows. (Numb. 33)

We have another scripture on the law touching the things that were vowed, or devoted. (Lev. 27.)

The Son of God was the great maker of vows. "Lo, I come," was His language in such a character before the world was; and we know how He fulfilled it. In the day of His sorrow also He made vows. Psalm 22 shows this. He vows to declare God's name to His brethren, and in the midst of the Church, or congregation, to sing praise. The first He began to pay immediately on His being delivered from death (John 20:17), and is still fulfilling in all the saints (Rom. 8:15). The second He will pay in the kingdom, when Israel and the nations are gathered, and all the offerings shall only be to the Lord God of heaven and earth, according to which He says, "So will I sing praise unto Thy name forever, that I may daily perform My vows" (Psalm 61:8). And again, "I will pay My vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all His people, in the courts of the Lord's house, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem. Praise ye the LORD." (Psalm 116:18-19). Thus Jesus, as I need not say, perfectly fulfilled His vows, the great pattern of paying that which He owed.

But we have some few instances of vows undertaken by others, and differently paid by them, which read lessons of either warning or encouragement to our souls.

Jacob vowed a vow, that if the Lord would take care of him in such and such a manner, he would, among other things, make the stone on which he was lying God's house (Gen. 28). When God had accomplished all the desired mercy, Jacob grew slack, and is not in that readiness to fulfill his vow that became him (Deut. 23:21; Eccles. 5:4). He lingers about Succoth and Sychem, and the Lord has to stir him up to go to Bethel, and there perform the vow of his distressful hour.

Jephthah vowed, as we know, what is commonly called a rash vow, and perhaps so. He was under excitement, and his lips spake too quickly, ere he had duly counted the cost (Pro. 20:25); and when the time of fulfillment comes, he consequently suffers some loss; for the honor of performing the vow rather rests on the head of his honored and devoted daughter, who, in due deliberation of soul, will have that (whatever it be I say not) accomplished, though against herself, which her too hasty father had undertaken. It is better to be slow and sure. (Judges 11.)

Hannah, by a vow, dedicated her child to the Lord.

This evidently cost her much; when the child was given to her prayers and vows, a mother's affections, as well as a suppliant's truth, assail her, and she has to meet a conflict of contending emotions. But the right prevails, according to her vow, and she is rewarded. The Spirit fills her mouth with praise, and the Lord gives her many children in the place of her little Samuel (1 Sam. 1 and 2).

These cases warn and encourage us. Jacob tells us not to delay, but be in haste to do our duty, be it what it may lest the Lord have to rebuke our lingerings. Jephthah warns us to sit down and deliberate with our souls, ere we undertake great services or sacrifices. Hannah encourages us to be true and devoted to Jesus, because, though this may at first, and for a time, cause the heart a struggle and a sorrow, blessing will surely be in the end thereof.

We are not to make vows, in the strict sense, as binding our souls to do something, or make a sacrifice in certain penalties, because service is now to know from love, and the sense of liberty, and the sense too of our own insufficiency.

Chapter 90

Waiting for the Son From Heaven: 1 Thessalonians 1:10

In the calculations of men, events unfold themselves as the effects of causes which are known to be operating. But, while this has its truth, to faith it is God who, in His supremacy, holds a seal in His hand to stamp each day with its character or sign.

This gives the soul a fresh interest in the passing moments. Some of them may be more impressively stamped than others; but all are in progress, and each hour is contributing to the unfolding of the coming era, like the seasons of the year, or the advances of day and night. Some moments in such progresses may be more strongly marked than others. But all are in advance. Every stage of Israel's journey through the desert was bringing them nearer to Canaan, though some stages were tame and ordinary and others were full of incident. And so all the present age is accomplishing the advance of the promised kingdom, though some periods of it have greater importance than others.

These "signs of the times," or sealings of God's hand upon the passing hour, it is the duty of faith to discern, because they are always according to the premonitions of Scripture. Indeed, current events are only "signs," as they are according to, or in fulfillment of, such previous notices.

The words of the prophets made the doings of Jesus in the days of His flesh the signs of those days (Matt. 12:22, 23). And have we not words in the New Testament which, in like manner, make all around us at this moment, or in every century of the dispensation, significant? Have not words, which we find there, abundantly forecast the characters of such dispensation, and given beforehand the forms of those corruptions that were to work in Christendom? They have told us what now our eyes have seen. They told us of the field of wheat and tares; of the mustard seed which became a lodging-place for the fowls of the air; of the unmerciful servant; of the Gentile not continuing "in God's goodness"; or of a "great house," with its vessels unto honor and dishonor; and of other like things. They told us of "the latter times," and of "the last days"; and they still tell the deadly character which the hour is to bear that is to usher forth "the man of sin," and ripen iniquity for the manifestation and power of the day of the Lord.

All this is so. And let me ask, If every hour be after this manner bearing its character, or wearing its sign, what mark are we individually helping to put upon this our day? Is the purpose and way of the Lord ripening into blessedness at all reflected in us? or are we, in any measure, aiding to unfold that form of evil which is to bring down the judgment? If the times were to be known and described according to our way, what character would they bear? What sign would distinguish them?

These are inquiries for the conscience of each of us. We cannot be neuter in this matter. We cannot be idle in this market place. It may be but in comparative feebleness; but still, each of us, within the range of the action of Christendom, is either helping to disclose God's way, or to ripen the vine of the earth for the winepress of wrath.

The Lord tells us that the sign on which our faith must rest is that of a humbled Christ-such a sign as that of Jonah the prophet. Our faith deals with such a sign, because our need as sinners casts

us on a Savior, or a humbled Christ. But hope may feed on a thousand signs. Our expectations are nourished by a sight of the operations of the divine hand displaying every hour the ripening of the divine counsels and promises, in spite of the world, and in the very face of increasing human energies.

These signs may be watched, but watched by the saint already in the place and attitude assigned him by the Spirit. They are not to determine what is his place, but they may exercise him in it. His place and attitude is beforehand and independently determined for him-waiting for the Son of God from heaven.

This posture the Thessalonian saints assumed on their believing the gospel (1 Thess. 1:9-10). The Apostle seems afterward to strengthen them in that posture by telling them that from it they were to be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:17). And again afterward he seems to guard them against being disturbed in that attitude, against being tempted to give it up, by further telling them, that that place of expectation should be exchanged for the place of meeting ere the day of the Lord fell with its terrors on the world and the wicked (2 Thess. 2:1). And, still further, this very posture of waiting for the Son from heaven had induced a certain evil. The Thessalonian saints were neglecting present handiworks. The Apostle does not in any wise seek to change their posture, but admonishes them to hold it in company with diligence and watchfulness, that, while their eye was gazing, their hand might be working (2 Thess. 3).

Other New Testament scriptures seem also to assume the fact that faith had given all the saints this same attitude of soul; or that the things taught them were fitted to do so (see 1 Cor. 1:7; 15:23; Phil. 3:20; Titus 2:13; Heb. 9:28).

Admonitions and encouragements of the like tendency (that is, to strengthen us in this place and posture of heart) the Lord Himself seems to me to give, just at the bright and blessed close of the volume.

"I come quickly" is announced by Him three times in Revelation 22-words directly suited to keep the heart that listens to them believingly, in the attitude of which I am speaking. But different words of warning and encouragement accompany this voice.

"Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book." v. 7. This warns us that, while we are looking for Him, we must do so with watchful, obedient, observant minds, heedful of His words.

"Behold, I come quickly; and My reward is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be." (vs. 12). This encourages to diligence, telling us, that by the occupation of our talents now during His absence, on the promised and expected return He will have honors to impart to us.

3) "Surely I come quickly" is again the word (vs. 20). This is a simple promise. It is neither a warning nor an encouragement. Nothing accompanies the announcement, as in the other cases. It is, as it were, simply a promise to bring Himself with Him on His coming again. But it is the highest and the dearest thing. The heart may be silent before a warning and before an encouragement; such words may get their audience in secret from the conscience. But this promise of the simple, personal return of Christ gets its answer from the saints. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." "Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

Thus the Lord, after this various and beautiful manner, does the business of the Spirit in the apostles. His own voice, in these different and striking announcements, encourages the saints to maintain the attitude of waiting for Him.

Great things are going on. The Church, the Jew, and the Gentile, are all in characteristic activity, each full of preparation and expectancy. But faith waits for that which comes not with such things. The rapture of the saints is part of the mystery, part of "the hidden wisdom." The coming of the Son of God from heaven is a fact, as I judge, apart altogether from the history or the condition of the world around.

Chapter 91

Walking With God

We are living in difficult days, but still days for which the Word of God is sufficient for the "man of God." Oh, that you and I might know more and more the joy of walking with Him. Rest assured that in this, neither nature nor the flesh can have any part; but that which is of Him rejoices in it, and we as His children are born of Him and are made partakers of the divine nature. How marvelous that it should be so with us! Think of being born of God and so possessing a nature that loves holiness, and that cannot sin. How one's heart even now moves at that word, "Holy and without blame before Him in love." We are such now in Christ, and the day is coming when we shall be up there and actually so; and then mark, it is before Him. It is before God that we are holy and without blame, and then in love before Him as our Father.

We are members of Christ's body, the Church, which He loved and gave Himself for, and children of the Father, and saints of God. How wonderful and blessed are these different relationships which we through grace sustain. May we seek grace to walk according to them each, to the praise of Him who has called us into them, and to the glory of Him whose death has made them eternally secure to us- even Him in whom we have redemption through His blood, our Lord Jesus Christ.

What heavenly joy would fill our souls if these things were more entered into in the energy of the Holy Spirit; and He has been given us that we might enter into them, according to His power to give us so to do, as it is said, "according to the power that worketh in us."

Chapter 92

A Wise and Safe Thing to Do

"Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee." (Psalm 119:11).

This, truly, is a wise and safe thing to do. Let us ponder it. Let us understand it. Let us imitate it. There are three special points suggested; namely, What have I hid? Where have I hid it? Why have I hid it? The reader will easily remember, What? Where? Why?

What have I hid? "Thy word." It is not man's word, but the Word of God, that liveth and abideth forever. This is the thing to hide. It is a treasure worth hiding. No thief can steal it, no moth can corrupt it. It increases by being hidden in the way here spoken of. We cannot set too high a value upon the Word of God. So the Psalmist thought when he "hid" it. This expression sets forth how intensely he prized the Word. I have "hid" it. He placed it out of the reach of everyone and everything that could deprive him of it. May we ponder it-may we understand it-may we imitate it!

Where have I hid it? "In my heart." It was not in his head or in his intellect, but in his heart-the seat of his affections - the center of his moral being - the source of all the influences that swayed his entire career. This is the right place to hide the Word. It is not hiding it under a bed, or under a bushel, or in the earth. It is not basely cushioning it, through a slavish dread of men, lest they should sneer at us or oppose us. No, my reader, this will not do. We must hide the Word where the Psalmist hid it, even in the heart. May we ponder this - may we understand it-may we imitate it!

3) Why have I hid it? For a very weighty reason - a most important reason. "That I might not sin against Thee." It was not that he might have a rich fund of new ideas to talk about and show off upon. Nor yet was it that he might be able to confound in argument all his opposers, and silence them. The Psalmist did not care about any of these things. He had a horror of sin -a holy horror. He knew that the most effectual safeguard against sin was the Word of God, and therefore he hid it in his heart. May we ponder this-may we understand it- may we imitate it!

Chapter 93

Ye Are the Salt

Salt is something presented to God; every sacrifice must be salted with salt (Lev. 2). There may be much fruit where there is little or no service. See the blessed man in the first Psalm. The Church and Christ are one. Everything of Christ in us is fruitful. Real service is fruit, but all is not service which seems to be so. "The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace," etc.; and "which is by Jesus Christ." Whatever of Christ is naturally seen in us is fruit. God works in us by His Holy Spirit, by giving us those desires that lead us into like mindedness with Jesus.

I rejoice in the thought that every setting sun is bringing us nearer and nearer to a world where suns will never set - where we shall walk together forever in an atmosphere of light and glory-where all the desires, longings, and hope of our hearts will be fully met! How blessed to feel that we have such a hope! How wonderful, that while the world around us is following after shadows, and walking in a vain show, we know and love the truth-that ours are hopes which will not, cannot, deceive.

Chapter 94

Ye Serve the Lord Christ

Two things give character to all true service in the present day. One is, the world has rejected Christ; the other, God has rejected the world. (See John 12:31.)

These two facts, if practically acted upon, would materially alter the character of that which professes to be the service of God, as well as the labors of many who render true service of God in some respects, but whose chief efforts are now misdirected. "In every good work doing the will of God." A work may be good in itself, but if it is not according to the will of God for the present moment, then it loses its savor to Him, and is deprived of its true value.

In Rom. 12 we have a complete summary of different characters of service. It embraces every member of the assembly of God, assigning to each his proper sphere of service. All are first exhorted to present their bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is their intelligent service (chap. 5:1). This gives the positive side, placing ourselves absolutely in the hands of another, which is the first requisite of a true servant-intelligent but absolute obedience. In verse 2 we have the negative side, "not conformed to this world"; and, as the certain result of devotion to good on the one side and separation from evil on the other, a practical acquaintance with the Master's will is obtained, proving "what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God." To admire a truth is not enough; it is only in practice that one proves its reality. "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God." John 7:17.

In 2 Sam. 15; 17, and 19 we find three classes of servants, each rendering to David in the day of his rejection intelligent and acceptable service, and illustrating the New Testament truths that "all members have not the same office," and there are "gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us" - truths practically ignored in this day of one-man ministry, when all the gifts are assumed to be possessed by one individual, who is not supposed to receive them from their true source - an ascended Christ - but by humanly ordained and appointed means, frequently "of man," as well as "by man."

1) Ittai, the Gittite, a stranger and an exile (chap. 15:20), has his heart attracted to the person of David, who tests the professed devotion of his servant by putting before him his own portion as that of his followers, warning him that an outcast and a wanderer in this scene is the only prospect before him. In spirit he says, The world hates me, and it will also hate you. How beautifully this test brings out the depth of Ittai's devotion, as he replies, "As the LORD liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be." Practically, he put his life in his hands, and this self-abnegation is the first grand requisite of a true servant. It is this the Apostle speaks of when he says, "We which live are alway delivered unto death" (2 Cor. 4:11). "And are the off-scouring of all things" (1 Cor. 4:13). He is willing to leave Jerusalem with all its attractions to De a servant and a homeless wanderer.

God in His sovereignty called out, in a distinct manner, certain men to be in the wilderness with Christ and for Christ. Home, friends, wealth, position, ambition, all that man as man values most,

must be relinquished when there is a distinct call from God. We have a striking example of this in Saul of Tarsus. Peter too must leave his nets, boats, and fishes at the call of Christ. Obedience to such a call will never be accompanied by ease and comfort after a worldly sort. Alas! the spurious servant of the present day seeks to find a lodgment in the wide-spreading branches of the mustard tree of profession. The "minister" must wait on "his ministry," "the teacher" on his teaching, "the exhorter" on exhortation: that is to say, the Lord's service is to be the distinct business of his life-all other things being subservient to this one end. He may make tents, though tent-making is not his object. This is important to notice, for some imagine that a true servant ought not at any time to be engaged in a worldly calling. The example of him who was "not a whit behind the chiefest of the apostles" teaches otherwise. "These hands," he could honorably say, "have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me."

In closing the first list of gifts and class of servants (Rom. 12:6-8), he adds (v. 9), "Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good"; in other words telling us that a loving heart, a separated path, and a devoted walk are grand moral requisites for a true servant.

2) But not only has God called out some distinctly to be His servants here, by leaving everything that would in the least interfere with his service; but we read of others, who in the exercise of "brotherly love" are "Not slothful in business [or diligence]; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality." Zeal, fervency, patience, joy, and dependence are to be exhibited in service toward those who belong to God, the circle of Christ's affections, the members of His body, the Church, which He loved, and for which He died and now lives. This will call forth service of a very varied character.

The action of Shobi, Machir, and Barzillai, in 2 Sam. 17:27-29, furnishes a beautiful illustration of the second class of servants. Their service is as grateful in its way and season as that of Ittai, though differing in its nature and character. They do not go out, leaving everything, to follow a rejected king; but they place their wealth, their beds, their basins, and their food, at the disposal of David and those who shared his rejection. "The people," they say, "is hungry, and weary, and thirsty, in the wilderness."

This carries our thoughts to the faithful Gaius of New Testament days, and to the devoted women who ministered to the Lord of their substance. A cup of cold water given in the name of Christ is treasured up by Him in sweet remembrance until that day when "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me" will recall many a long-forgotten act of "brotherly love."

This, beloved, has a very practical application. It may be I cannot evangelize, teach, or exhort; but this I can and ought to do - hold all that I have in this world absolutely at the command, control, and disposal of my Master, reckoning neither wealth, home, nor comfort as my own, but as a "good steward of the manifold grace of God," using all for Christ. Experience proves that nothing conduces more to the well-being of saints in any locality than the practical activities of that love that looks not upon its own things, but the things of others.

3) But some may say, "I have no special gifts wherewith to serve the Lord, nor house nor means to place at the disposal of those that are His." I reply that the Lord Himself in Luke 12 distinguishes between a "waiting" servant (v. 37) and a "working" servant (v. 43). He serves the former, and rewards the latter; but both are equally termed servants. Paul in writing to Timothy says of the crown of righteousness, that it is for those who love the appearing of their Lord. The heart that is freed from itself can "weep with those that weep," and if done in communion with the Master's mind, it is a service of very grateful and acceptable kind to His heart. What He desires is that our bodies should be the lamps through which the light of companionship with a rejected Lord is seen.

Such service is beautifully exemplified in the demeanor and conduct of Mephibosheth (2 Sam. 19:24) during the absence of his beloved though rejected king. He had neither dressed his feet nor trimmed his beard nor washed his clothes from the day the king departed until the day when he came again in peace. During the whole term of David's exile, this devoted servant, unable to follow him in his place of rejection and reproach, or to minister to him of his substance, was the standing witness to the fact that, though actually present at Jerusalem, his heart was "in the wilderness" with his beloved master. His body was the practical expression of this truth.

Let me ask, beloved, Is it so with us? Do our bodies express the fact that we are dead and risen with Christ, and that our only desire is to be with Him where He is? Mephibosheth might have cultivated the favor of the usurper on the throne, but he cared for neither position, appearance, nor ridicule. Wealth too was disregarded by him; for in verse 30 he can afford to say, "Let him take all, forasmuch as my lord the king is come again in peace unto his own house." Let us test our ways, beloved. Are we "like unto men that wait for their Lord"? May we each earnestly desire and ask this.

Lord, awaken in our hearts the desire to be Thine, only Thine, wholly Thine - to use all that we have and are in Thy service, and to wait for Thy coming again.

sermon index

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net