

CHRISTIAN TRUTH VOLUME 36

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A collection of articles and writings by P. Wilson, R.G. Rule, C. Buchanan from Christian Truth Volume 36, covering various biblical topics and Christian teaching.

101 Chapters

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Christian Truth Volume 36

After These Things: Mount Moriah

In Gen. 22 the history of Abraham is at its highest stage, but before he is brought to this point, there is much of practical importance in the preceding chapters. In Gen. 22:1 we read, "It came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham." After what things? The answer furnishes a great practical lesson for every one of us—a lesson of very deep solemnity.

There were two things that had to be corrected in Abraham (one in his heart and the other in his household) before he could be conducted to the highest point in his practical career. He had to have his heart freed from an old root that had long remained there and had sprouted again and again. There was in the father of the faithful a little bit of unbelief—a reserve with which he started on his course at first—and this root had been allowed to remain unjudged for many years.

Like Abraham, it is very important for each of us to consider what may be keeping us back, for we surely long for more deep-toned devotedness, more pronounced discipleship. We long to be devoted; we may pray for it continually, and perhaps we are not aware when breathing that desire into His ear, what form the answer may take. I would put it plainly to your heart and mine too—is there anything that is keeping us back from entire wholehearted devotedness? If there is, that point must be met, that root must be judged, before the aspiration of the true heart to be more true to Himself can be fulfilled.

It is very solemn to note that the Holy Spirit does not screen the faults of God's people. Abraham's faults are recorded for our souls' deepest blessing. When Abram started on his career, he demanded of Sarai that she should declare him to be her brother; he feared if their relationship were known, that he would come to grief. Denying the relationship was unbelief. The first time this root sprouted and brought forth fruit was in Egypt (Genesis 12). He went down into Egypt to get out of pressure in the place to which God had called him. But even when he got out of Egypt and back to Bethel, that root had never been judged. That such a one as Abram should go on year after year with an unjudged root in his heart is most solemn. For the heart to be fully judged, we need to be in the light of the divine presence. It is far better to learn what is in my heart in His presence, than by bitter experience. If in the secret of His presence I find out the roots that are there, and judge them, they will never sprout—never. I do not want to chill any heart, but if these roots are not judged, they will sprout. Are you conscious of any reserve in your soul? It is strange and sad to see how saints of God can go on with unjudged roots; it may be pride, ambition, covetousness, no matter what, and all the time we may be praying for progress. But this is hindering us, and we cannot go on to the point to which we aspire until it is judged.

In chapter 20 this root appears in Abraham again when he is before Abimelech, but at last he is brought to make a full, free confession, and to judge what was in his heart.

In chapter 21 the bondwoman is cast out, and then, house and heart being cleansed, the Lord says (in effect), "Now I can conduct you to the highest point." It was "after these things" that God can bring him on. Before, he was not in a position to respond to the call of God; now God tries him.

What deep-toned devotedness this testing called forth in Abraham! And now let me ask what was the basis, the spirit, and the object of it all? The basis was, "Abraham believed God"-not merely something about Him, but he believed God. He knew whom he believed. God was his object and the perfect covering for his eyes; God filled the vision of his soul. God was everything to Abraham. That is the true basis of all devotedness -God so much the One before our hearts that we may trust Him for everything. Have you this practical heart-knowledge of God? Are all your springs in Him, so that you are rendered independent of creature streams? Have you such a sense of what He is deep down in your heart, that human props have no place there? Human props give way and creature streams run dry, but faith finds in the living God an immovable Rock, and exhaustless Fountain.

Abraham stands on Mount Moriah and bears witness to all created intelligence that he has found God as the stay of his whole moral being; he could trust God for Isaac on the altar as well as before he was born. This trial did not come a single moment before Abraham was able to bear it. "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory." God never implants faith that He does not put it to the test. Does it all shine forth for the glory of Abraham? No, but for the glory of God. He is called to give up the one in whom all the promises were to be fulfilled, and that, after having enjoyed him for years. Who can conceive what Abraham's heart must have gone through! What assaults must Satan have made on him! But his one answer to all the temptation was, I have God; He has promised me a seed innumerable. Because he believed God, he was prepared to see Isaac reduced to ashes on the altar.

James takes up this episode, and says that Abraham was justified by works. He was justified by this act, which proved that his soul was reposing in simple confidence on God. It was the expression of a faith which rested on God without a cloud, so that God could say, "Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing that thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from Me." Here was the basis of devotedness. He could trust God when everything else had passed away; his soul had such a grasp of God that he could trust Him in the absence of all human agency.

Cowards that we are, we are often afraid of the very trial which strengthens our grasp on what God is. Seek to know, more and more, all you have in God. "Wait thou only upon God." Find all your streams in Him; then you will be blessedly independent of all creature streams-all human props. God says, There is that prop you are resting on; I must remove it, that you may rest in Me. You are sitting by that stream; I must dry it up, that you may get nearer to the Fountain.

In what spirit does Abraham walk to Mount Moriah?... in the spirit of worship. "I and the lad will go yonder and worship." That is always the spirit of true devotedness. Abraham does not speak of the sacrifice he is going to make; he moves on in all the calm blessedness of worship. He "stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son." That is enough, says God. Yes; we can say with deep joy that God reserved for Himself that final step.

When we contemplate this scene-the father and son going together to Mount Moriah-we are conducted to another scene where the Father and the Son went together to where God was to pour out on that blessed One all His wrath against sin- where all God's billows and waves passed over Him-where He took the cup of unmitigated wrath, and drained it, so that He has not left a single dreg for you and me. There was no voice from heaven to intercept that stroke when the

blessed Son of God bowed His head on the cross of Calvary. Oh! what a motive for deep-toned devotedness is here!

True devotedness has God for its object, and in the case of Abraham, that is brought out in that little word, "from Me"- "thou hast not withheld...from Me." People speak much of devotedness, but in order to make it truly so, it must have God for its basis, God for its object, and God for its motive spring. Anything else is that of a monk or a fakir, but what stamps Abraham's devotedness is that it was done for God.

Let us turn for a moment to Heb. 11:17. "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son." That is the inspired comment on this wonderful scene; he did not take account of difficulties unless to take occasion of trusting God more fully. Not one of us should say, I do not have the faith of Abraham. If you have faith at all, you have all the faith spoken of in Heb. 11 It is simply a question of using it, and the more you use it the stronger it grows. "Your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity [love] of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth." Faith glorifies God. What a harvest of glory came to God on Mount Moriah! There was a man who was content to be stripped of all he possessed, because he had God. God was a covering for his eyes, and the resting place of his heart. To him it was not God and Isaac-God and the means-but God alone.

God must be all or nothing. This is of all importance. If He covers our eyes, we can see nothing else. Difficulties vanish; all is peace, victory, and praise. He is glorified and we are blessed. There is not a single need that He cannot meet. Grant me but this, that I am in the path of simple obedience, and I can trust Him for everything. Give Him the fullest confidence of your heart. Trust Him fully. Use Him. Draw largely upon His eternal springs. He delights to be used-to be trusted. Abraham was "strong in faith, giving glory to God." Faith is the spring of practical Christian life. "The just shall live by faith." Blessed, precious, soul-sustaining, God honoring principle of life. May we more and more wait upon God. As our faith grows, we get into all the largeness, fullness, and blessedness that is in Him. Faith is the key that unlocks the treasury of God. Go and unlock it, and get all you need. "Borrow... empty vessels... not a few," because you are going to be conducted to a source that is inexhaustible. Faith is a path which, when truly trodden, gets brighter and brighter-shining more and more unto the perfect day. Abraham was attracted at first by the beams of the God of glory; he turned his back on his country and kindred, not knowing where he was going. What did he have? God! On he goes, therefore, step by step, stage by stage, wavering indeed here and there (for even he was open to the waverings of unbelief occasionally), but on he goes till he stands on Mount Moriah, declaring plainly that he was prepared to give up all, because his vision was filled with the Lord his God.

May it be granted to each of us to walk more and more in the power of faith in the living God-to endure "as seeing Him who is invisible." The life of faith grows stronger and stronger, and is prepared for higher and deeper trials as we go on.

Lord, lead us on closer and closer to Thyself, that We may be independent of all but Thee. May it be so to Thy praise, and to our deep, deep joy!

An Aged Apostle's Message: Message to His Children

In 1 John 2:13 the apostle John states: "I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father." They may not, like the fathers, have learned the vanity of the world and that Christ is everything, and they may not, like the young men, have known conflict with the wicked one, but they have known the Father.

We have already seen that the babes, in common with all Christians, have forgiveness of sins. But there is more than this; they are also in the enjoyment of a present and known relationship. They are children of God, and have the spirit of adoption in their hearts crying, "Abba, Father."

This is not a matter of attainment. It is not something gained after years of Christian experience. It is the very starting point of Christianity. The youngest babe in Christ has the forgiveness of sins, possesses the Holy Ghost, and knows the Father. Without these, no one has entered upon the ground of Christianity. Christianity is characterized by this great fact: redemption has been accomplished through the death and resurrection of Christ, who has gone to the Father, and sent down the Holy Ghost to take His place in and with believers, and He sets them consciously in the position and relationship of a glorified Christ on high. These babes are in this position and in these relationships. They are in Christ, and His relationships are theirs. They have the Holy Ghost as the power of it all, and as the divine source of all spiritual intelligence. In this there is no difference between a babe and a father, that is, they have the same position and the same relationships in Christ. And this, surely, is most blessed.

Now we have seen that the great danger to which the young men are exposed is to be found in the allurements of the world. As yet this is not the special danger of the babes. One who has just been delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God's Son, cares little for the world. The children of Israel, standing on the shores of the Red Sea which they had just crossed, and where they had seen their enemies engulfed in death under the judgment of Jehovah, would not have been easily persuaded to return to the land of bondage where they had groaned in "anguish of spirit" under the lash of the taskmaster. The rest they now enjoyed was too fresh and sweet for that. But after they had in a measure forgotten the rigors and hardships of that cruel bondage, had grown weary of the wilderness journey, and had loathed the bread of heaven, then they lusted after the melons, leeks, onions and garlic of Egypt, and were ready to turn back.

So it is now. One who has groaned under Satan's taskmasters, when set free from this bondage by the power of God, enjoys the sweetness of liberty too well to return at once to the world. While the heart overflows with praise to God, singing, "The Lord... hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and song, and He is become my salvation," the world has no charms. Its cruel bondage is remembered, and the sweetness of freedom is enjoyed, and the heart turns away from the world to find its satisfaction in the deliverer, looking on to a habitation with Him. "He is my God, and I will prepare Him a habitation." Exod. 15

But the babes have their special danger as well as the young men. One thing that marks a babe is the readiness with which it receives everything that people say. So it is with a babe in Christ as to spiritual things. They are simple, naive in their reception of truth, and eager to increase in knowledge. The enemy lays hold of this very thing as an occasion to seduce them and lead them away from Christ. Their great danger lies in their being seduced by false teachers. Satan seduces the young men through the world, and the babes through antichrist.

The Apostle affectionately warns these simple babes of their danger. "Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time."

The antichrist is coming. He will come according to the unbelief of the Jews, denying that Jesus was the Christ, and so will come in his own name, not in the name of the Father, as Jesus said to the Jews: "I am come in My Father's name, and ye receive Me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive." John 5:43. When he comes, it will not be at the first as denying that there is a Christ, but as claiming to be the Christ Himself, until he has seduced his victims. Then the mask will be thrown off, and he will deny the Father and the Son. This is the true mark of the antichrist. He will be a liar from the first, because he will deny that Jesus is the Christ, as the Apostle says, "Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ?" Afterward he will deny both the Father and the Son, as the Apostle again says, "He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son." This gives his full character when all is unmasked. He will come also with terrible satanic power, by which he will darken men's souls and lead them into open apostasy and rebellion against God. He will exalt himself above all that is called God, and will sit in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. He will get his power from the dragon, so that his coming will be "after the working of Satan," and this "with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish." 2 Thess. 2:9, 10. He will make fire come down from heaven in the sight of men to deceive them; and he will make an image to the beast (the imperial head of the ten kingdom confederacy and raised up by the power of Satan), and to this image he will give breath so that it should speak, and cause the death of all who refuse to do it homage. Thus he will delude men, and lead them to believe that he is God, with power to create, and work miracles. But the wonders he performs are "lying wonders," by which he will seduce the mass of the Jews and apostate Christendom after the true saints have been caught up to meet the Lord in the air. Men receive not the love of the truth that they may be saved, and for this reason God will send them strong delusion that they should believe a lie, and that all may be damned who believe not the truth, but have pleasure in unrighteousness (2 Thess. 2; Rev. 13). All this display of satanic power and malignant hatred of God and opposition to Him will take place in the closing days of what the Apostle calls "the last time."

Now the little children had heard that antichrist was coming; but the Apostle would have them understand that they were exposed to danger of a similar nature—a seducing power of Satan leading men into apostasy. "Even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time." The presence of these proved that it was already "the last time." Failure had come into Christianity. Seducing spirits were leading men into apostasy. This would culminate at the end in the great apostasy under the man of sin, which will bring down the judgment of God on apostate Jews and on apostate Christendom. Thus we may recognize the last time. Antichrists had gone out from among Christians. They were not true Christians, and never had been, or they would

have remained. Their going out manifested their true character. They were apostates, enemies, and liars, because they denied that Jesus was the Christ. This is the spirit of antichrist, and so the Apostle calls them "antichrists." They might not deny openly the Father, but they denied the Son, and "Whosoever denieth the Son, the same bath not the Father." They were seducers of the people of God, as all false teachers are.

But the babes in Christ are not without resource in the presence of these false teachers. Their going out from among Christians might tend to shake the faith of the babes, and their subtle arguments might seem difficult to answer, but the babes have an unction from the Holy One, and know all things. They know the truth. The anointing which they have received abides in them, and they need not that any man teach them. They have that in them by which they are able to discern the truth, and reject all that is opposed to it. It is not that they do not need teaching, for the Apostle is very carefully teaching them in this very scripture. But they do not need man's teaching. The Holy Ghost teaches them and fortifies them against false doctrine. God may use an instrument, but the teaching must be of the divine Source. There is the action of the Holy Ghost, both in the instrument and in the one who is taught. "The same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie." It is by the Holy Ghost that the teaching is given and received. He is in the babes, and is truth, and is no lie. By Him the babes can discern the truth, and detect what is false. Weak though they may be, the Holy Ghost is able to keep them from the seductions of the enemy, and this connects itself with another most important principle, namely, that of cleaving to the truth we have already received-the truth in which the Person of Christ has been revealed to our souls.

"Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father." 1 John 2:24. We have received Christ the Son of God in receiving the truth, for He is the truth and He is that which was from the beginning. If that which we have heard abides in us, we abide in the Son and in the Father. There is living and abiding dependence on Christ-cleaving to Him as our life, and as the sum of all truth and of all blessing. The Holy Ghost-the anointing-is the power of all this, connecting Himself with the truth in our souls, and at once challenging every lie that seeks entrance. This is the security of the babes against false teaching. We are to cleave to Christ, and give heed to the teaching of the Holy Ghost, who connects Himself with the truth in us, and resists all that is not of the truth, who "is truth, and is no lie." By Him we know the truth, and that no lie is of the truth.

The Lord keep us, beloved brethren, in these last days, when error in every form abounds and many are deceived. May we be content with the truth, and the truth alone. All that is not of the truth is a lie, and comes from Satan, the enemy of all truth. If we have the truth, we have Christ, the Son, and in Him the Father; and we have the Holy Ghost as the power of it in our souls. What would we have more? Is not this enough until we reach the glory itself? Even there Christ will be all.

Barzillai's Service and Reward

Read 2 Sam. 15 through 19

When the king is firmly settled on the throne and no rebel rises up to dispute his right to fill it, it is easy enough to appear loyal and to cry with the multitude, "God save the king!" But where rebellion has made progress among the masses, and the popular idol is no longer the king, but some aspirant to regal power and honor, then the sovereign must discover who are his real friends, and learn to discriminate between the flattering courtier and the loyal subject. The day of the king's rejection is the day for the subject to declare himself. Thus it was with the aged Barzillai and those who were with him at Mahanaim.

The masses of any nation are indeed fickle. The idol of today may become the object of popular hatred tomorrow, and the benefactor of the people may find himself a wanderer in the very country over which he had reigned. Such was David's experience when Absalom's rebellion broke out. "Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands," had been the song of the women of Israel as they returned from the conflict with the Philistines. He had known what it was to be the man whom Israel delighted to honor. He had received the homage of the twelve tribes of Israel at Hebron when they went there to anoint him king over all Israel. Now, he was an outcast with a company who remained faithful, a fugitive from the face of his own son Absalom. The warrior and benefactor of his country, who had raised her to a pitch of glory, prosperity, and influence never before enjoyed was rejected for the king's son, who was remarkable for nothing but his personal appearance, unbridled will, and immense powers of dissimulation. Absalom had stolen the hearts of the men of Israel.

David had sinned grievously in the matter of Uriah's wife, and the cold-blooded murder of his faithful soldier. But of what could Absalom boast except the treacherous murder of his own brother Amnon? God was punishing David now for the sins by which he had given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. At the same time He was testing the loyalty and fidelity of all the children of Israel to His anointed. What was the result? The king had fled from Jerusalem; Shimei had manifested what he was as he cursed him; the people of Israel showed what they were as they clustered around Absalom, and David and his followers had at length crossed the Jordan, and so passed out of the true limits of the land of promise.

At this juncture, when the fortunes of David were at the lowest ebb, Shobi, Machir, and Barzillai declared themselves on his side as they met him and his company at Mahanaim, and brought with them what they felt must be needed. David had not summoned them to entertain him and no superior force compelled them to yield up to the king what they possessed. They brought of their own accord things suited to the occasion. David was at Mahanaim, while Machir belonged to Lo-debar and Barzillai was at Rogelim. The distance between these two places and the Levitical city, the scene of Jacob's meeting with the angels of God, has not been ascertained, but this at least is clear—these three men made advances to David, and Barzillai apparently surpassed them all as he "provided the king of sustenance while he lay at Mahanaim." Their attitude at this time

was most acceptable to David, and was certainly pleasing to the Spirit of God who has seen fit to record it so fully.

Shobi, Machir and Barzillai probably had once followed different paths, but they were now united in aiding David and his men. What made them unite in this way? David deserved his punishment-everyone had to admit that. Did they simply see David as the son of Jesse? or did they not rather see him as the Lord's anointed? As such, they combined to show kindness to him.

Obligated to put the Jordan between himself and Absalom, who was backed by the masses of Israel, David, in the midst of general defection, met with substantial tokens of loyalty from these three men. They saw in him the Lord's anointed; so for them the popular idol had no attraction. They did not concern themselves with what others might do. They did not calculate the chances of success, nor wait to learn which side appearances favored. If they had looked at the matter in this light, would they have befriended David? Would not the hosts which followed Absalom have determined their place in Israel? With them, however, the question was a most simple one: Should they side with the Lord's anointed or not? Such an alternative could have only one answer. Can it have any other answer today?

Worldly caution might have counseled them to delay before committing themselves so irrecoverably, but, if they had delayed, all opportunity of manifesting their loyalty and devotion would have slipped away. It was now or never with them. Reason might have suggested further consideration and a conference with the leaders of Absalom's party before they took this bold step and occupied so prominent a place. Should they not hear both sides before they took the part of the fugitive king? Had not Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counselor, actually espoused Absalom's cause? and did not all Israel acknowledge that his counsel was as if a man had inquired at the oracle of God? Would they pit their wisdom against his? Besides, had not David dishonored the throne and perverted the fountain of justice? That was true of the man David, but he was the Lord's anointed. So they ministered to his need, and thus openly sided with him before all. It was a noble act on their part. Also, it was a right act as it was in accordance with God's thoughts. The Spirit of God surely delighted in their faithfulness, for He has recounted the different items of refreshment furnished by them for the king and those with him in the wilderness.

They "brought beds, and basins, and earthen vessels, and wheat, and barley, and flour, and parched corn, and beans, and lentils, and parched pulse, and honey, and butter, and sheep, and cheese of kine, for David, and for the people that were with him, to eat: for they said, The people is hungry, and weary, and thirsty, in the wilderness." 2 Sam. 17:28, 29. Nothing that they brought, it would appear, has been overlooked in the account and nothing that the people could want seems to have been forgotten.

Absalom then crossed the Jordan with the hosts of Israel under his command and the result of the battle is well known. David was to be chastised, but not deposed. Once he had been chastised, Absalom's turn came. That in which he had especially prided himself became the means of his capture. Suspended by his hair between heaven and earth, the man who had killed his brother and would have killed his father, the king, met with the due reward of his deeds. The rebellion and David's temporary exile ended with Absalom's death.

Preparations were now made for his return. The tribes of Israel spoke of it; and the tribe of Judah, at first cold-hearted toward him, stirred up Zadok and Abiathar and sent word, "Return thou, and all thy servants." "And all the people of Judah conducted the king, and also half the people of Israel."

Owned once more by all as king in Israel, David acted as king to regulate the lives and possessions of his subjects. He spared the life of Shimei, who had cursed him; he restored in some degree to Mephibosheth the possessions of his father, hastily bestowed on Ziba in the day of his flight, and he offered to reward Barzillai and said: "Come thou over with me, and I will feed thee with me in Jerusalem." Barzillai had served David when beyond Jordan; David would have Barzillai beside him permanently. "With me"- nothing less than this-was what he desired for Barzillai. Barzillai was to be with him in Jerusalem. This reward was most appropriate. When outside the land of Canaan, it was Barzillai's place and duty to own and serve the rejected king; in power again, and in the land, it was David's place to reward his faithful adherent.

David's request to Barzillai to "Come... with me" reminds us of similar language used by David's Son in addressing His Father in the presence of His disciples: "Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am," etc. Little did Barzillai think of the honor in store for him as a reward for his service. He only heard of it after the time of such service was over and the day for rewarding those faithful to David had arrived. But we know, while the Lord Jesus Christ is absent from the earth and rejected by His people Israel, what will be the future place of privilege and blessing for all who side with Him during the time of His rejection by the world.

Barzillai objected to David's offer. He had not worked with any thought of reward, although he richly deserved it. He had thought of the king in his rejection, and had done what he could to succor him. He had come, too, to do honor to David as he returned to his capital, but to be at the court was unsuited to such a one, for his age forbade his enjoyment of the pleasure of the king's house. When David was in need in the wilderness, Barzillai's age did not hinder him from bringing help in person. When the king was to re-cross the Jordan, he did not allow the infirmities of age to be a reason for his absence. He would testify his delight at the king's return, as he had proved his devotion to him while he lay at Mahanaim; but to go to Jerusalem as a reward for his service was more than he felt able to do. Men generally act very differently, putting forth an excuse to avoid the service but grasping eagerly at the reward! Barzillai was not like this; he thought of the king, and acted at once. While he and all Israel had enjoyed much comfort under the king's reign, he did not stay at home counting up the blessings in which he shared. He knew nothing of self-ease when the Lord's anointed was driven out of his land and obliged to take refuge across the Jordan. As to the reward, Barzillai suggested that Chimham, his son, might accompany David while he desired to stay and die among his own kindred. Old age, with the prospect of death not far off, prevented the fulfillment of the king's wishes. "Thy servant will go a little way over Jordan with the king: and why should the king recompense it me with such a reward? Let thy servant, I pray thee, turn back again, that I may die in mine own city, and be buried by the grave of my father and of my mother. But behold thy servant Chimham; let him go over with my lord the king; and do to him what shall seem good unto thee."

Who could refuse such a touching request? The king answered, "Chimham shall go over with me, and I will do to him that which shall seem good unto thee: and whatsoever thou shalt require of

me, that will I do for thee." "Do to him what shall seem good unto thee," had been Barzillai's request. "I will do to him that which shall seem good unto thee" was David's promise, reaching beyond the modest request of his servant. And more than this, he told him he had gained the king's ear. What a privilege this was! Honor, wealth, rank, are nothing compared with this. Thus they parted, but not before David had kissed him and blessed him on the Israel side of the Jordan. The king was sovereign in the land of Canaan when he kissed him and blessed him. All Israel could see whom the king delighted to honor that day. The multitude was right in escorting back king David, but Barzillai had done what others had not. These were around the monarch in the day of his return; Barzillai had been with him when they had cast him out. This was the difference between the multitude and this devoted servant of Rogelim.

In time Barzillai died, and perhaps this scene was soon forgotten by most in Israel. However, there was one, the king, who never forgot Barzillai's service, and his son, Solomon, was always to remember it. Occupied after his return with many important concerns, David, when he was dying, still spoke of this service at Mahanaim, and commended Barzillai's sons to Solomon's special care (1 Kings 2:7). Before David and Solomon, types of the Lord on His throne, the sons of Barzillai had a place, not of distance but of distinguished nearness, for they ate bread at the king's table and feasted in the king's presence. This service was never forgotten while David lived nor while Solomon reigned. David, as king, had portioned it out; Solomon, who ascended the throne without David's death intervening, was charged to continue it. Nothing was said to Rehoboam about it, for he was not, like Solomon, a type of the Lord on His throne. Faithfulness to the Lord's anointed in a time of general defection was never to be forgotten. Such devotion was always to be rewarded.

How long the remembrance of all this was to last is attested to by the reward bestowed on Barzillai's son, Chimham. As long as the kingdom lasted in Judah there was to be a witness of the king's approval of such conduct. For not only did David give Chimham a place before him, but he assigned him a portion in the city of the king's birth. In the city of his father's house Chimham owned a possession (Jer. 41:17). Barzillai was of the tribe of Gad; but Chimham was given a portion in Judah. Until the kingdom of Judah was terminated by the Babylonish captivity, Chimham's portion by Bethlehem was an abiding witness of Barzillai's faithfulness, and of David's acknowledgment of it.

The application of all this history is plain, and we understand the reason that it has been preserved. The points of resemblance are evident as are the contrasts. David was hindered by Barzillai's age from acting as he would toward him, and his hasty action regarding Mephibosheth shows us that we have only a man like ourselves before us. But nothing can hinder the Lord Jesus from rewarding as He will all who have followed Him in His rejection, and none will suffer injustice in that day. He will confess them before

His Father and before His angels, and the company of heavenly saints who have served Him while absent shall be with Him on high, as those of earth shall be before Him when He reigns over the house of Jacob forever (Luke 12:8; Rev. 3:5; 7:15; 14:1). It will be found that He has been in their thoughts and they shall be before His face when He takes to Himself the power, and reigns.

Be Open

"Thou God seest me." Have you personally, like David, been brought to realize that you can hide absolutely nothing from God-no deed, no secret thought? It is true whether you know it or not, and it is a most wholesome and purifying thing to remember. If you long for holiness, you will pray, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Psalm 139:23, 24.

Christ Our Hope and Delight

If I love God, I want to be holy as He is holy; the desire of sanctification has no limit at all. Isn't it wonderful that the effect of God in letting us know His plan of associating us with Himself hereafter, should be the desire for association with Him now? Hasn't Christ been revealing His love gradually to you, as you could contain it? Do you think He has no jealousy over you? Has He no desire to see your heart's affection linking itself around the God who has associated you with Himself? Does He not see the pulse of your thoughts rising towards Him? He, the Good Shepherd, is leading and watching every individual sheep; not one lock of wool is taken from a single sheep that He does not see. Does He see your mind taken up with unceasing thoughts of Himself and the glory awaiting you? Is your heart dwelling there and your walk corresponding; or, like Jacob, are you halting on the thigh because the flesh needs crippling?

God has spread an expanse of glory, all wrapped up in Christ for us. Are our hearts there? God has described and told us of the golden city where Christ is the light and the joy of all there. He would have us occupied with that which is the center of His thoughts, and that is Christ. Are you following in His wake? Is His Christ the center of our thoughts, and the hope of His coming connected with every motive and act? There may be failure; there may be discouragement down here, but He won't let me shake off that hope. What is your hope for tomorrow? Does your mind long for that future day, as His does? A poor feeble reflection it may be, but it must be a hope having its spring from that which is the center of God's thoughts, and that is Christ.

Has it ever entered your mind what sort of thrill the delight of God in Christ must cause in heaven? And is it indeed true that we are accepted in the Beloved, and that God loves us as He loves Christ, because we are in Him and He is in us? What in you can interfere with the delight of God in His Son? His delight in believers is not in themselves, but in connection with Christ and redemption. His blood has washed all my sins away, my soul is in Him-one with Him-all my guilt and misery judged on the cross. Oh, it makes one feel very little; it sinks one into insignificance, Christ being everything; God looking on His Son with ever the same delight, seeing the members of His body, and loving them as such! It is pure grace from first to last.

Christ Seen in Us

According to the 4th chapter of 2 Corinthians Corinthians, if we are acquainted with the glory revealed in the 3rd chapter as we should be, we will not faint on the way; we will renounce the hidden things of dishonesty; we will not dare to handle the Word of God deceitfully, and Christ will be seen in us in all our ways. How we should be impressed with the fact that it is possible for the life of Jesus in patience, love, obedience and every other way to be active in us instead of the life of the first Adam! And this is fruit-bearing-the reproduction of Christ in us-and the will of God concerning us.

Courage to Stand in Remnant Days

It is a day of small things, and we must not be discouraged if we find people taking little interest in the truth, or even opposing it. We are just in the end of a broken-down and ruined dispensation on which the judgment of God is about to fall, and we must not expect to see results such as were seen at the beginning, when an ungrieved Spirit was working in great power.

We find much instruction for the present day in Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai and Malachi, for they wrote of times somewhat analogous to the present. Then, the ten tribes had been carried away by Shalmaneser, and were lost. Judah had been carried into Babylon, and spent seventy years in captivity. A remnant from Judah returned in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, and the temple and the walls of the city were rebuilt. This return, and the building of the temple and walls of the city were all pure grace from the Lord.

We see, however, on the part of the people so favored, a constant tendency to decline. They did not go on with the work as they should. They yielded to the influence of the enemy and the work ceased. Haggai charges them with living in ceiled houses, while God's house lay waste, and they had to be stirred up afresh to go on with the work.

Then in Malachi, a little over a hundred years later, we see most dreadful declension—a mass of profession without reality, in the midst of which were to be found a feeble few who "feared the Lord and spake often one to another."

This little remnant alone gets the approval of the Lord, with the assurance that they should be His when He makes up His jewels. About 400 years later we still find this feeble remnant in such as Zacharias and Elizabeth, Mary, old Simeon and Anna, and the shepherds on the plains of Bethlehem. But how few and how feeble they were. Now, as we draw near the end, it is somewhat the same—a great mass of profession, but with little reality. There are, however, those whom the Lord owns, and of whom He can say, "Thou hast... kept My word, and hast not denied My name," and those, too, who have kept their garments, and who shall walk with Him in white.

These are the few—not the many. Well, in such a day, what we are called to do is to "hold fast." "Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." Rev. 3:11.

The struggle will be short, for He is near, but it is real, and we need courage to stand, even if it be alone. There was a time when no man stood with Paul, but the Lord stood with him, the testimony was given, and he was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. How blessed to be able to count on Him, though all others forsake us! May we, brethren, be strong in Him.

The Cross and the Crown

The covering of the brazen altar was a purple cloth, the royal color. If we suffer, we shall reign. There is a connection between the cross and the crown, upon the earth and in heaven. Thus it was with Christ, the King of the Jews, according to the superscription written on the cross, and the very throne of God was the answer to His sufferings, inasmuch as He was the burnt offering. From this point of view, the comparison of Psalm 19; 20, 21 and 23 is most interesting. Psalm 19 contains testimonies of the creation and the law. Psalm 20 presents Messiah suffering, but externally, so that man can take an interest in Him. Psalm 21 shows Messiah exalted and, as a consequence, vengeance striking at His enemies who had rejected Him. Psalm 22 presents His sufferings as forsaken by God Himself. This is the expression of Christ alone. In Psalm 20 and 21 the Jewish remnant were speaking of His outward sufferings. There is no vengeance in connection with those sufferings (Psalm 22) consequent on His being forsaken of God, for it was expiation. There is nothing but blessing which the mouth of the Savior announces, and to which He Himself responded by praising in the midst of His saints. This blessing will extend to the ends of the earth during the Millennium.

Declension and Its Course

1 Cor. 10

In a day of widespread declension such as today, it may be useful to trace the steps which lead to a low point-thus revealing our true state. Exposure by the Word is one means by which God is able to deliver us from it.

No one sets out on a downward path deliberately, though God may allow many warnings to come, and may even allow the discipline of His hand to be felt to awaken the soul that is indifferent from its lethargy. Neither can anyone who is pursuing that way tell how far he will go, though of course his own purpose is to keep within certain bounds. But the power of the enemy is such that we have no ability to stand against him, unless we are going on with God in the strength He gives to those who are dependent on Him.

In 1 Cor. 10:1-13, we have the steps in the course of declension very fully pictured, and they present a striking contrast to the Apostle's own way as given at the end of the previous chapter. Some have difficulty in understanding Paul's words because they have in some degree disconnected the life-eternal life-from the path in which those who have that new life should and, in measure, do walk. It is sad that for some the deliverance from judgment (because of failure in responsibility as children of Adam) by the cross of Christ, is, apparently, deliverance from responsibility itself. But this is surely not God's way. No; by redemption He puts us upon higher ground than we had left, and as a consequence, we have higher responsibilities. We are saved by grace- "Not of works, lest any man should boast"-yet we are "created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them," and he who does not more or less walk in that path disproves his title to eternal life. It is still true that without "holiness... no man shall see the Lord," and one part of Scripture is not in conflict with another, but all is in harmony. Compare also 2 Timothy 2:19.

The outward participation in the things of Christianity was no guarantee of attaining to the rest of God, and it is this that is insisted on in the first verse of chapter 10. They all stood on new ground, and partook of what was God's provision for their need-the bread from heaven and the water out of the rock-yet with many of them God was not well pleased, and they fell in the wilderness-they did not reach Canaan. These things are expressly said to have "happened unto them for ensamples [examples or types]: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." verse 11.

The first step in the downward course is lust (verse 6). If God had been retained in their thoughts, they could not have doubted that He would give all that was needful. To desire something different from what God sees good to give shows that the heart has turned from Him and lost its confidence in His love. To desire what is according to His will is not lust, but He has not limited us as to what is really for our good: "No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly." The restless craving of desire is itself a witness that we have turned away from the only One who can satisfy.

"He that cometh to Me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst."

The next step downward is idolatry (verse 7). Man makes an object, a god, that suits his low state. Israel made the golden calf. Man may create an ideal which suits his fancy or taste, but it is only a picture of the one who forms it-of his own limited thoughts. Consequently, fallen man deified human passion which was a large part of heathenism. But it is only a human sentiment or idea, for God can only be known through revelation which is far from what man's imagination would depict: "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself." Psalm 50:21. Man's idolatrous thoughts lead to unrestrainedness in his ways: "The people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play." Exod. 32:6. If God is turned from, how soon the heart is turned to folly! Like the prodigal, the soul goes off into the far country to indulge himself in every evil! If piety toward God is neglected, then no amount of truth can keep us or be a check upon the flesh.

In the next step worldly alliances are formed (verse 8). If we are down upon the world's level, it will soon be glad of our company, and little by little will take away from us all that savors of the fear of God. It is easy to acquire a liking for what conscience at first refused as evil. If it is not judged, but tolerated, it will soon be accepted and delighted in. It is striking that from Peor, Balaam was forced to speak the highest blessing of the people of Israel when he took up his parable the third time, and it was there the people fell into alliances with the Midianites. God's best thoughts and grace toward them are seen in contrast with their own low state and acts.

How seductive is the world! How few of us have grace to refuse it, especially in the shape in which it pleases us! For each of us it has a different aspect exactly adapted to our tastes, and what would be an attractive bait to one would not be to another. But "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." and "Whosoever...will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." We then have despised Christ and esteemed the manna as light food. If I share the world's tastes, I shall not see much in the lowliness of Christ to attract me.

The connection between Israel's tempting Christ in despising the manna (Numb. 21:5, 6) and the fiery serpents is important (verse 9). If He is rejected, the work of death (pictured by the serpents) goes on unhindered. It is sin become exceedingly sinful, manifest by the rejection of Him who came to deliver from it.

Finally, the dissatisfaction of the heart is openly expressed in their murmuring (verse 10) which brought on the judgment of God-no doubt a reference to Numb. 13 and 14, their refusing the pleasant land and turning back, in heart, to Egypt. This brought upon them the exclusion from the land which they had openly refused. How solemn the warning! How it should stimulate us to diligence and carefulness to watch against the coming in of what would, if its results were fully known, end in entire separation from God. And "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." Self-confidence is a very different thing from confidence in God, though it may carry one for some time without the discovery being made of what it really is. We "are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." But this is the confidence of one who, knowing his own weakness, has learned to trust Him, and everything else must fail and break down. How beautiful the encouragement given to one beset with the very wilderness trials which the enemy would use to discourage and drive from God into the meshes of his own net.

Do you think your trials are greater than others?-true as it is that "the heart knoweth his own bitterness," "there hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful." What a word! "God is faithful." Yes, think of Him who is still interested in your welfare, and who (though He may try your faith for your own good) will never forsake you. Only wait on Him as One who is entitled to the confidence of your heart, and He will make a way to escape that you may be able to bear it, and will give you that for which to praise Him when His delivering hand is seen. To have these exercises is true gain, as to be without them would indeed be loss. Those who seek to fortify themselves against trials by their own inventions will find how much they have lost in the weakening of their faith, and the consequent obscuring in the soul of all that is most precious. To leave the path of faith because of its frequent exercises, and to seek a seemingly easier way, is to ensure one's own failure and to miss the very gain we sought.

Devotedness

Devotedness is a much deeper and at the same time a much simpler thing than many suppose. Most think that if they are earnestly engaged in the Lord's work, and looking to Him for guidance and blessing, this is being devoted, but it is much more. It is having Christ Himself as the delight and resource of my heart, and the bent of my mind toward Him. The highest service we can render to the Lord is to serve His heart, and that is a service to which few devote themselves. Occupation with Christ with a view to becoming more intimately acquainted with His character, studying Him that we may learn what pleases Him, is very rare indeed.

Many can be found who are occupied for Christ, like Martha-few who are occupied with Him, like Mary. When we have reached this, we have reached the foundation stone of true devotedness. This is the Gilgal where the serving one returns to encamp, and whence he issues like the sun to run his course, and like a giant refreshed with new wine. It is because the saints know so little of this Gilgal in the Lord's presence that there is so much unsanctified activity and really profitless work.

If there is a zeal and ability, without a knowledge of God's mind and when to use it, how can there but be a turning to take counsel from nature, and how can we expect that the results flowing from such a source will be anything but profitless?

The Book of Ezra: Restoration From Babylon

The book of Ezra marks an important epoch in God's dealings with His people Israel. Although seventy years had elapsed, it is yet the continuation of 2 Chronicles, for time does not count with the Jews when in exile from the land of promise. They had lost everything by their sins and apostasy, and God had sent Nebuchadnezzar to chastise them, to destroy His own house which His people had profaned and polluted, to carry them away captive to Babylon and "to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths." 2 Chron. 36:21.

Nothing could be sadder than the record of the destruction of Jerusalem and the termination of the kingdom as entrusted in responsibility to the hands of man, except indeed the still more fearful accounts of the siege and capture of Jerusalem by Titus soon after the commencement of the Christian era.

The long-suffering of God had been tested in every possible way. In His patient grace He had borne with the high-handed rebellion of His people; He had lingered with a yearning heart, like the Savior when He was upon the earth, over the city which was the expression of royal grace; He had sent to them by His messengers, "rising up betimes, and sending; because He had compassion on His people, and on His dwelling place: but they mocked the messengers of God, and despised His words, and misused His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, till there was no remedy. Therefore He brought upon them the king of the Chaldees," etc. The sword of His justice thus fell upon His guilty people, for their sins had exceeded those even of the Amorites whom God had driven out before them (see 2 Kings 21:11). God's throne on earth was henceforward transferred to Babylon, and the times of the Gentiles commenced. This dispensation still continues, and will do so until Christ Himself shall establish His throne, the throne of His father David (see Luke 1:32, 33; 21:24). Lo-ammi, meaning, "not My people"-(it is on this account that God never, in these post-captivity books, whatever His care over them, addresses the Jews as His people) was in this way written upon the chosen race, and they entered upon the sorrowful experience of captivity and banishment under the judicial dealings of the hand of their God.

The book of Ezra begins at the completion of those seventy years of exile (foretold by the prophet Jeremiah). Ezra relates the actings of God in connection with that time, for the accomplishment of God's own sure and faithful word. It is the character of these actions which explains the attitude of God toward His people during the times of the Gentiles, and also, to some extent, the peculiarity of this portion of the Scriptures, as well as Nehemiah and Esther. In these books God is no longer seen actively interposing in the affairs of His people, but He works, as it were, behind the scenes. At the same time, recognizing the new order which He Himself has established, He uses the Gentile monarchs into whose hands He had committed the scepter of the earth for the execution of His purposes.

Bearing these principles in mind, we shall be able to enter more intelligently upon the study of this book. The book divides itself into two parts. The first six chapters give the account of the return of

the captives who responded to the proclamation of Cyrus and of the building of the temple. The last four tell of the mission of Ezra himself.

CHAPTER 1

There are two events in this chapter-the proclamation of Cyrus and the response to it on the part of the people, together with an account of the number of "the vessels of the house of the Lord, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods" (v. 7). These Cyrus now restored to the captives who were about to return to Jerusalem. The first verse draws back the curtain and reveals the source of the power which was acting then and through all the subsequent events of this book for the fulfillment of Jehovah's purposes. It runs, "Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing," etc.

Let us pause for a moment to point out how the Lord-whatever the outward appearances-holds the hearts of all men in His hands, and turns them whithersoever He will; how He uses men of all degrees as the instruments of the counsels of His will. The very mention of Cyrus carries us a step further back, "Who," says the prophet Isaiah, speaking in the name of Jehovah, "raised up the righteous man from the east, called him to His foot, gave the nations before him," etc. (chap. 41:2). And again, "That saith of Cyrus, He is My shepherd, and shall perform all My pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid." Isa. 44:28.

This prophecy was uttered long before the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, and at least a hundred years before Jeremiah was called to his prophetic work. This shows that the eye and heart of God are perpetually upon His people and upon their interests, and that the public events of the world, the rise and fall of monarchies, and the advent of mighty conquerors, are but the instruments of His power through which He works on the governments of the world to fulfill His own purposes in relation to His earthly people. How calmly therefore the children of God may rest amid political confusions and strife! In this way God has designated by the mouth of Isaiah, two hundred years before the event narrated in our chapter, His chosen vessel for the restoration of His people, and for the erection of His house at Jerusalem.

A century passed away, and Jeremiah prophesied during the closing days of the kingdom, alternately warning and beseeching his people-warning them of the certainty of the approaching judgments, and beseeching them to repent and to humble themselves before the God whose wrath they had provoked by their wickedness and folly. It was in the course of this work that he said, "This whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the Lord." Jer. 25:11, 12. Also, "For thus saith the Lord, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform My good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place." Jer. 29:10. First, then, Cyrus was designated long years before he was born into this world. Then, after another period had elapsed, Jeremiah, while announcing the approaching captivity of the people, proclaims the exact duration of their exile.

But there was yet another instrument, not appearing in this chapter, whom God was pleased to associate with Himself in carrying out His purposes of grace and blessing toward His people.

Turning to the book of Daniel we read, "In the first year of his reign" (that of Darius) "I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes." Dan. 9:2, 3. God had spoken the words concerning, and provided the instruments for, the restoration of His people, and yet what do we find? We find that one of the captives whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried away to Babylon, the prophet Daniel, had discovered, not by any special revelation, but by patient study of the writings of Jeremiah, that God had fixed the period of seventy years for "the desolations of Jerusalem."

Thereon, grounding himself upon this infallible word, he gave himself to prayer and fasting, humbling himself before God, confessing the sins of his people, and making supplication for the fulfillment of His own word. "O Lord," he said, "according to all Thy righteousness, I beseech Thee, let Thine anger and Thy fury be turned away from Thy city Jerusalem, Thy holy mountain: because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Thy people are become a reproach to all that are about us. Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of Thy servant, and his supplications, and cause Thy face to shine upon Thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake." vv. 16, 17. Thus Daniel, identifying himself with the state of his people, and in communion with the mind of God, had the unspeakable privilege of becoming an intercessor for Israel, and for the fulfillment of the promises of God. His prayer was heard (vv. 21-27) and we thereby learn that God in His grace permits His people to enter into His own thoughts, and to be associated with Himself in the accomplishment of His counsels for His own glory.

All therefore was now ready; the preparatory work had all been accomplished. In accordance with Isaiah's prediction, "the righteous man from the east" had been called to the sovereignty of the Gentiles, and it is through him that the appointed deliverance must come. The next action is therefore recorded-"The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia," and the following proclamation is the result:

"Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, the Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and He hath charged me to build Him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all His people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel, (He is the God,) which is in Jerusalem. And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, besides the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem." vv. 2-4.

Three things are here announced: namely, the commission which Cyrus himself had received as to the Lord's house; his royal permission to any of the Jews to return to Jerusalem for the purpose of building the temple; and last, his invitation to those Jews who should remain in his dominion to have fellowship by freewill offerings with those who should depart.

The rest of the chapter is taken up with an account of the effect produced by the proclamation. We say "the effect of the proclamation," but we notice that it was He who had stirred up the spirit of

Cyrus, who "raised" the spirit of those who offered themselves for the holy work in prospect. Two or three particulars only need to be observed. It is of importance, first of all, to point out that the chief of the fathers who offered themselves for the work were of the two tribes, Judah and Benjamin. There were also Levites, but they did not count as a tribe, for Levi had "no part nor inheritance with his brethren; the Lord is his inheritance." See Deut. 10:8, 9. It is plain indeed from this and other scriptures that though there may have been individuals from other tribes, there were only these two tribes restored. It was only therefore to Judah and Benjamin that Christ, when born into this world, was afterward presented for acceptance; and owing to their having rejected Him, it is they, and they only of the twelve tribes, who will pass through the terrible trouble "such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be," which will be consequent upon the advent and power of the antichrist in Jerusalem. For the same reason the ten tribes will not be collected and restored until after the appearing of the Lord for the salvation of the remnant in the land. See Zech. 14; Ezek. 20:33-44; chap. 34; Jer. 31:6-14.

In the next place God wrought in the hearts of the neighbors of those who devoted themselves to the work of the Lord's house, for they "offered willingly" according to the terms of the proclamation, of their substance, helping them with vessels of silver and gold, etc. Last, Cyrus himself showed his interest in the work (evidence that his heart also had been touched by divine power) by restoring the vessels of the temple which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem and had put in the house of his gods (see Dan. 5:1-4). These he numbered unto Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah (Ezra 1:6-11).

We have thus in this chapter all the signs of a genuine work of God. Concurrence of heart and object is produced in all concerned, whether in Cyrus, without whose permission the captives could not have returned; in the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin who were needed for the actual work of building; or in those who remained who, in having fellowship with their brethren by their freewill offerings, contributed toward the necessary expenses. There were no preliminary meetings to arrange and to come to an agreement, but the union of heart and purpose was produced alone by the action of the Lord on the hearts of all alike. This distinguishes a divine from a human work, and is sure proof of a real action of the Spirit of God. Every needed instrument therefore comes forward at the right moment, for the work is of God, and it must be accomplished.

The last three verses contain the number of the sacred vessels which Sheshbazzar received from Cyrus and brought up from Babylon to Jerusalem.

The Book of Ezra: Restoration From Babylon

We have in this chapter a register of "the children of the province that went up out of the captivity, of those which had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away unto Babylon, and came again unto Jerusalem and Judah, every one unto his city." v. 1. There are several interesting particulars to be noticed in the record. The first is that the fact of its existence shows how precious to God was the response which His grace had produced in the hearts of His people, however feebly they may have entered into His thoughts in regard to His house. On this account He has caused this list to be preserved, in evidence that He beholds with joy the smallest fruits of His Spirit's work. It also shows that the very names of His people are known and proclaimed as an encouragement to all to walk in His ways, to be identified with His interests, and to maintain fidelity in times of corruption and apostasy. (Compare Luke 12:8 and

Rev. 3:5.) In verse 2 the names of the leaders are given, and then the people are classified according to their family descent.

Examining this catalog a little more closely, a fourfold division will be found. Down to the end of verse 42, those who were undoubtedly of Israel, of Judah, Benjamin, or of Levi (among the last both singers and porters), are described. Then follow two other classes-the Nethinim and the servants of Solomon, concerning whom a few words will be necessary.

First, the Nethinim (vv. 43-58). The question is raised whether these were of Jewish descent. The word would seem to mean "those that are given," and it has been concluded that they, from the place in which their names occur in the chapter (see also 1 Chron. 9:2), were of another race, but had been given originally to the Levites for their service, even as the Levites-only these by divine command, and in the place of the firstborn of Israel (see Numb. 8)-had been given to Aaron for the Lord's service in His tabernacle. And traces of such are found in two scriptures. In Numbers we read respecting the spoil taken from the Midianites, "Of the children of Israel's half, Moses took one portion of fifty, both of man and of beast, and gave them unto the Levites, which kept the charge of the tabernacle of the Lord; as the Lord commanded Moses." Chap. 31:47. We also find that Joshua said to the Gibeonites, "There shall none of you be freed from being bondmen, and hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God." Josh. 9:23. (Compare Ezra 8:20.)

It is here, therefore, that we probably find the origin of the Nethinim-those who were spared from the just judgment of God-and if reduced to servile bondage, it was bondage in His mercy in connection with His house, whereby the very curse that rested on them (see Josh. 9:23) was turned into a blessing. For what do we find? Instead of being destroyed with the sword of the Lord's host, they were rescued; and now, after the lapse of centuries, they are found in honorable association with the Lord's people, and with a heart for the Lord's house, inasmuch as they returned from Babylon with their fellow captives at this special moment. They are surely a wonderful foreshadowing of the objects of grace, even in this dispensation.

Second, we have Solomon's servants, of whom the information is less distinct. But we read that Solomon levied "a tribute of bond-service unto this day" of the children of the Amorites, etc., that were left in the land, whom the children of Israel also were not able utterly to destroy (1 Kings 9:19-21). It might have been the descendants of these who received the designation of "Solomon's servants." However this might have been, the lesson already drawn is again significant-that the least connection with the Lord's people and the Lord's things becomes a means of blessing, if not always (as it surely does not) of spiritual, yet almost ever of temporal blessing, even though it may be sometimes limited through sin and unbelief to length of days and earthly comfort. But with "the servants of Solomon" as with the Nethinim, there must have been more than this, for through grace they had returned of their own desire to aid in building the house of God at Jerusalem. The number of these two classes was three hundred and ninety-two.

We have in the next place two other classes occupying a peculiar and, in a sense, a most mournful position. There were some-the children of Dalaiah, the children of Tobiah, and the children of Nekoda, six hundred fifty and two-who could not show their father's house and their seed, whether they were of Israel. Besides these, of the children of the priests, the children of Habaiah, the children of Koz, the children of Barzillai, etc.-"These sought their register among those that were reckoned by genealogy, but they were not found: therefore were they, as polluted,

put from the priesthood." (vv. 59-62.)

In the land of their exile the same care as to title and qualification had not been exercised. Babylon represents the corruption to which God's people are in bondage through their sins, and hence the period of their captivity was a time of carelessness. It was a time indeed when they were suffering under the hand of their God, but still a time of confusion and disorder; and necessarily so, inasmuch as they were without a temple, without sacrifices, and without Jehovah's presence. But now that, through the mercy of their God, there had been a recovery—a partial recovery, it is true, but one that contained within itself a distinct action of the Spirit of God—and now that Jehovah's house was once more to become their center, they were properly exercised concerning the title of all who had returned from Babylon.

If any could not show their genealogy, they had no claim to take part in the work to which they had been called; and in the case of the priests, the consequence was still more grave. If they could not find their register, they were as polluted, put from the priesthood. They were not told that they were not priests; the ground taken was that their claim was not proven. It might be at a future time; and hence, "The Tirshatha said unto them, that they should not eat of the most holy things, till there stood up a priest with Urim and with Thummim." When that time arrived, the priest, who should be once more endowed with divine intelligence and discernment through the light and perfection of God (Urim and Thummim), might adjudge them to be truly priests; but meanwhile their claim was forfeited. Grace could restore what was lost under law, only for this they must patiently wait.

A precisely similar thing in principle was seen during the past century. It is not too much to say that at its commencement the Church of God in this land was completely under the domination of the world power. The life of God's people was sustained through the ministry of a few faithful men here and there, and through the study of the Word of God; but the Church as a whole was enslaved, and had been enslaved, in Babylonish captivity. Soon after, a recovery took place. God wrought in the hearts of many in different places, producing great exercise of soul; and a movement was initiated which resulted in the deliverance of numbers in many parts of the country.

The charter of their deliverance from captivity was the Word of God. To it they turned day and night, and there they found both light and life. By it they judged themselves and their ways; by it they discovered the true character of their past bondage; and from it they obtained also guidance for the future. Listening to its teachings, they once again spread the Lord's table in all its simplicity. They learned that the Holy Ghost dwelt in the house of God, and that the Lord had promised to come quickly to receive His people to Himself. Thereon they were immediately confronted with the difficulty found in this chapter—the difficulty of title and qualification to break bread at the Lord's table. In the past every good citizen might do so, and all such were often exhorted to come. No one who claimed to be a Christian was ever denied, while very many whose lives contradicted their profession were received without question. Could such practices be continued?

Then the answer was found that only such as could "show their father's house" or could find "their register," had the scriptural qualification for a place at the table of the Lord. In other words, unless we have peace with God, unless we know that we are children of God through the possession of the Spirit, and can thus show our Father's house, and trace our genealogy, we have not the divine title required. Profession is not enough. In a day like this, a day of restoration from captivity, there must be the ability to verify our profession from the sure Word of God; for, as the Apostle says,

"The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread." 1 Cor. 10:16, 17.

But, it is objected, do you not constitute yourselves judges of others? By no means. As indeed the governor said in effect to the priests in this chapter who were put away, "You may be really priests, only you cannot produce your title. It must be left over therefore until a priest arises with the Urim and Thummim-one who can judge according to God." So now the burden of proof lies upon the one who desires to come to the Lord's table, and to be thus identified with His people. If he fail to produce it, he is not excluded by those who have to do with him, but by his inability to declare his genealogy, and if he be really a member of the body of Christ, his title, albeit all is of grace, will be fully acknowledged in a future day by the Lord Himself. It is needful that this scriptural principle should be both understood and enforced.

The question of the priests goes still further. These, as we have seen, were put out from their office, the functions of which were to minister before the Lord, and to teach the people (see Exod. 28; Lev. 10:9-11; Deut. 10:8; Mal. 2:5, 7). They were also forbidden, owing to their inability to find their register, to eat of the holy things. (Compare on this subject Lev. 22:1-16.) What a solemn commentary on the practices that have existed for centuries in Christendom! Forgetful or ignorant of the truth that all true believers, and no others, are priests (1 Pet. 2), they have devised a way of making priests-of filling their "holy" offices by a human ordination. And such, when thus appointed, arrogate to themselves the exclusive right of approach to God, as well as that of interpreting the Scriptures. It is a small thing to say that these practices are a denial of Christianity-they are worse, for they set aside the efficacy of the work of Christ, and deny His authority, as well as ignore the sovereign action of the Holy Ghost. God alone makes priests, and every one who is washed with water (born again), is brought under the value of the one sacrifice of Christ, is sprinkled with His precious blood, as also with the anointing oil (the unction of the Holy Spirit) and is set apart by Him for this office. (Read Exod. 29; Heb. 10.) Such, and such alone, can find their register among those who are reckoned by genealogy, and have "boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which He hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh." Heb. 10:19, 20. There, by the grace of God, they are permitted to feast on the holy things-the various aspects of Christ as symbolized by these-in communion with God in His own presence.

The number of the whole congregation, we are now told, was forty and two thousand three hundred and sixty. Besides these were their servants and maids, amounting to seven thousand three hundred thirty and seven, and among them were two hundred singing men and singing women. There were also seven hundred thirty and six horses, two hundred forty and five mules, four hundred thirty and five camels, and six thousand seven hundred and twenty asses (vv. 65-67).

Such was the large company or caravan that traveled from Babylon to Judah and Jerusalem with their hearts set upon the holy enterprise to which they had been divinely called. But a narrower inspection of the elements of which this multitude was composed will discover the sure precursors of decline and decay. What had these pilgrims to do, for example, with singing 'Men and singing women? Their land was desolate, their sanctuary had been consumed with fire, and was lying

waste, and they themselves were but a feeble remnant just emancipated from the yoke of captivity. Surely it was no time for mirth and song! (Compare Psalm 137.) Sad to say, every action of the Spirit of God producing a revival in the hearts of His people is speedily limited by man, and by his own thoughts and desires. Even the first response to His mighty power gathers those who are really under His influence with those also who will corrupt the movement and ensure its outward failure. How remarkably this is exemplified in the book of Judges, and it has been so in every age of the Church!

After arriving at their destination, we read that some of the chief of the fathers, when they came to the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, offered freely for the house of God to set it up in its place. They gave after their ability unto the treasure of the work threescore and one thousand drams of gold, and five thousand pounds of silver, and one hundred priests' garments (vv. 68, 69).

It is interesting to notice the form of the statement-"When they came to the house of the Lord which is at Jerusalem"-showing that the house, whatever its outward condition (and razed to the ground as it had been) still existed before the eye of God. Thus, though there were three different houses until the time of the Lord, it was always the same house in the mind of God. Haggai, on this account, says, as it should be rendered, "The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former." Chap. 2. There is undoubtedly another reason for this form of words in Ezra. God would seem to have used the desolations of His sanctuary to touch the hearts of these chief of the fathers. When they came to Jehovah's house-when they saw, as it were, its condition-they were moved, and they "offered freely" of their substance; and, as the Spirit of God is careful to notice, thus setting the seal of His approval upon the act, "they gave after their ability." In this they are surely examples for all time for those of the Lord's people who have the privilege of ministering to the Lord, whether in having fellowship with His needy saints, or with the needs of His service.

The chapter closes with the statement, "So the priests, and the Levites, and some of the people, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinim, dwelt in their cities." v. 70. It is open to the spiritual reader to question whether this record-especially when read in the light of what took place afterward, as related in Haggai 1-is not symptomatic of the decay of their first energy, whether it does not reveal the tendency to think of themselves and their own houses before the interests of the Lord's house. Solomon spent thirteen years in building his own house, while he occupied but seven upon the temple; and knowing what man is, it is not surprising if the restored remnant began by first minding their own things. But if so, the next chapter will show that the word of God was still energetic in their souls, to the praise of Him who had redeemed them from captivity, and associated them with Himself in the thoughts of His heart toward Jerusalem, and toward His temple.

The Book of Ezra: Restoration From Babylon

At the close of the last chapter we have seen that "all Israel"-the remnant in fact, but taking the place of the nation before God-dwelt in their cities. The commencement of this chapter opens out another remarkable action of the Spirit of God. "And when the seventh month was come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem." v. 1. In the book of Numbers we read, "In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, ye shall have a holy convocation; ye shall do no servile work: it is a day of blowing trumpets unto you." Chap. 29:1. This feast of trumpets prefigures the restoration of Israel in the

last days, and it was therefore with a true spiritual perception that the people assembled themselves in Jerusalem at this time—a perception which, combined with their perfect unity, showed that both they and their leaders had been taught of God, and were under the power of His word. (Compare Acts 2:1.),

It is but seldom in the history of God's people that such oneness has been displayed, because it can only be produced, not by any general agreement, but by common subjection of all alike to the power of the Spirit through the truth. Twice only has it been seen in the history of the Church (see Acts 2:4), and now it will never more be displayed on earth in the Church at large, though it might perhaps be exhibited in small companies of the saints. But here, as at Pentecost, the whole congregation was as one man—one will dominating all, and gathering them with irresistible power to one common center—for they were all with one accord in one place in the city on which the mind and heart of God were at that time set.

Having thus assembled, there "stood up Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and his brethren, and builded the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon, as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God. And they set the altar upon his bases; for fear was upon them because of the people of those countries: and they offered burnt offerings thereon unto the Lord, even burnt offerings morning and evening." vv. 2, 3. The governor, Zerubbabel, and the priest, Jeshua (aided by their respective "brethren"), united in this blessed work, the combination of the two foreshadowing Him who will be a priest on His throne, the true Melchizedek (see Zech. 6:9-15).

One of their motives in the erection of the altar would seem to have been their felt need of the protection of their God, and faith discerned that this protection would be ensured on the ground of the efficacy of the sacrifices. And what could be more beautiful than this exhibition of confidence in God? They were but a feeble remnant, having no outward means of defense, and surrounded by enemies of every kind, but their very weakness and peril had taught them the precious lesson that God was their refuge and strength. The setting up of the altar was therefore their first object, and as soon as the sweet savor of the burnt offerings ascended up to God, all that He was, as then revealed, was engaged on their behalf.

Moreover, it will be observed that their burnt offerings were presented morning and evening. This was called, at its original institution, the "continual burnt offering" (see Exod. 29:38-46), in virtue of which God had been able to dwell in the midst of His people. And if His presence was no longer in their midst, if He dwelt no longer between the cherubim overshadowing the mercy seat, the efficacy of the burnt offering remained. As long as faith brought this and presented it to God morning and evening, the people were as surely under the protection of Jehovah as before. They were as safe as, and indeed far safer than when Jerusalem in her glory was surrounded by her fortified walls and bulwarks. They might have therefore adopted the language of one of their psalms: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will we not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof." Psalm 46:1-3.

The altar having been duly ordered, they kept the feast of tabernacles, as it is written (see Lev. 23:33-36), and offered the daily burnt offerings by number, according to the custom, as the duty of

every day required. The feast of tabernacles was a figure of millennial joy (Lev. 23:40). Israel was to rejoice before the Lord their God seven days. To human eyes looking at their desolate condition it might have seemed a mockery for these poor returned captives to be keeping a joyful feast. But faith is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen," and thus brings the future into present realization. Moreover, when the soul once stands before God in all the acceptance of Christ, as prefigured by the burnt offering, it has already the certainty of every promised blessing as secured in Him. It was thus open to the believing Israelites who stood around the altar which they had erected amid the ruins of the temple, and as they saw the smoke of the burnt offerings ascend up to heaven, to look onward to the time when all God's promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would be fulfilled. Then the ransomed of the Lord would return and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads, they would obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing would flee away.

They also, we are told, "offered the continual burnt offering, both of the new moons, and of the set feasts of the Lord that were consecrated, and of every one that willingly offered a freewill offering unto the Lord." v. 5. And it will be remarked that the striking feature of all their proceedings was that they offered everything now according to the word of God (vv. 2, 4). Whatever they may have practiced in Babylon, whatever had been their traditional rites and customs, all these had been left behind in the scene of their captivity; and now, delivered and brought back, nothing could satisfy them short of the authority of the written Word.

We might therefore characterize the proceedings narrated in this passage as the restoration of scriptural worship. This contains a principle of immense importance, and one that has found an illustration within the memory of some who are still living.* There was a movement some fifty or sixty years ago, as already pointed out in a previous chapter, corresponding largely as to its spiritual features with this deliverance from Babylon; and the first object of the saints of that time, as with this remnant, was the restoration of the altar (using this term as a symbol of worship), and the ordering of the assembly in all its meetings according to the written Word. Customs, traditions, observances, all rites and ceremonies were now tested by the recorded apostolic practices, and such as could not stand the proof were abandoned. It was but a remnant also that were brought out of bondage; but they had light and life in their dwellings and in their gatherings because "as one man" they sought to give the Lord Jesus Christ His rightful place of preeminence as Son over His own house. In truth, God owned this movement in a remarkable manner, using it to recall believers in every part of the land to the authority of the written Word, to the knowledge of the fullness of His grace in redemption, to their priestly place and privileges, to the truth of the presence of the Holy Spirit, and to the expectation of the Lord's return. And if the spiritual power of that day has not been maintained, its influence is still felt, and it is not too much to say that the whole Church of God is indebted to it, through the sovereign grace and appointment of God, for the exhibition and preservation of the full truths of Christianity.

Before that time Christianity, in the hands of its public advocates, had degenerated into a mere code of morals, and the consequence was Socialism and widespread infidelity; whereas since that day, whatever the increasing power of evil, and the rapid development of the signs of the coming apostasy, there has never been wanting a full testimony to the truth of God, and to His Christ as glorified at His right hand. All this proclaims to us, as with a trumpet voice, that the path of obedience to the written Word, in the power of the Spirit, is the path of recovery from error, the

secret of all blessing, and the true method of arresting spiritual decline.

The first five verses of this chapter are a delightful record, and might well be studied in connection with the first days of the Church after Pentecost (Acts 2:4). In both places alike individual, as well as collective, spiritual energy is manifested. Thus it was not only the new moons and the set feasts that are noticed as having been observed, but it is added, and "every one that willingly offered a freewill offering unto the Lord." v. 5. When God's Spirit is acting in power, He fills the hearts of many of His people to overflowing, and the vessel, not being able to contain the blessing, runs over in thanksgiving and praise to God. This is the secret both of devotedness and worship.

The next two verses close up this period, preparatory to the introduction of another. "From the first day of the seventh month began they to offer burnt offerings unto the Lord. But the foundation of the temple of the Lord was not yet laid. They gave money also unto the masons, and to the carpenters; and meat, and drink, and oil, unto them of Zidon, and to them of Tire, to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea of Joppa, according to the grant that they had of Cyrus king of Persia." vv. 6, 7. The record of the commencement of offering burnt offerings the first day of the seventh month is made with evident delight. It was gratifying to the heart of God to behold the return of His people to Himself, acknowledging His claims, and the only ground of their acceptance. It shows us how particularly He observes the actions of His own, and that He takes pleasure in their approach and worship. Producing these fruits by His grace in their hearts, with the same grace He puts them to their account. (Compare Eph. 2:10, and 2 Cor. 5:10.)

Then follows, as we judge, a note of sadness- "But the foundation of the temple of the Lord was not yet laid." The people had responded largely to the grace and goodness of Jehovah in their restoration. They had rejoiced to place themselves under His protection, and had ordered His worship according as it was written in the law of Moses, the man of God. But at present they went no further. Instead of entering into God's thoughts concerning His house, they rested in the blessings into which they had now been brought. Their spiritual energy had in measure expended itself in their first efforts, and their temptation was now to pause before going farther. Such has ever been the history of all real revivals in the Church of God. Take, for example, the mighty work of God, of which Luther was the instrument.

At the outset the authority and sufficiency of the Scriptures was the battle-ax with which he waged war upon the corruptions and idolatries of Rome, and God wrought with him and granted a remarkable deliverance. But what followed? Luther, and his followers alike, rested in and feasted upon the fruits of their first victories, and the Reformation subsided into a system of state churches and creeds, out of which all vitality soon departed. (See Rev. 3:1-3.) They failed to go on in communion with the mind of God-they labored for their own objects rather than His-and the consequence was that blight and decay soon showed themselves and the movement was arrested. Now, today, the very truths which were then recovered are fast fading away (if they have not already gone) from the very places which were the scene of the conflict.

We learn therefore that the safety of God's people lies in their rising to the height of their calling. He calls us to fellowship with Himself and with His Son Jesus Christ. If, forgetting this, we are satisfied with the enjoyment of our blessings, and lose sight of God's desires for us, feebleness and decline will soon mark us, whether as individuals or as companies of believers. If, on the other hand, God's objects are ours, if our minds are set upon what is before Him, He will ever lead us on

into fuller intelligence of His purposes of grace, as well as of His ways, and into larger blessedness. He delights in our happiness, and He would ever increase this by associating us in His grace with His own objects and aims.

If, however, the children of Israel did not prosecute the work of the Lord with all diligence, they were not unmindful of the purpose of their restoration; for, as we have seen, they began to make provision for the materials wherewith to build the temple (v. 7). To understand the circumstances of the remnant in contrast with the glory of the kingdom when Solomon's temple was built, 1 Kings 5 and 1 Chron. 28 and 29 should be read. Together with this, it should be remembered that Jehovah was the same, and that His resources were as available, through the exercise of faith, for this feeble remnant as for David and Solomon in all their power and splendor. True, they were outwardly dependent upon the grant of a Gentile monarch for permission to build, and for the means to secure the necessary materials, but it was God's work on which they were engaged and, counting upon Him, He would enable them to prosecute it to a successful issue. When believers work with God, their apparent difficulties and obstacles become the servants of faith to bring God in, before whom crooked things are made straight, and rough places plain.

The Book of Ezra: Restoration From Babylon

In this section the account is given of the actual laying of the foundation of the temple. An interval of at least seven months must be placed between verses 7 and 8. How it was spent is not revealed. The ostensible ground of the pause before commencing the work of the building would seem from the connection to be waiting for the "cedar trees." However this might have been, "In the second year of their coming unto the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, began Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the remnant of their brethren the priests and the Levites, and all they that were come out of the captivity unto Jerusalem; and appointed the Levites, from twenty years old and upward, to set forward the work of the house of the Lord." v. 8.

Three things are to be noted in this statement. Whatever the state of the people at large, Zerubbabel and Jeshua, the governor and the priest, are foremost in the Lord's work. Officially at the head, they retain the spiritual lead of the people. Happy is it for the people of God in every age, when their leaders are in the secret of the Lord's mind, when they can call upon the people to follow them in His service. It is not always so; indeed, not infrequently the first action of the Spirit of God is in the midst of His people, and then the nominal leaders are set aside, or constrained to follow to preserve their place.

Second, the governor and the priest know how to associate the people with themselves in their sacred enterprise. This is the sure mark of spiritual power on their part, as well as a testimony to the fact that God was working with them. Thus far there were no schisms, but all were banded together by the Holy Spirit for one common object. Last, we find that the Levites from twenty years old and upward were commissioned to set forward the work of the house of the Lord. This was evidently a recurrence to the scriptural order arising out of a divine intelligence as to the nature of the work on which they were engaged. (See Numb. 4; 1 Chron. 23:24.) The maintenance of God's order in the work of His house is of the first importance, for it is in fact subjection to His will as expressed in His Word. To man's thoughts some other method might have seemed preferable, but the only question for the Lord's servants was, and is, What has He directed? From not perceiving

this, there has been perpetual conflict in the Church of God between man's will and the Lord's, and the consequence has been that man and man's thoughts have almost universally usurped the place of Christ and His Word.

The Levites, through grace, readily entered upon their labors. There were but seventy-four. (The children of Asaph, and the children of the porters [chap. 2:41, 42] were also Levites. All together, therefore, they numbered three hundred and forty-one; but only these seventy-four were available for this special work.) In the wilderness, comprising only those who were "from thirty years old and upward even unto fifty years old," they numbered "eight thousand and five hundred and fourscore." Numb. 4:47, 48. When the Lord therefore opened the door of deliverance for them from their Babylonish captivity, very few had cared to avail themselves of it. They had found a home in the land of their exile, and had forgotten Jerusalem, and ceased to remember Zion. The more precious to the Lord was the fidelity of these seventy-four, and with His presence and blessing they were enough for His service as overseers of the workmen in the house of God. Grace, too, had wrought in their hearts, for they stood "together," or, as the margin reads, "as one" in their office. This was true fellowship, and sprang from the fact that they were in communion with the mind of God concerning His house. His objects were theirs, and hence they were not hampered by divided counsels, but "as one" they set forward the workmen. Blessed augury for the success of their enterprise, as well as the evident fruit of the action of the Spirit of God!

The next two verses describe the celebration of the laying of the foundation. "And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the Lord, after the ordinance of David king of Israel. And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the Lord; because He is good, for His mercy endureth forever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid." vv. 10, 11. It was a day of great joy and gladness; and as they had gone back to the word, "as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God," for directions concerning the altar, the sacrifices, and the feasts, so they have recourse to "the ordinance of David king of Israel" for guidance in their service of praise. (Compare 2 Chron. 5:12, 13.)

In the wilderness indeed we do not read of songs of joy; they had sung the song of redemption on the banks of the Red Sea, but even that soon died away on their lips, and was succeeded by the murmurs which were begotten by the hardships and perils of their pilgrim journey. But when in the land the ark had found a resting place, if but for a time, in Zion, David "appointed certain of the Levites to minister before the ark of the Lord, and to record, and to thank and praise the Lord God of Israel." Also Asaph and others were to play upon psalteries and harps. Asaph himself was to make a sound with cymbals, while certain priests were to blow with trumpets. "On that day David delivered first this psalm to thank the Lord into the hand of Asaph and his brethren," in which the words occur, "O give thanks unto the Lord; for He is good; for His mercy endureth forever" (1 Chron. 16). Few and feeble therefore as were the children of Israel who gathered this day on Mount Moriah, they were scrupulously exact in obedience to the Word. Engaged in the Lord's work, they discerned rightly that in it human thoughts and human wisdom had no place. The Lord, and the Lord alone, must prescribe the method of His house.

Three classes are distinguished in this joyful celebration. There were the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the sons of Asaph with cymbals. Outside of these there were the people who answered the praise they heard with a great shout because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. None but priests were permitted to blow with the sacred trumpets (see Numb. 10) for it needs to be in the holy place, in the presence of God, in communion with His mind, to discern when to sound the notes of testimony and praise. So likewise only the sons of Asaph Levites, "according to the king's order" must use the sacred cymbals (1 Chron. 25:6). Thus duly arranged, "they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the Lord," and the burden of their song was, Jehovah "is good, for His mercy endureth forever toward Israel."

But there were tears of sorrow mingled with their notes of praise, for the next verse tells us of many of the priests and Levites, and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men. They had seen Solomon's temple in all its glory and splendor, and as they contrasted it with the house they were now commencing, they wept with a loud voice while the others shouted aloud for joy. And truly the tears of the one and the gladness of the other befitted the circumstances of the day. The former had seen the glory of the kingdom and the visible cloud of the presence of Jehovah in the first temple, and they were now spectators of the desolations of Jerusalem. They felt their present impoverished condition, and their feebleness in attempting to build anew the house of the Lord and it was but natural for them, whatever their gratitude, that grief should predominate. For those, on the other hand, who remembered only their captivity in Babylon, with its deprivation of both altar and temple, it could be nothing but unmingled gratitude and praise.

And who can doubt that both the tears and the gladness were alike acceptable to the Lord, inasmuch as both might equally have been the fruit of the working of His grace in their hearts? Indeed, might not a parallel be found in our own times? When the Lord brought some of His people out of their Babylonish captivity, and they entered anew upon the possession of their priestly privileges of access and worship; when they marked out again from the Word the true ground of the Church and sought in whatever feebleness to occupy it, their hearts, under the power of the Holy Ghost, would of necessity overflow in thanksgiving and praise. Now delivered from sacerdotal assumptions and claims, from the corruptions of the Church and of Christianity, and filled with gratitude to Him who in His grace had opened their eyes, broken their fetters, and brought them into this wealthy place, they could but shout "aloud for joy."

On the other hand, when the ancient men who were more deeply instructed in the Word, and who had often pondered the beauty and order of the Church in Pentecostal days, compared it with their own feeble efforts to conform themselves according to the directions of the Scriptures, and when they reflected how many of their brethren had been left behind in bondage, sorrow was as appropriate as joy. There could not but be the blending of the two so that, as in the case of the children of Israel, there might have been a difficulty in discerning "the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people."

Altogether the celebration of laying the foundation of the temple is a beautiful scene. The reader, however, will remark that in accordance with the nature of the book and the position of the people, the record is wholly taken up with what the people did and felt. God is not visibly in the scene, though it is apparent that all is being done for and as unto Him. In a word, His people are acting in faith, and faith only could bring Him in, and that of necessity was an individual thing. But we are

not left without witness of God's thoughts of His people on this day. If we turn to the book of Zechariah, we shall find that He was watching for His people, and interested in their doings. As yet God had not begun to speak by prophecy to His restored people, either by Haggai, or by Zechariah; but when He, some years later, stirred them up and encouraged their hearts by this means, He refers to the laying of the foundation of the temple. Zechariah thus speaks: "The word of the Lord came unto me saying, The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me unto you. For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth." Chap. 4:8-10.

We thus learn how precious to God was the commencement of His house. His heart was set upon it, and He ever rejoices when His people understand His thoughts and, with intelligence of His mind, seek to be found in the path of His will. Zerubbabel had laid the foundation, and he also should finish it, and this should be a sign to the people that the Lord had sent His servant. It might be a day of small things, as measured by the outward eye, but it was a day which contained within itself the promise of the restoration of the kingdom in glory, under the sway of the promised Messiah (see Zech. 6:12, 13), and it was the privilege of faith to link itself in this day of small things with the full accomplishment of the purposes of God toward His people.

Moreover, the eyes of the Lord-"those seven," His perfect intelligence and cognizance of all things, for they are the eyes of the Lord which run to and fro through the whole earth-should rejoice, and see the plummet in the hands of Zerubbabel; that is, when His house should be completed. In the previous chapter these seven eyes are upon the foundation stone. "Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, thou, and thy fellows that sit before thee: for they are men wondered at: for, behold, I will bring forth My servant the Branch.

For behold the stone that I have laid before Joshua; upon one stone shall be seven eyes: behold I will engrave the graving thereof, saith the Lord of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day. In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, shall ye call every man his neighbor under the vine and under the fig tree." Chap. 3:8-10.

The Scripture reveals to us the full significance in the thoughts of God in the laying of the foundation of His house by the remnant in Jerusalem. It was the assurance of the introduction of Christ, the Branch, who should secure to His people the promised blessing. So looked at, it was God that was doing all, if His people were the instruments. He laid the foundation stone (compare Isa. 28:16), though it were by the hands of Zerubbabel. It was His work, inasmuch as it was the fulfillment of His counsels. His eyes were upon the stone-that stone of grace and blessing-for indeed it was "a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation"-and He Himself would engrave the graving; that is, He would unfold and declare all its divine import, and then He would remove the iniquity of the land in one day. For truly it was through His death and resurrection that Christ would become the Savior of His people from their sins, and thus the foundation stone on which His people should be built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 2:4, 5), and on which His people Israel should also rest, and trusting in which they should never be confounded. The consequence, therefore, should be full earthly blessing, every man calling his neighbor under the vine and under

the fig tree.

Combining the above scriptures with the narrative in Ezra will enable the reader to view the proceedings of that day with a double interest. If in Ezra the Spirit of God would associate us with the thoughts and feelings of the people in connection with their work, in Zechariah He draws us into fellowship with the thoughts of God. The people, it may be, saw but little beyond the promise of the restoration of the temple and its services. God, however, with whom a thousand years are as one day, beheld in that day of small things the commencement of His work of grace and power, in virtue of which He would accomplish all His counsels through the advent, death, appearing, and reign of His anointed-His King, whom He would one day establish on His holy hill of Zion.

The Book of Ezra: Restoration From Babylon

No sooner had the foundation of the temple been laid than adversaries appeared on the scene. It was so also in New Testament times, for wherever the Apostle went about laying the foundation of the assembly, the activity of the enemy was excited. Hence his warning, "According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master-builder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." 1 Cor. 3:10, 11. But as with Paul, so with Zerubbabel and Jeshua, the enemy assumed the guise of friendship. "Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity builded the temple unto the Lord God of Israel; then they came to Zerubbabel, and to the chief of the fathers, and said unto them, Let us build with you: for we seek your God, as ye do; and we do sacrifice unto Him since the days of Esar-haddon king of Assur, which brought us up hither." vv. 1, 2.

The reader is not left in doubt for a single moment as to the character of these would-be helpers of God's people in their work. The Holy Spirit tells us plainly that they were "the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin," although the words of peace were upon their lips, for He knew their hearts, their aims and ends. And indeed they betray themselves in the very words they use. It is ever so, for the mere professor cannot understand the things of God. They say, "We do sacrifice unto Him" (God) "since the days of Esar-haddon king of Assur, which brought us up hither." They revealed in this way their true origin; they were, by their own confession, not the children of Abraham, but Assyrians, and had therefore no claim to be of the children of Israel. These were, in fact, the fathers of the Samaritans (see 2 Kings 17:24-31) who continued down to the very end of the Jewish economy to seek to intrude themselves into the place of privilege and blessing. It was on this account, and because of the strife thereby engendered, that the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans. We may learn for ourselves from this incident the source of one of the gravest dangers in the work of the Lord. The kisses of an enemy are both deceitful and dangerous, though it seems ungracious to refuse the proffered help of professed friends. The Church, to her loss, has not only forgotten this truth, but has also sought the aid of the world in her work. She has thus become both corrupt and corrupting, illustrating anew the old proverb, "The corruption of the best thing is the worst corruption."

Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and their fellow builders, were endowed with divine perception and hence alive to the wile of the foe. They replied to this seductive offer, "Ye have nothing to do with us to build a house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the Lord God of Israel, as king Cyrus the king of Persia hath commanded us." v. 3. It may seem to some that these leaders

of the people were taking up a narrow and exclusive position, and in fact they were, but in so doing they had the Lord's mind, and were resting on a divine principle which still abides, namely, that only the Lord's people can be engaged in the work of His house. Others may call themselves builders, and profess a desire to help on His work, but they can only build in wood, hay, or stubble, and the Apostle has uttered the solemn warning voice for all ages, "If any man defile [corrupt] the temple of God, him shall God destroy." 1 Cor. 3:17. No possible straits or difficulties, no circumstances whatever, can justify the alliance of the Church with the world, the acceptance of the world's favor or assistance in the holy work of the Lord. We are not of the world, even as Christ was not of the world and if we break down the everlasting distinction (which has been revealed in the cross of Christ) between ourselves and it, we deny both our character and that of the world itself. See Gal. 6:14; John 15:18-21.

The true nature of the offer these adversaries of Judah and Benjamin had made is seen by the effect produced by its refusal. For what do we read? "Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building, and hired counselors against them, to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia." vv. 4, 5. Thus, failing in their object of corrupting the work on which the children of the captivity were engaged, they now throw off the mask of friendship, and seek to hinder by open hostility. Such is Satan's method of proceeding in every age. He and his servants will often transform themselves into angels of light and ministers of righteousness, because it is easier to deceive than to deter the saints, but the moment his presence and activity are detected and exposed, his rage is unbounded. How could he seek to advance the building of God's house? The foundation is Christ; and "what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial?" (2 Cor. 6). But alas! Satan in the case before us gained a temporary advantage, for through his machinations, working on the fears and the unbelief of the people, he succeeded in stopping the building of the temple, even until the reign of Darius, king of Persia.

It will be perceived that these two verses (4 and 5) are a summary of the activity of the foes of Israel during the reigns of Cyrus, Ahasuerus, and Artaxerxes, and that therefore verse 24 is connected with verse 5, the intervening passage being a parenthesis which gives an account of the way in which the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin succeeded in their designs. Moreover it would seem, from a careful comparison of the prophecies of Haggai with this chapter, that the children of Israel ceased to build long before the prohibition was obtained, for it is evident from Hag. 2:15 that they had made but little, if any, progress after the foundation was completed. Fear of their adversaries was stronger than their faith in God, and consequently, losing heart, and thinking only of themselves and their own selfish interests, they began to build their own houses, and to say, "The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built." Hag. 1:2. It is true that they were but a feeble remnant, and that their enemies were numerous and active, but they might have read in one of their own Psalms: "When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell. Though a host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident. One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple." Psalm 27:2-4. But alas! our own hearts understand only too well both the weakness and the fear of these poor captives, and how easily we are disheartened by a demonstration of the enemy's power

when we forget that if God be for us, none can succeed in their designs against us, when, in other words, we walk by sight and not by faith. The failure of God's people in this chapter is therefore but the failure of His servants in all ages.

From verses 6-23, as already pointed out, we have the particulars of the way in which the adversaries of God's people secured a royal decree in their favor, and against the building of the temple. Their attempt in the reign of Ahasuerus seems to have failed (v. 6), but nothing daunted, they persevered with their object in the reign of his successor, Artaxerxes, and then their efforts were rewarded. (This is scarcely the place to discuss the question as to who were Ahasuerus and Artaxerxes. There is great difficulty in identifying them now with the monarchs of profane history. Probably the first was Xerxes, and the second Artaxerxes Longimanus. The reader may consult any good Bible dictionary on the subject.)

There are several points of instruction to be noted in the record of their proceedings. The first is the union of all the various races of the land "against Jerusalem." "Rehum the chancellor, and Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their companions; the Dinaites, the Apharsathchites, the Tarpelites, the Apharsites, the Archevites, the Babylonians, the Susanchites, the Dehavites, and the Elamites, and the rest of the nations whom the great and noble Asnapper brought over, and set in the cities of Samaria" (vv. 9, 10)-all these were banded together to frustrate the work of the Lord in the building of His house. The carnal mind is enmity against God, and there is therefore no difficulty, when God and His testimony are in question, in securing unity of aim and purpose among His enemies. Differ as they may among themselves, and even hating one another, they have but one mind when God appears on the scene. This was remarkably illustrated in the case of our blessed Lord when the kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers took counsel against Jehovah, and against His Anointed (Psalm 2). Even Herod and Pilate, who before had been at enmity between themselves, were made friends together by their common contempt of Christ.

It was in this way that Satan was proved to be the god of the world, for he succeeded in uniting the highest and the lowest against the Son of God, and marshaling all together-Romans and Jews, the civil, the ecclesiastical, and the military authorities, as well as the common people. He led on his army, animated by his own mind and spirit, to cut off Christ out of the land of the living. Once more in the world's history he will prove his power over the hearts of sinful men, but then to his own, and alas! also to their everlasting destruction. (See Rev. 19 and 20.) So in our chapter, Satan, though concealed, is the active agent in stirring up these various peoples in their action against the work of the remnant.

This is seen in the next point to be noticed. In the letter addressed to the king, they say, "Be it known unto the king, that the Jews which came up from thee to us are come into Jerusalem, building the rebellious and the bad city, and have set up the walls thereof, and joined the foundations." v. 12. This statement betrays the speech of the "accuser of the brethren," for it was false, and proceeded therefore from Satan, for "When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it." John 8:44. So far indeed from having set up the walls and joined the foundations of the city, they had barely laid the foundation of the temple. And the reader will perceive that, though these "adversaries of Judah and Benjamin" had professed a desire to help in building the temple, on the ground that they also sacrificed to the God of Israel, they omit all reference in their accusation to the temple, and speak only of the city. Their reason was

obvious. The proclamation of Cyrus was concerning the temple. If therefore they accused the Jews of building the city, they gave a color to the charges of rebellion and treasonable practices which they insinuated, and from the king's answer it is clear that they had not miscalculated (vv. 19, 20).

Another point not to be passed over is that the sin of Israel in the past bears bitter fruit for these children of the captivity. Their last king, Zedekiah, had sworn "by God" to be faithful to Nebuchadnezzar, but he broke his oath, and rebelled against the king of Babylon, and thus procured the destruction of Jerusalem, as well as incurred the judgment of God. (See 2 Chron. 36:13; Ezek. 17:12-16.) There was truth therefore in the accusation that Jerusalem had been a rebellious city, so that while the remnant themselves were under the favor and protection of God, and no one could harm them as long as they went forward in confidence in Him, they now suffered, in His government in this world, the consequence of the sins of their fathers. It is still to be emphasized that these adversaries could have had no power as against the people of God, if the people themselves had not lost faith in God and heart for their work. The Apostle wrote, "A great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries" (1 Cor. 16:9), but not one of his opponents could have hindered his work, because he was counting on Him who "openeth, and no man shutteth." So had it been with the remnant but for their own sloth and unbelief, for, as already pointed out, they ceased, it would seem, from their work before the prohibition was obtained.

The two motives urged on the king were provision against future danger, and the possibility of loss of revenue. Thus appealed to, and the statements made concerning the character of the city in past days having been verified by the records in the royal archives, he wrote, "Give ye now commandment to cause these men to cease, and that this city be not builded, until another commandment shall be given from me. Take heed now that ye fail not to do this: why should damage grow to the hurt of the kings?" (vv. 17-22.) The adversaries were thus successful and, having received the letter, went up with all speed, armed with royal authority, and effectually provided against any attempt to continue the work of building Jehovah's house. They "made them cease," it says, "by force and power."

The chapter then closes with the statement, "Then ceased the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem. So it ceased unto the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia." v. 24. This last verse, however, connects itself with verse 5, and gives the result of the enemy's opposition of which verses 4 and 5 contain a general summary. The parenthesis gives the details of the way in which Artaxerxes was prevailed upon to issue his decree. Altogether it is a sad chapter—the account of the activity of Satan. The only bright gleam in it is the faithfulness of the leaders of Israel in refusing the alliance of the world. The rest of the chapter is darkness. God does not appear in it, and, looked at with human eyes, it would seem as if the enemy had completely conquered. While, however, God does not interpose, He is no uninterested spectator of what is taking place. Whatever His people are, He abides faithful, and we shall see that, though He will have His people thoroughly tested, He only waits for the proper moment to raise up a power which the enemy will not be able to withstand, and with which He will arouse His servants from their slumbers and will urge them onward in the prosecution of the object for which they had been brought back from Babylon.

The Book of Ezra: Restoration From Babylon

In the last chapter we saw how the people were turned aside from their work by the activity of Satan. In the first two verses of this chapter we have the record of God's intervention, by His prophets, on His people's behalf, in order to overthrow the enemy's designs.

The reader will recall the special position of these restored captives. Though brought back, in the mercy of God, to their own land, they could not have Jehovah's visible presence in their midst, as in the days of the kingdom, for He had transferred the sovereignty of the earth to the Gentiles. Fire no longer came down from heaven to consume their sacrifices, and the priests were without the sacred Urim and Thummim (chap. 2:63). God therefore was now purely the object of faith, and the godly had to endure as seeing Him who is invisible.

On this very account it was that God came in-not by any act of power to confound the adversary, but by the word of prophecy to reach the conscience of His people, and to stir them up to confidence in Himself, and thereby to strengthen them for the conflict which their labors would involve, as well as to assure them that as long as they trusted in Him, the utmost efforts of their enemies would be in vain. In this we learn the true function of the prophet. As another has said, "Prophecy supposes that the people of God are in a bad condition, even when they are still acknowledged and prophecy addressed to them. There is no need of addressing powerful testimony to a people who are walking happily in the ways of the Lord, nor of sustaining the faith of a tried remnant by hopes founded on the unchangeable faithfulness of God, when all are enjoying in perfect peace the fruits of His present goodness- attached, as a consequence, to the faithfulness of the people. The proof of this simple and easily understood principle is found in each of the prophets."

It should, moreover, be pointed out that the prophet was raised up as the medium for communication with the people of God when the responsible head or heads of the people had failed. Thus when the priesthood had failed under Eli, Samuel was God's chosen vessel for His messages to His people, and his ministry continued through the reign of Saul, or at least until David was anointed king. This explains the fact that the greatest of the prophets appeared on the scene at the darkest periods of the history of Israel, as, for example, Elijah and Elisha. So in our chapter, Zerubbabel, the governor, and Jeshua, the high priest, were the responsible heads of the captivity, but, worn out by the harassing attacks of their adversaries, they had also succumbed with the people, and had with them ceased to build the house of the Lord. God therefore now sent prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, and they "prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, even unto them." v. 1.

As a matter of fact, Haggai (as may be seen by a comparison of the dates of their respective prophecies) received his first message from Jehovah two months before Zechariah was employed, and it is worthy of notice as indicative of their failure that his first errand was to Zerubbabel and Jeshua. (See Hag. 1:1.) It is of the utmost importance (as shown in our exposition of Haggai) that the messages of the prophets should be read in connection with Ezra, for it is in these that the true condition of the people is discovered. It is evident that it was not only the fear of the enemy that led them to desist from their work, but that also their own hearts were settling down upon their own ease and comfort. They found time to build their own houses while saying, "The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built." (Hag. 1:1-5.) How often the people of God,

forgetting that their citizenship is in heaven, and that therefore they are pilgrims, bend their efforts to build houses for themselves in a scene of death and judgment. So the children of the captivity, untouched by the sight of the desolations of Jehovah's house, lying waste as it was, turned aside to erect "ceiled houses" for themselves. But God was not indifferent to the state of His house, if they were, and He "did blow upon" all the increase of the field because of His house that lay waste while they were running ' every man to his own house. (Hag. 1:6-9.)

It was to this state of things that Haggai was sent to call attention, and his words were clothed with such energy and power that in a little more than three weeks the chiefs of the people, and the people themselves, were aroused from their selfish apathy. They obeyed the voice of the Lord their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him; and the people did fear before the Lord. (Compare Hag. 1:1 with vv. 12-15.) It would seem then that verse 1 of our chapter is a general statement of the work of the prophets, and that in verse 2 we have, in fact, the effect of Haggai's first message; or it may be also the general effect of the prophetic work among the people. "Then rose up Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and began to build the house of God which is at Jerusalem: and with them were the prophets of God helping them." This last expression will refer to the continuous work of the prophets during the progress of the building, by which Jehovah encouraged His people to persevere in their labors, unfolding before them the glory of the future in connection with the advent of Messiah and the establishment of His kingdom. The people builded, and the prophets prophesied, both alike filling their appointed places, and both alike fulfilling their task in fellowship with the mind of God. If the prophets spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost (2 Pet. 1:21), it was Jehovah who stirred up the spirit of the builders (Hag. 1:14), and hence all alike labored in the power of the Spirit, and all occupied the places assigned to them by the sovereign action of the grace of God.

The reader should again be reminded that the people did not wait for the renewal of their commission to build from the Gentile authorities. No doubt they were in subjection to the powers that were ordained of God, and a decree had been obtained forbidding them to build, but God Himself had spoken, and if, therefore, they were to render to Caesar the things that were Caesar's, they also were to render to God the things that were God's. When God condescends to speak, His claims are supreme, paramount to every consideration, whatever may be the consequences entailed. This principle was recognized by the builders of a later day, Peter and John, who, when forbidden to speak or teach in the name of Jesus, replied, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.

For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." Acts 4:19, 20. In truth, faith links itself with God Himself, with His objects and His power, and can thus peacefully leave every other question with Him. Hence these children of the captivity obeyed the voice of their God, and went forward with their work knowing that He held the hearts of all men in His hands, and that He could-as He did in the issue-use even the opposition of their enemies to further the work of His house. The record of the manner in which God manifested that He was above all the proud devices of the adversary is contained in the rest of this chapter and in the following one. First we have the action of the Gentile governor, with his companions. We read:

"At the same time came to them Tatnai, governor on this side the river, and Shetharboznai, and their companions, and said thus unto them, Who hath commanded you to build this

house, and to make up this wall?. Then said we

unto them after this manner, What are the names of the men that make this building?" vv. 3, 4.

The governor, in making this inquiry, was undoubtedly within his rights and acting in the interests of his sovereign, inasmuch as a decree prohibiting the building of the city, if not of the temple, had been issued. He could know nothing of any commandment except that of his own king. The children of this world can never understand the claims of God upon His people, and it always seems folly to them that any should brave the displeasure of an earthly monarch to please One in whom they themselves do not believe.

The fourth verse is somewhat ambiguous. Comparing it with verse 10, it is evident that the "we" of verse 4 applies to the enemies of Israel. It was they who asked, "What are the names of the men that make this building?"-their object being to report these transgressors of his commandment to the king. It is still Satan working behind the scene, and whenever God acts on the earth through His people, Satan immediately counterworks. This will be the force of the words, "At the same time." v. 3. We do not read of any persecution of the people during the time of which Haggai speaks, when they were building their own houses. But at once, on their resumption of their work upon Jehovah's house, they are met by new wiles-indeed, open opposition.

The house of Jehovah was the testimony for that day, and it is this which Satan always hates. If believers settle down in the world, mind earthly things, become "dwellers on the earth"-using this phrase in its moral sense-Satan will let them alone, but the moment, wrought upon by the Spirit of God, they apprehend His mind and go forth in living testimony, the adversary will seek to turn them aside by any art or device which is likely to accomplish his purpose. We have a striking and perfect illustration of this principle in the life of our blessed Lord, as well as in the exhibition of Satan's powerlessness to touch His people as long as they are maintained in dependence and obedience (see Matt. 4).

On the other hand, if Satan is merciless in his opposition, God is not indifferent to the needs and weaknesses of His servants when engaged in the conflict. We are thus told, immediately after the new effort of the enemy to deter the Jews from their work, "But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, that they could not cause them to cease, till the matter came to Darius." The eye of God was upon His beloved people, beholding their danger, in order that He might minister the needed courage in the presence of the foe, to give them the consciousness of His presence and shelter, and thus to animate them to perseverance in their work. And indeed it is a wonderful thing for our souls when we in any measure realize that the eye of God is upon us. It produces in us that holy fear which makes us fearless of man, and also gives us the sweet sense of the overshadowing presence and protection of Him who has in His grace bound us to Himself by imperishable ties, while it brings to our lips the victorious challenge of the Apostle, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" We are thus enabled to pursue the path of service to which we have been called in calmness and peace, though surrounded by powerful enemies, because we are assured of the omnipotent succor of our God. It acts as an incentive both to perseverance and fidelity.

We have in the next place the copy of the letter which Tatnai and his companions sent to King Darius, from which fuller details of their visit to Jerusalem may be gathered. A brief analysis of this

letter will be both interesting and profitable. They were evidently impressed with the work of the feeble Jews, for they tell the king, "We went into the province of Judea, to the house of the great God, which is builded with great stones, and timber is laid in the walls, and this work goeth fast on, and prospereth in their hands." v. 8. Unlike the letter given in the former chapter, this gives at least a faithful report of the facts, though the object of both was to stop the progress of the work, while the enemy in this case bears testimony to the diligence and devotedness of the builders.

The next two verses (9, 10) are a repetition of verses 3 and 4, for the information of the king, and then from verses 11-16 we have the answer which the elders of the Jews returned to their interrogators. Nothing could be more simple and beautiful than the way in which they give their own history, and that of the temple which they were engaged in building. In the very forefront of all, they declare themselves as "servants of the God of heaven and earth." In dealing with the wiles of Satan there is no weapon more potent than the bold confession of our true character. The beginning of Peter's fall, or rather the first outward step toward it, was his denial that he belonged to Jesus of Nazareth. And how often since that day has it been the precursor of shame and defeat! It was blessed, therefore, that these Jews were able to take their stand upon this open confession that they were God's servants; it was blessed for their own souls, the result surely of knowing that the eye of God was upon them, and it was at the same time their complete justification for commencing their work in spite of the king's decree. Moreover, they narrated the cause of the destruction of the house in past days. Their "fathers had provoked the God of heaven unto wrath," and He had given them "into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed this house, and carried the people away into Babylon." vv. 11, 12.

What a history! Solomon had built the house, and Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed it, and the cause of all this sorrow was their fathers' sins. And what a tale of long-suffering grace and mercy was included between these two dates, and what a revelation of the heart of man-under divine culture as it was. In a word, between those two epochs is contained the history of the kingdom under man's responsibility, established in glory and splendor under Solomon as prince of peace (David was the first king, but it was the erection of the temple that marked the establishment of the kingdom), and destroyed in the reign of weak and wicked Zedekiah. (Read 2 Chron. 36:11-21.) Furthermore, they explain that the work on which they were employed was the result of a decree of Cyrus, in proof of which they told how he had committed to their care the vessels of gold and silver belonging to the temple, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken away (vv. 13-15). "Then came the same Shesh-bazzar, and laid the foundation of the house of God which is in Jerusalem: and since that time even until now hath it been in building, and yet it is not finished." v. 16. If the account so given by the Jews was correct, they were entirely justified even in the eyes of man, for it was a well-known characteristic of the laws of the Medes and Persians (and Cyrus was king of Persia) that they could not be changed (Dan. 6), and their adversaries were shown to be in error through ignorance of the law.

Hence the letter concludes: "Now therefore, if it seem good to the king, let there be search made in the king's treasure house, which is there at Babylon, whether it be so, that a decree was made of Cyrus the king to build this house of God at Jerusalem, and let the king send his pleasure to us concerning this matter." v. 13.

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Here we read that the king ordered the search to be made, and the decree of Cyrus was found (ch. 6:1-5). The statement of the Jews was thus confirmed in every particular, and even more, for it was now discovered that Cyrus had not only issued his decree for the rebuilding of the temple, but had also ordered that "the expenses be given out of the king's house." He also directed the restoration of the sacred vessels which Nebuchadnezzar had taken away.

Acting then upon this decree, Darius commanded Tatnai, Shethar-boznai, and their companions to cease to molest the Jews, and to allow them to continue their work in peace. To the eye of faith, God was manifestly working behind the scenes, and using the power of the enemy for the accomplishment of His own purposes, affording another instance of how He causes all things to work together for good to them that love Him. For not only did Darius, on the interposition of their adversaries, confirm the decree of Cyrus, but he also issued another to the effect that all the necessary provision for the house of God should be made at his expense.

He says, "Moreover I make a decree what ye shall do to the elders of these Jews for the building of this house of God: that of the king's goods, even of the tribute beyond the river, forthwith expenses be given unto these men, that they be not hindered. And that which they have need of, both young bullocks, and rams, and lambs, for the burnt offerings of the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the appointment of the priests which are at Jerusalem, let it be given them day by day without fail: that they may offer sacrifices of sweet savors unto the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king, and of his sons." vv. 8-10.

"When a man's ways please the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him" (Pro. 16:7); and when found, therefore, in the path of His will, he may safely leave his enemies in the Lord's hands. So these elders of the Jews discovered, and they might have learned the lesson often taught in the Word of God, and ever needed by His people, "They that be with us are more than they that be with them."

Thus God Himself was the shield of His people while they were engaged in His service, and as long as they were obedient to His Word, and counting upon Him for strength and defense, it was not possible for them to be hindered. In this way Satan once more overreached himself and was used to further the work that he hated. The Apostle wrote in after centuries, "I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which have happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel." Phil. 1:12. When Satan succeeded in shutting Paul up in prison, he thought he had gained a victory, even as he did in the most notable case of all, when he urged the Jews to demand the crucifixion of their Messiah, but in both instances his apparent success was a most disastrous defeat. We may well, therefore, whatever the opposition or persecution, go calmly forward, courageous in perseverance because it is the Lord's work in which we are engaged, and He has said, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

Darius went still further. He added, "Also I have made a decree, that whosoever shall alter this work, let timber be pulled down from his house, and being set up, let him be hanged thereon; and let his house be made a dunghill for this. And the God that hath caused His name to dwell there destroy all kings and people, that shall put to their hand to alter and to destroy this house of God which is at Jerusalem. I Darius have made a decree; let it be done with speed." vv. 11, 12. The king thus surrounded the Jews with his authority, and guarded them against further molestation by attaching the penalty of death to interference with their work. And from the language employed, it

can scarcely be doubted that Darius himself had some knowledge of "the God of heaven," for he speaks of Him as causing "His name to dwell there." We see God disposing his heart in favor of His people and of the work of building His house. The effect of the decree was instantaneous, for we read that Tatnai and his companions "did speedily" according to that which Darius had sent, and forthwith all opposition ceased, and the enemies of the work disappeared from the scene.

Not only had the opposition to the work of the house of God now ceased, but God, in His care for His people, and in response to their faith, had also turned the heart of the king toward them, so that his royal power had now become their shelter and defense. Hence we read:

"And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they builded, and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia. And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king." vv. 14, 15.

Before entering upon the particulars of this statement, we call to mind a striking parallel from the history of the building of the house of God in the New Testament. In connection with the death of Stephen, there arose "a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles." Acts 8:1.

Soon after, on the visit of Saul, after his conversion, (in fact, several years after his conversion-see Galatians 2:1), to Jerusalem, opposition was once more aroused, and the Grecians went about to slay Saul, and the brethren sent him forth to Tarsus (Acts 9:29, 30). The statement follows, "Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified [built up]; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied." Acts 9:31. God had given them rest from persecuting enemies, and they, by His grace, used the opportunity to build themselves up upon their most holy faith. So it was with the elders of the Jews. They builded, and they were encouraged by the comfort of the Holy Ghost as ministered by the prophets.

It is important to notice these two classes-the builders and the prophets. As pointed out when expounding on Haggai, these two characters of service can never be confounded. A builder cannot assume the functions of a prophet, nor could a prophet exchange his prophetic mantle for the trowel of the builder. Hence the Apostle says, "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering." Rom. 12:6, 7. A builder is one whose work is to lay stones upon the foundation-one, that is, who is used of God by preaching or teaching to gather souls, to bring them as living stones to the foundation which is Jesus Christ (see 1 Cor. 3). A prophet is one who both urges the people forward in their work by the communication of the mind of God, and who also tests everything by His Word. A prophet sets the conscience in the presence of God, maintains therefore the sense of responsibility, and ministers guidance, rebuke, or exhortation according to the need of the moment, speaking as he is moved by the Holy Ghost-now, of course, through the written Word, but guided of the Spirit to the word suited to the case.

Thus the elders of Israel labored, and the prophets prophesied, and it is also recorded that "they prospered through the prophesying," etc. The reason is evident. The Holy Spirit was acting in power, first through the prophets; second, in producing a response to the Word of God as ministered by the prophets in the hearts of the builders. All through the history of the kingdom, the nation prospered when they heeded the voices of their prophets, and, on the other hand, every evil consequence flowed from disregard of these heaven-sent admonitions and warnings. Nor is it different in the Church of God. Whenever "the builders" are attentive to the prophets who unfold and apply the mind of God as revealed in His Word, they prosper, their work is durable, and they themselves receive blessing. But if they are careless of divine guidance and warning, and work after their own thoughts, they only corrupt the work upon which they are engaged, and introduce wood, hay, and stubble in the place of gold, silver, and precious stones. Their work may seem greater, and even more prosperous to the eye of man, but it remains to be tested at a future day, and the Lord alone is the judge of true prosperity of service.

There was now no further interruption, for they continued their work until they had it finished, and, as the Spirit of God carefully notes, it was finished "according to the commandment [or decree] of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia." All was done, therefore, in obedience to God, and by the permission of the earthly power to which, by God's appointment, they were in subjection. Blessed privilege for these workmen to have so labored, and no small honor, it may be added, for these Gentile monarchs thus to be associated with and to be used for the execution of the purposes of God! No doubt-and the lesson ought not to be passed over-the names of the kings are thus mentioned to show, for one reason, the value God attaches to the principle of obedience to constituted authority.

The only limit, as before pointed out, is where the "powers that be" intrude their claims into the province in which God is supreme. The moment human authority clashes with the claims of God over the soul, it becomes null and void. With this exception (Acts 4:19), the believer has ever to submit to the powers that are ordained of God (Rom. 13).

Then the date on which the house was completed is added. It was on the third day of the month of Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king. That is, there were four years occupied from the recommencement of the building until its completion (chap. 4:24). How many years had passed away since the foundation was laid cannot be exactly ascertained, inasmuch as the length of the reign of the sovereigns between Cyrus and Darius is not given. It could scarcely have been less, and was probably more, than twenty years. With what long-suffering and patience God had borne with the failures of His people! And now that His purpose is accomplished, and the house builded, with what delight He calls our attention to the labors of His people. Although all had been wrought by His grace, in that same grace He reckons to His people that which He Himself had wrought. And so it ever has been, and will be, as the judgment seat of Christ will abundantly testify. For if any of us receive for the good things we have done in the body, we shall confess to His praise that He Himself was the source and the power of all the good works which He has been pleased to commend.

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Jehovah's house now being completed, we have next the account of the dedication.

"And the children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of God with joy, and offered at the dedication of this house of God a hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs; and for a sin offering for all Israel, twelve he goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel. And they set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites in their courses, for the service of God, which is at Jerusalem; as it is written in the book of Moses." vv. 16-18.

It was only natural that they should rejoice at such a moment, for the house of their God was the expression of all the blessings of the covenant in which they stood. And at last, after weary years of failure, difficulties, disappointments, and sorrow, it stood completed before their eyes. It was for this that they had been brought up out of Babylon, and if any of them had sown in tears, they now reaped in joy. But their own feebleness and the poverty of their circumstances may be seen by contrasting this dedication with that of Solomon's temple. Then the king offered a sacrifice of twenty and two thousand oxen, and a hundred and twenty thousand sheep, besides sheep and oxen which could not be told nor numbered for multitude, which were sacrificed before the ark (2 Chron. 7:5; 5:6). If they had dwelt on this aspect, their joy, as on laying the foundation, might well have been accompanied with lamentation and tears. Faith, however, has to do with unseen things, and it could thus recall to the mind of this feeble remnant that Jehovah was no less mighty and no less merciful for them than for Solomon.

The house might be less glorious and they themselves only poor subjects of a Gentile monarch, but if God were for them, as He was, the resources available to faith were as unbounded as ever. This truth that Christ remains the same for His people in a day of difficulty as in a season of prosperity cannot be impressed too deeply on our minds. To be in the power of this raises us, as nothing else can, above our circumstances, and gives us courage to press on, whatever the perils of the path.

Faith was in exercise in these children of the captivity, for we find that they offered a sin offering for all Israel. All Israel was not there- only representatives of two or three tribes-but these few were on the ground of the nation before God, and they understood this, and thus included in their sin offering all the tribes of Israel. This is surely a significant lesson for the remnant gathered out in these last days to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. They may be few in number, and both poor and feeble, but if they enter into the truth of their position, they will include in their hearts and in their prayers all the members of the one body. In spirit they will occupy the ground on which they have been set "with all the saints;" or otherwise they will only add another to the many sects which already divide the Church of God. This becomes easy when faith is in lively exercise, for the faith that on the one hand links itself with God, on the other, links itself with all His people.

They were also characterized at this moment by obedience. They regulated the service of the house-the priests and the Levites-"as it is written in the book of Moses." The path of obedience, whether for the individual or for the assembly, is the only path of blessing. At such a time-just when the house of God was completed-it would have appeared folly to them for man to have intruded his thoughts into the house of God. Their only concern was to know what God had said-what He had directed. So it was when the house of God was built at Pentecost, in the apostolic Church; and so it was when God graciously permitted the revival of the truth of the Church at the beginning of the last century. But what happened after the departure of the apostles

has happened again (as also with the remnant, as will be seen in the closing chapter of Ezra); that is, the Word of God as the sole regulator of His house is often displaced by man for his own convenience, or for his own wisdom.

No danger is more subtle than the gradual creeping into the assembly of human thoughts and arrangements in substitution for the Word of God. In effect, although not so intended, it is the deposition of the Lord from His place of supremacy over His people. There never was a time, therefore, when it was more necessary to remember the words of our risen Lord: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

Following the dedication of the house, although actually a short interval elapsed, the Passover was observed.

"And the children of the captivity kept the passover upon the fourteenth day of the first month. For the priests and the Levites were purified together, all of them were pure, and killed the passover for all the children of the captivity, and for their brethren the priests, and for themselves. And the children of Israel, which were come again out of captivity, and all such as had separated themselves unto them from the filthiness of the heathen of the land, to seek the Lord God of Israel, did eat, and kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy: for the Lord had made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel." vv. 19-22.

The connection is exceedingly beautiful. The house of their God finished, His people celebrate the memorial of their redemption from the land of Egypt, and thus remind themselves, to the praise of Jehovah, of the ground on which they stood, and of the fact that the foundation of all their blessing, of all God's actings in grace toward them, was the blood of the slain lamb. This, according to the word of Moses, was "a night to be much observed unto the Lord for bringing them out from the land of Egypt: this is that night of the Lord to be observed of all the children of Israel in their generations." Exod. 12:42. Nothing could show more distinctly that these children of the captivity were at this moment in possession of the mind of the Lord than their observance of the Passover. Passing by the glories of the kingdom, they traveled upward until they reached the charter of all they possessed, whether in title or in prospect, and there confessed God as the God of their salvation. Thus they built on what God was for them on the ground of the blood of the passover lamb, and in that they found, as individual souls always find, a rock which is both immutable and immovable. Their hearts were in this feast, "For," as we read, "the priests and the Levites were purified together, all of them were pure." (See Numb. 9:10-14.) They discerned what was due to Him whose feast they kept.

There were others besides themselves who united with them in this observance—those who had "separated themselves unto them from the filthiness of the heathen of the land, to seek the Lord God of Israel." Whether these were of the few Israelites who had been left behind in the land when their brethren were carried away captive, or whether they were of the heathen, is not mentioned. In Exod. 12 it is said, "There shall no stranger eat thereof;" but it is added, "When a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the passover to the Lord, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it." (See also Numb. 9:14.) They were probably therefore "strangers," and if so, they had been attracted to the children of the captivity by witnessing the divine power that was seen in their separation from evil. Alas! we do not read of any more being

thus drawn; rather the children of Israel were drawn afterward to the heathen. It is always the same with the people of God. When the Spirit of God works in their midst, and when, as a consequence, they walk in any measure according to the nature of their calling, there will always be numbers, constrained by what they behold, seeking their company and fellowship. When, on the other hand, life and power vanish, and are succeeded by coldness and indifference, it is the world that attracts, not the Church. Hence it is that every movement in the Church of God is most influential at the outset, because then the display of the Spirit's power is more manifest.

After the Passover, they observed, according to the Word of God, the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy. (See Exod. 13) This feast followed immediately upon the Passover, and derives its special significance from it. The Apostle has explained this to us. He says, "Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." 1 Cor. 5:7, 8. That is, the moment we are redeemed God claims us, and He desires us to respond to His claims by holy lives-separation from evil, and separation unto Himself. The feast lasted seven days; that is, a perfect period-typically, the period of our lives. Thus in the Old as in the New Testament all God's claims upon His people are founded on redemption. "Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price." This, whatever the change of words, is the unvarying note, and teaches the uniform lesson, everywhere repeated, that since He is holy, we also are to be holy. Leaven must not be found in our dwellings, but we are to keep the feast perpetually with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. Nor should these two things ever be separated in

teaching. If grace-grace unbounded-is displayed

in our redemption, grace should be operative in the hearts of the redeemed. If God calls us out of the world, it is not that we should go back to and find our home again in the world. If by His grace we are washed in the precious blood of Christ, He surely looks that we should keep our garments undefiled. If, then, the memorials of our redemption are sweet to us, if we delight to be found around the Lord's table, to feast upon the emblems of His body and His blood, let us also delight to keep the feast of unleavened bread in testimony to Him who has redeemed us.

It was a time of joy to this poor remnant, for the blessing of God rested upon them, and the heart of the Gentile king was turned toward them. For a season the clouds had disappeared, and they could rest in the sunshine of heavenly and earthly favor.

Here the first part of the book closes; the remaining four chapters are occupied with the mission and work of Ezra.

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We now enter upon the second part of this book. In the first part, the return of the people from Babylon and the building of the temple are narrated, and in the second, we have the personal mission and the work of Ezra. Again it should be noticed that the signs of the transference of governmental power in the earth from the Jew to the Gentile are everywhere apparent. Thus the date of Ezra's mission is given as "in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia," and indeed his commission for his work from the king is given at length (vv. 11-26) in proof that God's people were at this time under the authority of the Gentiles, and that God Himself ever recognizes the powers which have their source in His own sovereign appointment.

It may aid the reader if the structure of chapters 7 and 8 is first briefly indicated. After Ezra's genealogy (chap. 7:1-5), a short summary is given of the king's permission for him to go, of his journey up to Jerusalem, and of the object of his mission (vv. 6-10). Then follows the king's letter, conferring upon Ezra authority to act, as well as the necessary powers for the execution of his work (vv. 11-26). This chapter closes with Ezra's praise to God for having inclined the heart of the king to Jehovah's temple, and for having extended mercy to himself before the king, etc. (vv. 27, 28). In chapter 8:1-14 we have a catalog of those who voluntarily availed themselves of the royal permission to go up from Babylon with Ezra. All these having been assembled by "the river that runneth to Ahava," Ezra, finding that none of the sons of Levi were there, took measures to secure "ministers for the house of our God" (vv. 15-20). All being thus prepared, two things follow: first, fasting and supplication before God (vv. 21-23), second, the appointment of twelve of the chief of the priests to take charge of the silver, the gold, and the vessels which had been offered for "the house of our God" (vv. 24-30). Last, we have the journey, and the arrival at Jerusalem, together with the necessary preparations for the commencement of Ezra's work (vv. 31-36).

Thus we see that chapters 7 and 8 should be read together, forming as they do a continuous narrative, of which chapter 7:1-10 is the preface or introduction.

The genealogy of Ezra is traced back to Aaron (vv. 1-5). He was one therefore entitled to all the rights and privileges of the priesthood (see chap. 2:62), and moreover he was a ready scribe in the law of his God, and thereby qualified to be the instructor of the people in the statutes of Jehovah. (see Lev. 10:8-11; Mal. 2:4-7.) He became a priest by birth and consecration, but he only became "a ready scribe in the law of Moses, which the Lord God of Israel had given," by personal study of the Word. Inherited office therefore, even with the Jews, could not bestow the qualifications for its exercise. These could only come from individual converse with God in the Scriptures, for while by virtue of consecration the priest was entitled by grace to minister before God, he could only minister acceptably when all was done in obedience to the Word, and it was impossible that he could teach unless he himself were acquainted with the mind of God. It was neglect of this second part of their office that led to the failure and corruption of the priesthood, for so completely was the Word of God forgotten in the days of Josiah, that his finding a copy of the law in the temple was a memorable event in his reign.

Therefore, it is of surpassing interest-like finding a beautiful flower in the midst of a sandy desert-to discover in Ezra one who, while he cherished his priestly descent, found his joy and strength in the law of his God, and in verse 10 the secret of his attainments is unfolded. He had "prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it." This is a significant and instructive statement-"Ezra had prepared his heart." So the Apostle prayed for the Ephesian believers, that the eyes of their heart (heart is the right reading) might be enlightened, that they might know what is the hope of His calling, etc. (chap. 1:18). Yes, it is to the heart that the revelations of God are made, even as it was to the heart of Mary Magdalene rather than to the intelligence of His disciples that the Lord manifested Himself at the sepulcher. Nor can we attach too much importance to this truth. Preparation of heart (and this also comes from the Lord) is everything, whether for the study of the Word, for prayer, or for worship. (See 1 Cor. 8:1-3; Heb. 10:22; 1 John 3:20-23.)

There is still another thing. If Ezra prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, it was first and foremost that he might do it. It was not therefore to increase his knowledge, or to add to his repute

as a teacher, but it was that his heart, life, and ways might be formed by it-that his own walk might be the embodiment of the truth, and thus well-pleasing to the Lord. Then followed teaching, "and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments." This order can never be neglected with impunity, for where teaching does not flow out of a heart that is itself subject to the truth, it is not only powerless to influence others, but it will also harden the heart of the teacher himself. This is the secret of many a failure in the Church of God. The saints are often startled by the sudden departure from the truth, or by the fall, of those who had occupied the place of teachers, but whenever the state of the heart is overlooked, and the activity of mind is permitted upon divine things, the soul is exposed to some of Satan's most subtle temptations. A true teacher should be able, in measure, like Paul, to point to his own example and to say, as he did to the Thessalonians, "Ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake." (See also Acts 20 and Phil. 3)

It is evident that Ezra was in communion with the mind of God as to His people. His heart was upon them, for we learn that he had sought permission of the king to go up to Jerusalem, and that "the king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the Lord his God upon him." v. 6. What he desired was the blessing of his people, the people of his God, but being under subjection to the king, he had to obtain his leave, for the Lord will not have us, even for His own service, slight the authority under which we are placed. If, however, the Lord had put the desire to serve Him in the heart of Ezra, He will influence the king to answer His servant's request.

How good it is to leave ourselves in His hands! We are often tempted to leap over the barriers which man may place in our path, to force open the doors which the hand of man may have closed, but it is for our comfort and strength to remember that the Lord can make His way plain before our face whenever He wills, and that our part is to wait quietly on Him, ready to go forward when He shall speak the word. The recognition of the hand of God upon him was a characteristic of this devoted servant (see v. 9; chap. 8:18, 22, 31, etc.), and it was at once the source both of his patience and of his courage.

The details of the journey, of which we have a short account in verses 7-9, will occupy us in the next chapter, and hence we may pass at once to the king's letter of authorization to Ezra-a letter which empowered him to act, defined the object of his mission, and provided, through the king's treasurers beyond the river, the means for the execution of his service in connection with the ordering of the house of Jehovah.

First, after the salutation-a salutation which shows that Ezra was a true witness in the midst of the Gentiles-the king decrees that "All they of the people of Israel, and of His priests and Levites, in my realm, which are minded of their own free will to go up to Jerusalem, go with thee." v. 13. Cyrus, as seen in chapter 1, had also accorded the same privilege, and now, after the lapse of many years, once again the Spirit of God works through the king, to deliver His people. But no human constraint was to be exercised; if any man went up it must be voluntarily, for God would have willing servants. If under constraint, it must be only that of the Holy Spirit. Then from verses 12-20 the scope and objects of Ezra's mission are carefully defined even as to its details. He was "sent of the king, and of his seven counselors, to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, according to the law of thy God which is in thine hand." v. 14. He was also to take charge of the silver and gold which the king and his counselors had freely offered to the God of Israel, and also of that found in the province of Babylon, together with the free will offering of the people, etc. This

was to be expended in the purchase. of animals, for sacrifice, etc., or as Ezra and his brethren might decide "after the will of" their God.

The reader may gather the particulars of Ezra's commission for himself; however, his attention may be directed to one or two of its instructive features. It cannot fail to be observed that this Gentile monarch refers everything to the will of God, or, to speak more exactly, that he directs that all should be ordered in subjection to that will. It would almost seem, Gentile though he was, that he was in full fellowship with the object of Ezra, and from the confession of Jehovah as the God of heaven (vv. 21, 23), it is not impossible that grace had visited his heart. Whether this were so or not, he carefully provides for the execution of Ezra's mission in every possible way, and at the same time entrusts Ezra with the government of his people "after the wisdom of God." Finally, penalties were attached to disobedience to the law of God, and to the law of the king, rising even to death itself. The lesson lies in the fact that God is sovereign in the choice of His instruments, that He does according to His will among the inhabitants of the earth as in the army of heaven, and that none can stay His hand, or say to Him, What doest Thou? An illustration of this is found in our chapter in that "Artaxerxes, king of kings," and "Ezra the priest, a scribe of the law of God," are yoked together for the execution of God's thoughts for His people and for His house in Jerusalem.

Ezra himself is filled with adoration as he contemplates the wonder-working power of the hand of his God, for having recorded the letter of the king, he breaks out into praise: "Blessed be the Lord God of our fathers, which hath put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem: and hath extended mercy unto me before the king, and his counselors, and before all the king's mighty princes." vv. 27, 28.

He adds, "And I was strengthened as the hand of the Lord my God was upon me, and I gathered together out of Israel chief men to go up with me." In this he showed himself to be a true man of faith; he traced everything up to God. He lost sight of himself, and to his soul God was all in all. It was thus not his request (v. 6) that induced the king to act, but it was God who put the thing into the king's heart; it was not Ezra's influence that commended him to the king and his princes, but it was God that extended mercy to him in their presence; it was not in his own power that he assembled the chief men to go up with him, but it was God who strengthened him with His own hand upon him.

In all this he is a striking example to every believer, and happy is the one who, like Ezra, has learned to live in the presence of God, to look beyond the actions of men to the power that controls them all, and to receive all, favor or persecution, aids or hindrances, from the Lord. That soul has acquired the secret of perfect peace amid the confusion and turmoil of the world, as well as in the presence of Satan's power.

The Book of Ezra: Restoration From Babylon

The close connection between this and the preceding chapter will be perceived at once. Chapter 7 closed with the words, "And I gathered together out of Israel chief men to go up with me"; this commences with, "These are now the chief of their fathers, and this is the genealogy of them that went up with me from Babylon, in the reign of Artaxerxes the king." This genealogy reaches to the end of verse 14, and it shows how precious to God were the very names of those who responded to His call at such a moment. The response itself is the fruit of His grace; but in the exercise of that

same grace He is pleased to impute to His people that which He Himself had produced in their hearts. It was a goodly company, numbering over fifteen hundred souls, who were thus gathered to return to the land of their fathers-the land of all their traditions, as well as the land of all their hopes.

The first act of Ezra was to assemble them by "the river that runneth to Ahava; and there abode we in tents three days: and I viewed the people, and the priests, and found there none of the sons of Levi." v. 15. There were two, but only two, priests; namely, Gershom, son of Phinehas, and Daniel, son of Ithamar; but of the Levitical family, outside of the priesthood, there was absolutely none. Well might Ezra have been concerned, for it was a sad symptom of the state into which the people had fallen. The priests alone enjoyed access to the holy place of the house of their God, and the Levites alone were the appointed ministers in all that appertained in its service, and yet when the proclamation was made that they might return and once more resume their privileges, they were untouched and indifferent. They had found a home in the very place where their fathers had hung their harps on the willows, and wept when they remembered Zion. And it is the same with God's people now. The moment they are tempted by the enemy to "mind earthly things," they become careless of their spiritual privileges and, if not aroused from their lethargy, may even become "enemies of the cross of Christ." No child of God who understands his heavenly calling could be content to dwell in Babylon.

Nor was Ezra content to leave the Levites behind. Besides, he knew the needs of the Lord's house, and it pained this devoted servant to find them caring for their own things rather than for the courts of Jehovah. He accordingly took measures to reach their consciences, that even yet they might join him in his mission to Jerusalem. To this end he sent for some of their chief men, among whom were Joiarib and Elnathan, "men of understanding." It is well for the people of God when, in times of decay and corruption, there are still men of understanding to be found. It is by these that God preserves His saints from sinking into still deeper depths, and keeps alive what of faith and hope may still remain. Ezra knew where to put his hand on some of these; and his zeal for the work on which his heart was set is expressed in the commission with which he entrusted them.

He says, "And I sent them with commandment unto Iddo, the chief at the place of Casiphia, and I told them what they should say unto Iddo, and to his brethren the Nethinim, at the place Casiphia, that they should bring unto us ministers for the house of our God." v. 17. It is said of the Lord Jesus, or rather, speaking in spirit, He Himself said, "The zeal of Thine house hath eaten Me up" (Psalm 69:9; John 2:17); and this was because the glory of the Father was ever His supreme object. God's name, God's honor, were ever the delight of His soul. And Ezra in his measure, desired Jehovah's honor in His house, and was therefore in fellowship with the heart of God Himself. This was the secret of his earnestness in seeking to obtain "ministers for the house of our God."

God wrought with him, as he himself confesses, for he says, "By the good hand of our God upon us they brought us a man of understanding, of the sons of Mahli, the son of Levi, the son of Israel; and Sherebiah, with his sons and his brethren, eighteen; and Hashabiah, and with him Jeshaiah of the sons of Merari, his brethren and their sons, twenty; also of the Nethinim, whom David and the princes had appointed for the service of the Levites, two hundred and twenty Nethinim: all of them

were expressed by name." vv. 18-20. There were still less than forty Levites, while there were two hundred and twenty Nethinirn. It is another proof that amid the carnal ease of Babylon, the national hopes and privileges of the nation had ceased to exert any practical power upon their minds. By the side of the sloth of the Levites, it is beautiful to notice the number of the Nethinim (probably of an alien race) that obeyed the summons of Ezra.

It may be in reference to this that it is said, "All of them were expressed by name." God notices their faithfulness, and caused it to be recorded.

All was now ready, as far as collecting the people was concerned; but both Ezra and the people needed to prepare for the journey which they had undertaken. Hence he says, "Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of Him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance. For I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way: because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek Him; but His power and His wrath is against all them that forsake Him. So we fasted and besought our God for this: and He was entreated of us." vv. 21-23.

The work of God is never lightly to be entered upon, and it was with a true discernment both of the character of the work, and of what was due to His glory who had called him to it, that Ezra proclaimed this fast, that he and the people might afflict themselves before their God. The flesh cannot be used in any shape or form in the Lord's service; and it is only when in true separation from all that it might feed upon, and in humiliation in the presence of God, that our motives, aims, and objects are tested and become apparent. Thus among those who had gathered around Ezra, some might have been attracted by other things than the welfare of the house of their God. This is always the case in any action of the Holy Spirit. Ezra, therefore, would have all searched by the light of God's holy presence, that they might learn that nothing would avail to protect and guide them in their journey, and nothing could sustain them by the way or in their after-service but the good hand of their God. Thus it was that he and they together fasted, afflicted their souls, and prayed.

The question may well arise whether in this day our service for God is not often too easily taken up; whether it would not conduce to spiritual power and efficacy if, before we embarked upon anything for God, we were more frequently found in this attitude of Ezra and his companions. Far be it from us to insinuate for one moment that the Lord's servants do not thus seek His face before commencing their service. Our question concerns rather collective waiting upon God, with fasting, before work is entered upon in which the saints at large have a common interest. It was understood in the early Church, for we read: "Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets.... As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate Me now [This word "now," or some such, should be inserted as a translation of the Greek particle, and as showing the connection between the ministering and the fasting, and the command of the Holy Spirit; in fact, the Holy Spirit responded to the prayers of these prophets.] Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." Acts 13:1, 2. If there were but a revival of such a practice in the power of the Holy Ghost (for to imitate it without the power would be worse than useless), far larger results from service in teaching and ministry might be confidently anticipated.

Another reason for this gathering actuated Ezra. He was a man of faith, and he had avowed before the king his confidence in God for protection during his journey, and he would not therefore ask for a military escort. And now, in consistency with his profession, he, together with the people, cast himself on God for guidance for a "right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance." As every believer knows, it is one thing to express trust in God before a difficulty comes, and another thing to maintain that dependence in the presence of, and when passing through the difficulty. Ezra was able to do both, and was able to rest in the assurance that the hand of his God would be upon all them that seek Him for good, and that His power and His wrath would be against all them that forsake Him. All this he doubtless told out before the Lord during this fast, and indeed he had pledged the faithfulness of God before a Gentile monarch, so that the name and honor of Jehovah were concerned in appearing for His servant. Ezra tells us, "So we fasted and besought our God for this: and He was entreated of us." Yes, God delights to respond to the confidence of His people, and to appear for those who testify to what He is for them amid trials and dangers.

The reader should remark that it was no imaginary danger which Ezra had conjured up, for he records afterward to the praise of his God that "He delivered us from the hand of the enemy, and of such as lay in wait by the way." v. 31. Surely God is the refuge and strength of His people, and a very present help for them in trouble, and they would know it more fully if, like Ezra, they did but learn to count upon Him as all-sufficient in all possible circumstances. When Nehemiah made the same journey some years after, he was accompanied by captains of the army and horsemen (Neh. 2:9). In him faith was not in such lively exercise, though he had a true heart for the Lord's interests. How much better to trust in the Lord than in a visible arm! And they that wait on Him will, like Ezra, never be ashamed.

In the next place Ezra "separated twelve of the chief of the priests, Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their brethren," to take charge of the offerings he had received for the house of their God until they should arrive at Jerusalem (vv. 24-30). The ground of the choice was that they were "holy unto the Lord," as also were the vessels (v. 28). As the prophet said, "Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord." Isa. 52:11. And this we know was according to the divine order, for none but the priests and Levites could touch or carry the holy vessels or furniture of the house of God (see Numb. 4).

Out of a blind misconception of this and of the nature of Christianity, has grown the ecclesiastical custom of setting apart an order of men, the clergy, for ministration in the Church. It is quite true that those who minister in any way from the Lord to His people must needs be set apart for their service; but this must be accomplished, not by the hands of men, but by the sovereign action in the grace of God through the power of the Holy Ghost. Under law there was a distinct class of men -the priests and the Levites-but these were divinely appointed and divinely consecrated; but under grace, while there are still distinctions of gifts and services (1 Cor. 12), all believers alike are priests, and as such have an established title to appear in the holiest in the immediate presence of God.

It was then to the custody of the priests that Ezra committed the holy vessels, and the silver and the gold, which had been given as a free will offering unto the Lord God of their fathers. He enjoined them to watch and keep these things "until ye weigh them before the chief of the priests

and the Levites, and the chief of the fathers of Israel, at Jerusalem, in the chambers of the house of the Lord." v. 29. The expression "weigh them" contains a principle of importance. It was not that Ezra doubted the fidelity of the priests he had selected, but even as the Apostle of a later age, he would provide "for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men." 2 Cor. 8:21. The people might have had full confidence in the integrity of both Ezra and of the priests, but Ezra would remove all occasion for the enemy's work by having the vessels, and the silver and the gold weighed when put into the priest's hands, and again weighed when delivered. He thus proved his and their fidelity. And surely this is a godly, scriptural example to be followed by those who in any way have charge of the offerings of the Lord's people. Such should be careful to render an account of their stewardship, and not to be pressed to give it.

Many difficulties in the Church of God might have been obviated if this practice had been adopted. It may further be noted that on reaching Jerusalem the weighing was done by others than Ezra, "and all the weight was written at that time." (vv. 33, 34.) In modern language, the accounts of Ezra were checked and audited, and this was done on the fourth day after the completion of their journey.

In verse 31 we have a short statement (already alluded to) concerning their journey. It simply records the faithfulness of their God in answer to their prayers. "Then we departed from the river of Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go unto Jerusalem: and the hand of our God was upon us, and He delivered us from the hand of the enemy, and of such as lay in wait by the way. And we came to Jerusalem, and abode there three days." In chapter 7:9 it is said that they began to go up upon the first day of the first month, this being the probable date of gathering the people to the river Ahava (chap. 8:15). The actual journey occupied therefore a little less than four months, and Ezra testifies that God safely guided them through all its perils and dangers, and shielded them from all their foes. Truly, "the name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe." Pro. 18:10.

Nor were they unmindful of the Lord after the difficulties of their journey were over, for the "children of those that had been carried away, which were come out of the captivity, offered burnt offerings unto the God of Israel, twelve bullocks for all Israel, ninety and six rams, seventy and seven lambs, twelve he goats for a sin offering: all this was a burnt offering unto the Lord."

It is touching in the extreme to see this feeble remnant, as also was the case at the dedication of the house of God (chap. 6:17), embrace in their faith the whole of Israel. They were but few in number, but they could accept no narrower ground than that of the twelve tribes, and to this they testified by the number of their offerings. It is the same now, or should be so, with those who are gathered out to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ on the ground of the one body. They also may be few, feeble, and poor; but if they have any intelligence of the wealthy place into which they have been brought, they will refuse any narrower ground than that of all the members of the one body, and if they hold this truth in power, their sacrifices of praise will bear witness to it in the presence of all. Failing to do so, they degenerate, whatever their profession, into the narrowest sectarianism, than which nothing is more abhorrent to the mind of the Lord.

Others may taunt them with their poverty and broken condition, but if they do but "with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love," endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, maintaining before God the sense of oneness with all the saints,

the Lord will abundantly sustain them with His approbation and blessing.

It will be noticed that there were two kinds of sacrifices-burnt offerings and sin offerings.

From the numbers it would seem that the twelve he goats, as well as the twelve bullocks, were for all Israel, and that the other offerings were individual, the spontaneous expression of grateful hearts for the mercy of Jehovah toward them in bringing them in safety to Jerusalem and to His house.

Having thus put themselves under the efficacy of the sacrifices, and having established their relationships with God on the only possible ground, they proceeded to deliver "the king's commissions unto the king's lieutenants, and to the governors on this side the river: and they furthered the people, and the house of God." v. 36. This order is as instructive as beautiful. They first placed themselves under the favor of God, through their offerings, and then they turned to the king's officers. They gave God their first thoughts and the first place, and they owned thereby that all depended on Him. He answered to His people's confidence by touching the hearts of the lieutenants and governors, and inclining them to favor His people and the object they had in view.

How blessed it is to be wholly dependent on God, and to look to Him alone to further His cause!

The Book of Ezra: Restoration From Babylon

Whoever seeks the welfare of God's people must expect a path of trial and sorrow, for, with the affections of God Himself motivating him, the servant will, in his measure, identify himself with their state and condition while laboring for the glory of God in their midst. This was perfectly exemplified in the life of Him who was able to say, "The zeal of Thine house hath eaten Me up," and also in no mean degree, in His servant Paul, who says, in the power of the Holy Ghost, "I endure all things for the elect's sake, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory." 2 Tim. 2:10.

It was the experience also of Ezra in the opening of this chapter. Filled with a holy zeal, he had been moved to come up to Jerusalem that he might "teach in Israel statutes and judgments," and he finds at the very outset that many of the chosen people had already sunk nearly as low as, if not lower than, the Canaanites whom God had cast out before them. He says:

"Now when these things were done, the princes came to me, saying, The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, doing according to their abominations, even of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. For they have taken of their daughters for themselves, and for their sons: so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of those lands: yea, the hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this trespass." vv. 1, 2.

Such is man! Such, too, are the people of God when following the inclination of their own hearts instead of walking in obedience to His Word. Notice, moreover, that when the saints fall into sin, it is often into worse and grosser forms of sin than those committed by the people of the world. It is as if Satan, having gained the advantage over them, would mock at and triumph over them by displaying the most horrible forms of the flesh. In the case before us, it was not only the abominations of the Canaanites, etc. (the former inhabitants of the land), but also those of the

Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites, into which the children of the captivity had fallen, that is, into every possible form of corruption.

And all this had taken place in so short a time- within a few years of the completion of the temple. Objects of the special grace of God in their deliverance from their Babylonish captivity, they had turned His grace into lasciviousness.

What forbearance and long-suffering on the part of Him who had restored them once again to the land of their fathers, in that He did not instantly deal with them in judgment! But if His people are ever the same in their backsliding and sins, He is also unchangeable in His mercy and grace. Hence the gifts and calling of God are without repentance, and therein, and therein alone, lies the security of His people.

The special sin here mentioned is that "the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of those lands," that is, by intermarriages. This had been expressly forbidden. (That it was not intermarriages only may be gathered from the passage above cited from Exodus, as also from Numb. 25; in fact, all the abominations of the idolatry of the several nations named were connected with these marriages.) See Exod. 34:12-16. It was therefore in willful disobedience that they had contracted these shameful alliances with the world, for this is what these marriages typify-the besetting sin of God's people in every age. The Apostle James thus says, "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be" (is minded to be) "a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (chap. 4:4), and the Apostle Paul cries, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial?" etc. 2 Cor. 6:14, 15. For if Jehovah deigned to say that He was married to Israel (Isa. 54; Hos. 2), believers now are said to be espoused to Christ (2 Cor. 11). Whether for the Jew therefore or for the Christian to unite himself with the world is both unfaithfulness and sin, as well as to forget the holy place of separation into which the former had been, and the Christian is called.

Nor was this sin confined to any one class of the people. The hand of the princes and rulers had been chief in this trespass, and the priests and the Levites, as well as the people, are distinctly named. It would seem, then, that the princes and rulers had first set the example, and that the others had been only too ready to follow. "One sinner destroyeth much good" (Eccles. 9:18), especially when that one has a place of position and influence. As when a standard-bearer faints in the day of battle, the soldiers are often discouraged and so easily defeated, so after Satan has succeeded in entrapping a leader in the Church of God, he often finds it easy work to ensnare many who are less conspicuous. On this account the sin of a ruler or priest under the law needed a larger sacrifice than that of one of the common people. It is therefore a solemn thing-solemn for himself and for the consequences entailed-when a "prince" or "ruler" leads God's people into the path of worldliness and idolatry.

Such were the heavy tidings brought to the ears of Ezra soon after his arrival in Jerusalem, and in the next verse we have the effect produced upon this pious and devoted soul. He says, "And when I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonished." v. 3. He was thus smitten with a great and unspeakable grief because of the sins of his people, and the secret of the intensity of his sorrow, expressed in all

these outward signs of humiliation before God, was that he felt in his inmost soul the dishonor done to Jehovah's holy name.

It is comparatively easy to feel for God's people when they are dishonored by their sinful conduct in the eyes of the world, but it is only those who are, through the power of the Holy Ghost, in communion with the mind of God, those who share in His affections for His own, those therefore who first and foremost are filled with zeal for the maintenance of His glory, that can estimate their sin as it affects the holy name by which they are called. Only they can go down, take up, make the sin their own, and tell it all out before God. Moses, Nehemiah, and Daniel are examples of this in their several measures, as well as Ezra, but all these, with others that might be named, are but feeble fore-shadowings of Him who so identified Himself with His people that in confessing their sins He said, "O God, Thou knowest My foolishness; and My sins are not hid from Thee." Psalm 69:5.

The grief and humiliation of Ezra were used to reach the consciences of others, or rather to attract to him all who in any degree had mourned over the condition of the people, for he tells us, "Then were assembled unto me every one that trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the transgression of those that had been carried away." v. 4. "To this man," says the Lord, "will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My word." Isa. 66:2. Trembling at God's word is the evidence of a tender conscience, of one walking in the fear of God and desiring to be found in His ways. Blessed was it therefore that there were still such among the children of the captivity, though it would seem their trembling sprang rather from an apprehension of the consequences of the transgression of their fellows than from a gracious fear of offending their God.

However this might have been, where had they been, and where their testimony before the arrival of Ezra? But that their hearts were true is shown by their taking their stand at this critical moment with him, and we learn at the same time that we have no power to help our brethren until we distinctly and openly take our stand against the evil by which they have been ensnared. Faithfulness to God is the first qualification for helping others.

Ezra retained his place in the dust-borne down by his inexpressible sorrow-until the evening sacrifice. If on the one hand he was heartbroken on account of the people's sin, on the other he discerned, in the exercise of faith, the only ground of approach to God concerning it. In a word, he laid hold of the efficacy of the sacrifice as the foundation on which he could appear before God to spread out before Him the iniquities of the children of Israel. (Compare 1 Sam. 7:9; 1 Kings 18:36, etc.) The evening sacrifice was a burnt offering, all of which, consumed on the altar, went up as a sweet savor unto the Lord, and when once Ezra was before Him in the value of this-in all the value typically of what Christ was to God in His death-the success of his intercession was assured. The Lord Himself could on this account say, "Whatsoever ye shall ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son." John 14:13. It was then, as understanding the value of the sacrifice, that Ezra rose up from his heaviness, and having rent his garments and mantle, he fell upon his knees, and spread out his hands unto the Lord his God, and confessed the sins of his people. Let us examine a little these outpourings of his burdened heart.

Notice first, how completely he takes the place of the people before God. He says, "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to Thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our

head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens." v. 6. Not even in spirit does he separate himself from those who had sinned; he and they- indeed, all the people-are one, corporately one before God. It was so in the eyes of God Himself, for when Achan transgressed, He said to Joshua, "Israel hath sinned." Ezra understood this, and was thus qualified to become an intercessor for the people with God, for unless we apprehend our oneness with God's people, that their sin and sorrow are our sin and sorrow, we cannot truly bear them on our hearts before the Lord in the time of their need.

Having thus taken their place, Ezra confessed that nothing but sin had marked them from the days of their fathers. All God's judicial dealings with them, in delivering them "into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, and to a spoil, and to confusion of face, as it is this day," had been on account of their iniquities. He justified God in all His past dealings with His people. And then he owned the grace that had been shown to them from the Lord their God in bringing back a remnant, "and to give us a nail in His holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage. For," he adds, "we are [not were, as in our version] bondmen; yet our God hath not forsaken us in our bondage, but hath extended mercy unto us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us a reviving, to set up the house of our God, and to repair the desolations thereof, and to give us a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem." vv. 8, 9.

The order of Ezra's confessions is most instructive. Having owned the sins of his brethren, and justified God in His ways with His people, he in the next place magnifies the grace which had visited them in their low estate, and

had brought them-a remnant-back to the land,

and permitted them once again to set up the house of their God. But why does he recite this proof of Jehovah's grace and mercy? It was to show the character of his people's sin, for he proceeds, "And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? for we have forsaken Thy commandments," and then he confesses that they had sinned against both light and grace. He conceals nothing, and extenuates nothing, but spreads out all before God, while he owns that if, after all the mercy they had received (v. 13), they should break God's commandments, and "join in affinity with the people of these abominations," God might well be angry with them till He had consumed them, "so that there should be no remnant nor escaping." v. 14. He then concludes by once more justifying God, and by taking His part against himself and the people. He says, "O Lord God of Israel, Thou art righteous; for we remain yet escaped, as it is this day: behold, we are before Thee in our trespasses; for we cannot stand before Thee because of this." v. 15.

There is much in this inspired confession to commend to the attention of the Lord's people. Its main features have already been indicated, but we desire to emphasize the fact that Ezra from first to last justifies God, and lays bare the iniquities of his people. This in itself is not only a proof of the work of the Holy Spirit, but also a promise of blessing. The place of confession is always the place both of restoration and of spiritual power, and hence it is always a sign of a bad condition when that place is rarely taken. Let us then for a moment challenge ourselves. We have more than once pointed out the correspondence between this remnant and that gathered out to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ in the present day. Is there no correspondence between the sins of the two? Is it not the fact that we have largely "joined in affinity" with the people of the world? Have we not submitted ourselves to their habits, ways, and customs? Is not worldliness our bane? Are not

traces of Egypt to be seen everywhere in the assembly? Do we not think more of riches and social position than of the fruits of the Spirit?

Moreover, is it not seldom that our sins (we do not mean our individual sins, but the sins of God's people) are really confessed in our meetings? In fact, is there not an unwillingness on our part to hear our sins spread out before the Lord? If, for example, our departures from the Word of God are owned, our setting aside the authority of Christ, our coldness, our unfaithfulness to the Lord and His truth, our want of separation-if these things are told out in our meetings for prayer, is there not often a manifest impatience, a feeling like that expressed in Malachi, "Wherein" have we done this or that? But we cannot too soon learn the lesson that the Lord will have reality; that, if we are blind to it, He sees our condition, and that until we are brought to own it, like Ezra in this scripture, He must from His very love to us deal with us in corrections and chastisements.

It should also be observed that Ezra does not once pray for forgiveness. No, with any intelligence of the mind of God, it was impossible that he should do so. When there is known evil in our hearts or in the assembly, our first responsibility is to judge it, not to pray for forgiveness. Thus, when Joshua lay on his face before the Lord, after the defeat of Israel by the men of Ai, the Lord said, "Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face? Israel hath sinned," etc.

And yet how often does Satan beguile the Lord's people, in a time of manifested evil, by suggesting through one or another, Let us pray about it. Confess our sins we surely should, but even then only as seeking grace and strength to deal with the evil, and to separate ourselves from it; for if Ezra lay before the Lord in this chapter owning his people's guilt, we shall see him in the next, energetic in dealing with the sin he had confessed, and not resting until it had been put away.

The Book of Ezra: Restoration From Babylon

The Lord used the sorrow of His servant to reach the consciences of His people who had been guilty of transgressing His commandments, for in truth the sorrow of Ezra was no common sorrow. Every indication is given of the intensity of his grief when he "had prayed, and when he had confessed, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God." By his prayer, his confessions, his tears, and his prostration before God, he had told out his grief for the sins of Israel, and he had done so publicly "before the house of God." It became known therefore to those for whom he had been pleading, and "there assembled unto him out of Israel a very great congregation of men and women and children: for the people wept very sore." v. 1.

It would seem that the tears of the people proceeded either from contrition, or from fear of the consequences of their misdeeds. Ezra was armed with authority (see chap. 7:25, 26), and his zeal for his God was manifested; they therefore knew that he would proceed to separate them from the evil for which he had humbled himself before God. This would entail upon many of them the most bitter consequences. Though they had acted in self-will, in disobedience, their hearts might have been truly upon the wives they had married, and upon their children. To separate from them might thus involve the rending of the most affectionate ties, a prospect which might well cause them to weep. That this is the explanation of their tears seems plain from the fact that women and children were found with the congregation that had gathered about Ezra. How hard it is to retrace the steps of unfaithfulness and sin! And how often the bitter fruits of it remain for the rest of our lives!

There were some, however, who saw the necessity of proceeding at once to act in the matter, at whatever cost, knowing, as they must have done, that Jehovah could not bless them or prosper them in the land as long as they were living in open violation of His commandments. "Shechaniah the son of Jehiel," we read, "one of the sons of Elam, answered and said unto Ezra, We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives of the people of the land: yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing. Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law. Arise; for this matter belongeth unto thee: we also will be with thee: be of good courage, and do it." vv. 2-4.

Several points in this address of Shechaniah may be noticed with profit.

First, it is worthy of attention, as noticed in the last chapter, how the Lord uses the faithful zeal of one to arouse others to the sense of their condition. Before the advent of Ezra, the consciences of all seem to have been deadened. Not even Jeshua or Zerubbabel appear to have been troubled because of the prevailing sin. Ezra was alone, and alone he would be, if necessary, in taking the part of God against the transgression of the people. But it needed courage and a single eye, and both these things Ezra by grace possessed. He had God with him in the part he was taking and now we see the effect. Shechaniah comes forward on behalf of the people, owns their sin, and accepts the necessity of subjection to the Word; besides him there were those who trembled at the commandment of God (those alluded to in chap. 9:4), who had been drawn to the side of Ezra. In times of evil, the only path of blessing-and even of success, in its divine sense-is the path of fidelity.

Second, it may be observed that both wives and those born of them were to be put away. The wives, not being of Israel, were unclean, and the children, the fruit of the mixed marriages, were also regarded as unclean. This was under law, but now under grace all this is reversed. Not that a Christian is at liberty to intermarry with the unconverted, but, as the Apostle teaches, "The unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy." 1 Cor. 7-14. That is, if either husbands or wives, perhaps converted after their marriage, find themselves linked up with the unconverted, the above instruction applies to their case.

Under law, as in the scripture before us, the heathen wife and her children were to be sent away, but under grace the unbelieving wife is sanctified by her husband, and the children are holy. It will be readily understood that the sanctification referred to is of an external character, as well as the holiness of the children. The wives and children were dismissed under the law because they were unclean, and as such could not be admitted into the congregation of Israel, but under grace the unconverted wife is sanctified through the husband, and is thus considered as set apart for God with His people on the earth. So also the children are holy and reckoned on earth as belonging to His people. If this holiness is purely external, and carries no saving power with it, as it surely does not-for salvation is ever connected with the personal exercise of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ-it yet bestows the inestimable privilege of being in the place of blessing, the sphere where the Holy Spirit dwells and acts.

Grace could not be confined within the narrow limits of the law, even as our Lord taught when He said, "No man putteth new wine into old bottles; else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish." Luke 5:37. And how precious to us to learn that the heart of God is interested in all who are linked up by natural ties with His people on the earth.

It may also be pointed out that Shechaniah owns the authority of the Word. "Let it be done," he says, "according to the law." The restoration of the authority of the law over the ways, if not over the hearts and consciences, of the people was the object of Ezra's mission (chap. 7:10), and God had now provided him with a helper in Shechaniah. There is, in truth, no other way of reformation among God's people.

In the course of time, as may be seen in every dispensation, customs, human maxims, traditions, etc., are adopted to the neglect of the written Word (see Matt. 15; 1 Tim. 4, etc.), all of which are the fruitful cause of corruption both in heart and life as well as in the government of God's house. The only remedy therefore in times of departure is the rigid application of that Word which is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and the refusal of all which it condemns. Thereby also the people themselves are brought into the presence of God and His claims, and are encouraged to hear what "the Spirit saith unto the churches."

Individual consciences are aroused and enlightened, and, acted upon by the Spirit of God, all who tremble at the word of the Lord (chap. 9:4) are drawn together in the common desire that the Lord's name may be vindicated and His supremacy be restored. Shechaniah's counsel was thus of God, and sprang from a true perception of the cause of Israel's sins, and what was due to Him whose name had been profaned by the transgressions of His people.

Finally he urges Ezra forward. "Arise;" he said, "for this matter belongeth unto thee: be of good courage, and do it." How encouraging these words must have been to the burdened heart of Ezra! And doubtless he would see in them the interposition of God in answer to his prayers. He had indeed learned the source of all wisdom and strength, and thus he turned to the Lord before he sought to rectify the abuses which were prevalent in the midst of Israel. Hence the Lord went before him, prepared the way, and inclined the people to confess and put away their sin.

It is an immense thing to learn, as Ezra had done, that nothing can be accomplished for God by human energy; that it is only as He gives wisdom and strength, discernment and opportunity, that anything can be accomplished.

Ezra redeemed the opportunity which the Lord had thus made for him, and he "made the chief priests, the Levites, and all Israel, to swear that they should do according to this word. And they sware." v. 5. He thus bound them by a solemn oath to do what they had promised. One is struck with the spiritual power thus exhibited by one man. The secret of it was that he was in communion with the mind of God, was standing in faithfulness for God in the midst of common unfaithfulness, and thus God was, and wrought, with His servant. To the outward eye Ezra was almost alone, but the truth is, it was God and Ezra, and thus it came to pass that the hearts of the people were bowed before him. What a difference it makes when God is brought in! Many a servant might well be daunted when he views the opposition and difficulties by which he is confronted, but the moment he raises his eyes to the Lord, he measures everything by what He is, and immediately the obstacles he deplored become to his faith but occasions for the display of His power in whom

he was trusting. Our only concern therefore should be to see that, like Ezra, we are working with God.

The work, however, was not yet done, and the sorrow of Ezra continued as long as the sin remained, for he felt in his inmost soul the dishonor done to the name of his God. He then, we read, "rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Johanan the son of Eliashib: and when he came thither, he did eat no bread, nor drink water: for he mourned because of the transgression of them that had been carried away." v. 6. Ezra felt the sin of his people according to God, and it was in this way God qualified him to separate His people from their sin. When the Lord came down from the mount and cast out the demon from the afflicted lad, His disciples asked, "Why could not we cast him out?" The answer was, "Because of your unbelief," and then, after declaring the efficacy of faith to remove mountains, He added, "Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting." Surely we may say that an unclean spirit had entered into Israel at this time, and it was precisely because Ezra had been before God with prayer and fasting that he could be used to cast him out. Yes, is it not the secret of all spiritual power-to be thus alone with God? There is indeed no power without it, and hence the want of it betrays the fact that we have been so little like Ezra in this scripture.

Proclamation was thereon made "throughout Judah and Jerusalem" that all the children of the captivity should come within three days to Jerusalem, under the penalty for disobedience of the forfeiture of their substance, and excision from the congregation (vv. 7, 8). All came, "all the men of Judah and Benjamin," in the ninth month, on the twentieth day of the month. It must have been a striking scene, one easily recalled, as here described-"And all the people sat in the street of the house of God, trembling because of this matter, and for the great rain." Their bodily discomfort only added to the sorrow within.

Ezra rose and addressed them. First, he charged them with their sin (v. 10), and then urged them to confess "unto the Lord God of your fathers, and do His pleasure: and separate yourselves from the people of the land, and from the strange wives." v. 11. His first thought was concerning what was due to Jehovah, but if they confessed to Him they must submit themselves to His will.

Too often the soul deceives itself even by confession-confession without judging the sin. Ezra was too well instructed in the Word and in the ways of God to permit this, and hence there must be self-judgment and separation from the evil as well as its confession. The order of the separation too is most instructive-"From the people of the land, and from the strange wives." As marrying the strange wives had been sin, it might be thought that these might be mentioned first. But what had led to these marriages? Association with the people of the land. This was the root of the mischief, and Ezra thus deals first with it. So in all departures from God, until the root is discovered nothing is gained, and restoration is impossible.

The Lord Himself has given a perfect illustration of this in His dealing with Peter. Not until He had asked him three times, "Lovest thou Me?" (once, "Lovest thou Me more than these?" for confidence in his own love to Christ-a love, as he affirmed, greater than that of the rest-was the cause of his fall) did He effect his restoration. It was on this same principle that Ezra acted when he demanded separation, first of all, from the people of the land.

The power of God was still manifestly with His servant. The people assented to his demands, for they had been made to feel that "the fierce wrath" of their God was upon them because of their sins. They answered, "As thou hast said, so must we do." They only pleaded that the work could not be carried out there and then; for they said, "The people are many, and it is a time of much rain, and we are not able to stand without, neither is this a work of one day or two: for we are many that have transgressed in this thing. Let now our rulers of all the congregation stand, and let all them which have taken strange wives in our cities come at appointed times, and with them the elders of every city, and the judges thereof, until the fierce wrath of our God for this matter be turned from us." vv. 12-14.

The plea and counsel of the people were accepted, and we have in the next place the names of those who were employed about the matter (v. 15). (It is not clear whether those named in verse 15 were not rather opposing the suggestion of the people. One translation gives, "Stood up against this matter." Certainly Ezra and the chief of the fathers did the work [v. 16].) Further we are told that "Ezra the priest, with certain chief of the fathers, after the house of their fathers, and all of them by their names, were separated [that is, set apart for this work], and sat down in the first day of the tenth month to examine the matter. And they made an end with all the men that had taken strange wives by the first day of the first month." Thus in two months the work was completed. Thereafter is given a list of the names of those who had transgressed, concerning which there are two or three remarks to be made.

First, the names of the priests who had fallen into sin are recorded, and these are divided into two classes. In verse 18 there are "the sons of Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren;" and in verses 20-22, other priests. (See chap. 2:37-40.) The former were held, it would seem, to be the more culpable, and with reason, for Jeshua had been associated, in the grace of God, with Zerubbabel, as the leaders of His people in building His house. "The priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they [the people] should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts," but in this case the priests had corrupted the people by their evil ways. But now being dealt with, "they gave their hands that they would put away their wives; and being guilty, they offered a ram of the flock for their trespass." This, it will be observed, is only said of the kindred of Jeshua. The names of the rest, priests, Levites, singers, porters, and Israel are singly given.

This leads to our second observation-that nothing escapes the eye of God. By Him all our actions are weighed and recorded, one day to be produced either to magnify His grace, or (if we include unbelievers) as the ground of righteous judgment. "We must all," says the Apostle, "appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." 2 Cor. 5:10.

Finally, it may be pointed out that while Ezra, as may be seen from Nehemiah (chap. 8:1), continued to labor in the midst of his people, he no longer appears as the prominent figure-as the leader. Together with this chapter his special work was done, and he discerns it. For this, great grace is needed. The temptation when the Lord uses one of His servants for some particular and public service, is to think that he must continue in a foremost place. If he yield to the temptation, it brings sorrow to himself, and failure for the people. The Lord who uses one today, may send another tomorrow, and blessed is that servant who can recognize, as Ezra did, when his special

mission is ended, and who is willing, like John the Baptist, to be anything or nothing if so be his Lord may be exalted.

Faith As Seen in David

Let us briefly trace the history of David in 1 Samuel. Simplicity of faith keeps him in the place of duty and contented there without desire to leave it, because the approbation of God suffices him. Consequently, he can there reckon upon the help of God as thoroughly secured to him; he acts in the strength of God. The lion and the bear fall under his youthful hand. Why not, if God was with him? He follows Saul with equal simplicity, and then returns to the care of his sheep with the same satisfaction. There in secret he had understood by faith that Jehovah was with Israel; he had understood the nature and force of this relationship. He sees in the condition of Israel something which does not answer to this, but, as for himself, his faith rests upon the faithfulness of God. Goliath, an uncircumcised Philistine, falls like the lion. He serves Saul as musician with the same simplicity as before and, whether with him or when Saul sends him out as captain of a thousand, gives proof of his valor. He obeys the king's commands.

At length the king drives him away, but he is still in the place of faith. There is little now of military achievement, but there is discernment of that which became him when the spiritual power was in him, but the outward divine authority was in other hands. It was the same position as that of Jesus in Israel. David does not fail in this position, its difficulties only the better bringing out all the beauty of God's grace and the fruits of the Spirit's work, while very peculiarly developing spiritual affections and a more intimate relationship with God, his only refuge. It is especially this which gave rise to the Psalm Faith suffices to bring him through all the difficulties of his position, in which it displays all its beauty and all its grace.

It is because faith dwells so near God as to be above evil, that it withdraws nature itself from the power of evil, although nature has no power of self-mastery. But God is with faith, and faith respects that which God respects. Faith invests one who bears something from God with the honor due to that which belongs to God, and which recalls God to the heart with all the affection that faith entertains for Him and for all that pertains to Him. This is always seen in Jesus, and wherever His Spirit is. It is this that gives such beauty, such elevation, to faith, which ennoble itself with the nobility of God, by recognizing that which is noble in His sight, and on account of its relationship to Him, in spite of the iniquity or abasement of those who are invested with it. Faith acts on God's behalf, and reveals Him in the midst of circumstances, instead of being governed by them. Its superiority over that which surrounds it is evident. What repose, to witness this amid the mire of this poor world!

But although faith, in the place it gives us in this world, suffices for all that we meet with in it, yet, alas! communion with God is not perfect in us. Instead of doing our duty, whatever it be, without weariness, because God is with us, and when we have slain the lion, being ready to slay the bear, and, through this, more ready still to slay Goliath -instead of faith being strengthened by victory, nature grows weary of the conflict-we lose the normal position of faith; we debase and dishonor ourselves. What a difference between David who, by the fruit of grace, draws tears from the heart of Saul, reopening (at least for the moment) the channel of his affections, and David, unable to

raise his hand against the Philistines whom he had so often defeated, and boasting himself ready to fight against Israel and the king whose life he had spared!

My brethren, let us abide in the place of faith, apparently a more difficult one, yet the place where God is found, and where grace-the only precious thing in this world-flourishes and binds the heart to God by a thousand links of affection and gratitude, as to One who has known us, and who has stooped to meet our need and the desires of our hearts. Faith gives energy; faith gives patience; it is often thus that the most precious affections are developed-affections which, if the energy of faith makes us servants on earth, render heaven itself happy, because He who is the Object of faith is there, and fills it in the presence of the Father.

Nature makes us impatient with circumstances, because we do not sufficiently realize God, and draws us into situations where it is impossible to glorify Him. On the other hand, it is well to observe that when man had thoroughly failed, when even David's faith had been found wanting, and, departing from Israel, he had thrown himself among the Philistines, it was then that God gave him the kingdom. Grace is above all failure; God must glorify Himself in His people.

A Father's Love

His love is not a careless love. We have all, more or less, lost sight of the judgment exercised by the Lord in His own house, and it is too frequently supposed that, because the salvation of the saint is a sure thing, God is indifferent about character here. But to love, this is impossible. A child would eventually inherit his father's property, but then what parent would be satisfied, if he loved his child, with knowing that? Would he not anxiously train him up, watching every development of his mind and faculties, and ordering all things in his education so as best to fit him for his future destination? How much more is this the way of God's love with His children!

Five Things That Should Go Together: Day, Table, Supper, Death, Coming

We find in Scripture and in the practice of the early Christians the following five things linked together:

1) The Lord's day 2) the Lord's table 3) the Lord's supper 4) the Lord's death 5) the Lord's coming.

If our practice in respect to the Lord's supper be in accordance with Scripture and the example of the early disciples, we shall be found, if possible, every Lord's day, at the Lord's table, eating the Lord's supper, in remembrance of the Lord's death, and in view of the Lord's coming.

Let us briefly consider these five things and see how intimately they are linked together. The precious link that unites them is the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, who said, "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." Matt. 18:20.

1) The first Lord's day was that "morrow after the sabbath" when the Lord arose from among the dead-the first day of a new week and of a new era-on which He sanctioned by His presence the assembling of His disciples together, speaking "peace" to them as the result of His death and resurrection. This was repeated the following first day of the week, when Thomas also was present, and it would appear from Rev. 1:10 that that day soon became known as the "Lord's day."

In Acts 20:7 we read, "Upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them." From this we gather that Christians were wont to connect the breaking of bread, or Lord's supper, with the first day of the week, or Lord's day, and that they had apostolic sanction for so doing, though doubtless they did not confine it to that day, but at the first observed it even more frequently, than once a week.

2) The Lord's table is the name given in 1 Cor. 10:21 to the table on which were spread the memorials of the Lord's death-the bread (or, "one loaf") "the communion of the body of Christ," and the cup, "the communion of the blood of Christ." v. 16. Thus was the Lord's supper connected with the Lord's table, and we should be careful to ascertain whether the table at which we partake of the communion, or "break bread," is indeed the Lord's table, for there are many tables which men have set up, all claiming to be the Lord's table, but which, if tested by the Word, would be found contrary to divine order. That only can rightly be called the Lord's table which the Lord Himself owns, which is open to all the members of the body of Christ (without any special membership), to which none but true believers are admitted, from which even these are excluded, if leavened by evil doctrine or practice, and where everything in the way of worship, ministry, and discipline is left to the Lord to direct, by His Spirit, "as He will," apart from all human order or arrangement. In short, the Lord Jesus Christ being recognized as present in the midst, everything must give way to Him, and befit His presence. All must be according to His name, and therefore consistent with all that He is as "made Lord and Christ," and "Head over all things to the church, which is His body."

Do not rest satisfied with only breaking bread every Lord's day, but apply the test of Scripture to your position, and see whether you are indeed in fellowship with those who are at the Lord's table. Even at Corinth, where so much internal division and confusion prevailed, they still came together "into one place" (1 Cor. 11:20, etc.) to eat of the "one loaf" (chap. 10:17, Greek), and thus was the outward expression of the oneness of the body maintained, though surely the outward expression is of slight account unless there be also the endeavor to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the [uniting] bond of peace." Eph. 4:3.

The Lord's supper is the name given to that blessed feast which the Lord Himself instituted after the Passover supper (see Luke 22) on the night of His betrayal, as that in which His people should be able, after His departure, to remember Him. We get the expression in 1 Cor. 11:20, and in the verses which follow, the Apostle communicates to us what he had "received from the Lord" respecting it, and he expressly connects it with-

The Lord's death, which, he says, ye show (or announce) "as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup." The very fact that the cup is apart from the bread brings before us that His precious blood was shed, and we remember His death as that through which we have forever been delivered from the guilt and power of sin. It is most important to remember that it was from the side of a dead Christ the blood and water flowed (see John 19:30-35), for "in Him was life," and although it is blessedly true that "God hath given to us eternal life" (1 John 5:11), yet, "this life is in His Son," and could not be imparted to us without His laying down His life and taking it again as He did in resurrection; after that He could, and did, impart His own risen life in the power of the Holy Ghost, as we see in John 20:22. Again, in John 12:24 we read, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." The Lord Jesus might at any time have gone back to the glory from which He came, but there He must have dwelt alone, and left us in our sins to go on to death and judgment, had not His love and the Father's purpose led Him to come down to the place where we were, in death to be made sin for us, and bear our sins "in His own body on the tree," then, leaving sin, death and judgment behind, he rose from among the dead to impart to us who believe a life victorious, sinless and eternal. Well may we remember His death!

It may be well to remark that there is no reference to the Lord's supper in John 6:53, etc., for if the Lord's supper were intended, we should be forced to conclude from verse 54 that whoso eats the Lord's supper has eternal life, and will be raised up for glory, which even a Romanist would not assert. If we have never fed spiritually and by faith on the death of Christ as the ground of our forgiveness and all our blessings, we certainly are not fit persons to sit down to the Lord's supper, in which believers are called in a special way to remember and feed upon the Lord's death.

"The Lord of glory crucified;

The Lord of life has bled and died."

But there is another thing connected with the Lord's supper, namely-

5) The Lord's coming. In the verse already partially quoted (1 Cor. 11:26) we are told, "As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He come." The Lord, when He instituted the supper, was just about to leave His disciples, but promises (John 14:3) to come again and receive them to Himself, and He simply invites those who have a heart for Him to

remember Him together in this blessed way until He comes. We count on His presence in our midst, recall His first coming, and His death under the judgment of our sins, and we do it in longing expectation of His second coming. Can we not hope that each time may be the last, or we may be "caught up" from that very feast to meet Him in the air, to see Him face to face, and so "ever be with the Lord"? (See 1 Thess. 4:13-18.)

It is clear then that Scripture connects these five things together, and that it was the custom of the early disciples to assemble together in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ every Lord's day (if not oftener) around the Lord's table, to eat the Lord's supper, in remembrance of the Lord's death, and in view of the Lord's coming.

Thank God, there are at least "two or three" thus gathered in many places week by week, in fellowship with all who desire to keep His word and not deny His name, and in spite of all the efforts of the enemy to throw contempt on the simple feast, to sow dissension, and to scatter. We believe there will be to the end a little company so doing, for it is written, "Till He come." Dear fellow Christian, would not you like to be found among that number when He comes?

The Fixed Look

"But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God." Acts 7:55.

After painting the Sistine ceiling, Michelangelo found that the habit of looking upward, which that long-continued work rendered necessary, made it for some time impossible to read or to look carefully at a drawing, except in the same attitude. He had looked up so much, it was difficult for him to look down.

The opposite is too often sadly true of us; we look down so much that it is a great task to look up. After much looking up, Michelangelo found it easier than looking down. Why do we not acquire the habit of looking up and lifting up our heads? The darkness of gloomy hearts is easiest emptied by beholding, like Stephen, our Lord in the glory for us.

Forever With the Lord

There is something very sweet in the thought that we shall "ever be with the Lord." Too often when we look beyond the borderland, we see only heaven with its thrones and crowns and think more of its cloudless peace, its unbroken rest, its joyous fellowships, its relief from conflict and strife, sorrow and sin, than of the One with whom we are to be, and whose presence alone will constitute our everlasting blessedness and joy. But surely the Spirit of God, acting in sympathy with the affections of Christ, would rather fix the heart on the Person in whose company we shall be, than on any material object, or any gift, however great and good. "So shall we ever be with the Lord." My spirit is stirred when I think of that. The Lord, the One who loved and loves me, who washed me from my sins in His own blood-I shall be with Him, hear Him, and be evermore conformed to His image and He Himself is coming for us. "I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." "The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout... and so shall we ever be with the Lord." 1 Thess. 4:16, 17.

Blessed Savior, teach Thy saints to watch and patiently wait for Thee! Amen.

The Glory of the Son of Man

The supreme blessedness of the saints, when they shall have their part with Christ above, will be to behold His glory. "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." Such is the desire of the Son of God for the objects of His love. Nothing can satisfy His love, short of having us with Himself, and like Himself, in the place His love has prepared for us in the Father's house. But there too He would have us behold His glory-the glory given Him of the Father, who loved Him before the foundation of the world, and to behold His glory in that day will be our deepest delight. If such will be the case then, should not the renewed nature be moved now to adore and worship as the Spirit of God unfolds His different glories before our wondering eyes?

Let us, as the Holy Spirit enables us, seek to contemplate a little the glory of our blessed Lord as it shines out at the cross. It was man's hour and the power of darkness (Luke 22:53). Satan had entered into Judas, and he had gone out in the darkness of the night to accomplish his evil work. Jesus knew this, and He saw the cross before Him with all that was to be accomplished there for the glory of God amid the deepening darkness of that terrible hour. Conscious of His own personal glory in the presence of this stupendous work and knowing well what the issue would be, He said, "Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in Him. If God be glorified in Him, God shall also glorify Him in Himself, and shall straightway glorify Him." John 13:31, 32.

Here we have three glorifyings:

The Son of man glorified;

God glorified in the Son of man;

3). The Son of man glorified in God; that is, the Son of man goes into the glory of God.

We desire to call special attention to the first of these: "Now is the Son of man glorified." The work of the cross was the Son of man's glory. There, His intrinsic moral and personal glory shone forth with a brilliancy that will never grow dim-a brilliancy that lightens up eternity, and in that light we shall worship forever.

There was not only the question of man's ruin and need, but there was the question of God's glory in a scene where His character had been maligned and where sin had spread its deadly blight on every side. Sin must be judged; God's character, His majesty, His righteousness, His holiness, His truth, His love, must be made good. Who could sustain the glory and majesty of God in His judgment of sin? In the presence of this awful judgment who could declare and make manifest before the universe that "God is love"? The Son of man! He, and He alone, could do this, and to do this was His glory. That a man-the Son of man- should do this will be the wonder of wonders throughout eternity. I hardly need to say that this Man is the incarnate Word, the Son, the brightness of God's glory, and the exact expression of His substance. Yet, it is as man-the Son of

man-that His glory shines forth in that work of the cross on which God's glory will rest forever.

To get the truth of this more fully before our hearts, let us compare other scriptures. In Lev. 16 we have Israel's great day of atonement. Various directions are given in the opening verses. Verse 11 gives us the first real action of the day, the killing of the bullock. This is the death of the atoning victim, the foundation of all. For us it is the death of the Lord Jesus. It might be supposed the next thing would be the sprinkling of the blood, but such was not the case. The first thing after the death of the victim was the burning of the incense: "And he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the Lord, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring it within the veil: and he shall put the incense upon the fire before the Lord, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is upon the testimony, that he die not."

What is this incense? And what is the burning before the Lord? We learn from Exod. 30:34-38 that this incense was a "perfume," "pure and holy," compounded after the art of the apothecary. It was to be beaten small and placed before the testimony. It was to be "most holy," and none was to be made like it, on pain of death. On the day of atonement it was burnt on the censer before the Lord immediately after the killing of the bullock. Out of this burning rose a cloud-"the cloud of the incense"-which covered the mercy seat.

The killing of the bullock was in type the death of Christ. That death was under the fire of God's judgment. And what could this cloud of incense be but the sweet savor of Christ-the sweet and holy perfume which arose out of that awful burning? Not the sprinkling of the blood, but the burning of this pure and holy incense, was the first thing after the death of the holy victim. And the sweet perfume of that most holy and infinitely precious Sacrifice was the first thing that rose up before God in the death of the Lord Jesus. That death of holy obedience told out the glory of His Person, and spread abroad the savor of His perfections.

That tabernacle was the sanctuary of Jehovah's glory. The mercy seat was His throne. Between the cherubim, over the mercy seat, dwelt the Shechinah, the visible cloud of glory which witnessed the presence of Jehovah. The glory and majesty of Him who dwelt there must be made good on that day of atonement. This we have presented to us in type. Out of the burning incense on the censer of the high priest arose a cloud of glory that covered the mercy seat. This was the glory that answered to the glory between the cherubim-glory equal to that glory-glory giving its value to the blood of the victim, which was to be sprinkled before and on the mercy seat, and so it was said "that he die not." In short, it is the intrinsic personal glory and infinite perfections of the Son of man witnessed in His death on the cross in which He sustained the full weight of the glory and majesty of God in the judgment of sin, and in that scene of deepest anguish and unparalleled sorrow, made good the truth that "God is love," as well as "light."

Let us turn now to Psalm 22. The psalm opens with the cry, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" This was the cry of the Lord Jesus on the cross where He was made sin for us, and where, under the holy judgment of God, He bore our sins. In obedience to the will of God and for the glory of God, He had gone down under the waves and billows of divine judgment, and out of that abyss of darkness and unequalled sorrow He cried and was not heard. Oh! was there ever sorrow like His sorrow? The fathers had cried to God and had been delivered, but to Him the heavens were brass. Lover and friend were far away-none to comfort; His enemies were against Him; the power and malice and rage of Satan were there; yet all this was as nothing compared

with being forsaken of God. It was the anguish of the outer darkness. And yet, while the question "Why?" ascends from those awful depths, no murmur escapes His holy lips; though stroke after stroke of divine judgment falls upon Him for sins not His own, no word of resentment or rebellion is heard. On the contrary, He owns the holiness of the hand that was bruising Him for sin; "But Thou art holy, O Thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel." v. 3. What is this but the rising up of the cloud of incense from the burning censer, the holy perfume of the glory of the Son of man as tested under the fire of God's judgment?

In Rev. 16 we have the plagues and judgments of God visited upon men because of their wickedness with the result that a stream of blasphemy against God issues from their wicked and rebellious hearts, the pressure of judgment bringing out just what was there. How different with Christ! The unmingled judgment of God falling upon Him brought forth the utterance of praise-"Thou art holy." It brought out just what He was. Bruise a noxious weed, and it will emit its foulest odors; bruise a lovely rose, and it will emit its sweetest perfume. So with wicked men; so with Christ.

Men ask, If wicked men are punished eternally for their sins, why did not Christ suffer eternally when He took the place of the sinner? The answer is simple. The judgment of God never produces repentance in the sinner. Its only effect is to bring out all the rebellion of a heart that is full of incorrigible enmity against God. Man's rebellion and enmity continue forever, and God's judgment abides forever. But how was it with Christ? He suffered for our sins, the Just for the unjust. The full weight of God's wrath and judgment fell upon Him during the three hours of darkness. What was the effect? Instead of enmity, resentment, or rebellion, there was perfect submission. The only answer to the crushing blows of judgment was-"But Thou art holy, O Thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel." This was the holy perfume.

of the burning incense. Could God go on bruising forever that holy and blessed One when every stroke of judgment only brought out the intrinsic glory and moral loveliness of what He was, the burning of the censer filling the very heavens with the sweet and holy perfume of that precious incense? It could not be. A moment must come when God must say, I am satisfied, I am glorified, and when the sword of divine judgment must be put back in its scabbard. The character of the Victim was such that it must be so. The value of the work was commensurate with the glory of the Person whose work it was.

Oh! what a Savior! What perfection! What beauty! What moral loveliness! What glory! Who would not worship and adore in His presence! Who would not cry, Worthy, worthy, worthy, the Lamb that was slain! In His presence our souls have rest, and our hearts adore, as we gaze upon the glory that shone out amid the darkness of Calvary-the glory of Him who not only glorified God, but who has met all our deep need, and in the sweet savor of whose work we stand before God accepted forever-yes, "accepted in the beloved."

Godly Counsel

A young Christian man had been nominated for a public office. Before accepting the nomination he wrote to a respected brother in the Lord for counsel.

The reply was soon forthcoming. "A dead man does not vote, nor does he receive votes." Believers are pronounced dead:

To self: Gal. 5:24

To sin: Rom. 6:2, 11

To the law: Rom. 7:4

To the world: Gal. 6:14

To religion: Col. 2:20-23

God's Beginning Assures God's End

From the beginning faith counts upon the end. The hymn puts the thought this way:

"The guilt of twice ten thousand sins One moment takes away;

And grace, when first the war begins, Secures the crowning day."

This calculation upon the end is found in Moses's song at the beginning of Israel's wilderness journey. (See Exod. 15:17-19.) It is a fine exercise of the soul. His faith knows what the end must be, from knowing what the beginning has been.

Our life's journey is pictured in Israel's journey from Egypt to Canaan (Exod. 12 to Josh. 4). Their journey began-and ours must too-with the full and perfect settlement of the greatest question of all, the question of our relationship with God.

This relationship is the subject in Exod. 12 It was not a time of conflict between Israel and Egypt, but a time of God's judgment. The blood on the doorpost settled the matter of God's judgment, and settled it forever.

"The guilt of twice ten thousand sins One moment takes away."

The Destroyer is turned aside by the blood on the doorposts and lintel of that house, where most surely, but for the blood, He would have entered carrying death with Him. That blood was God's provision for settling matters between Himself and Israel in the doomed land of Egypt. It effectually blunted the sting or power of death, and it did it all alone, in great simplicity. Nothing else could have done anything at such a moment. That blood alone, however, did everything that was required at that moment, a moment that was to decide whether the firstborn in Israel were to live or die, to be saved or perish.

As sheltered by the blood, Israel begins the journey. The greatest of all questions was settled -their relationship to God-and this being so, they begin, as it were, to live, so that the very month in which all this took place was to be to them the beginning of months (Exod. 12:2).

It is well when the soul owns that its relationship to God is the first great matter to settle. Other matters, whatever they may be, are secondary to this.

Having peace with God, Israel now starts their journey. Soon they find themselves at their wits' end. The strength of Pharaoh is behind them, and the Red Sea in front. It seems as though it is only a choice of deaths, the slaughter or the flood. But He who was in Egypt with them yesterday, is with them today on the road out of it. The pillar can do its business as effectually as the blood. It may be a different business, but it is accomplished with equal ease. The blood is not in use now, but the pillar serves because the blood had already served; the pillar defends because the blood had already redeemed. Accordingly, the pillar comes between the two camps. It is darkness to the one and light to the other, so that Egypt does not touch Israel, and the hosts of Israel go on through the sea while the hosts of Egypt in all their strength and power perish in it.

Thus the journey began. They were taking the journey as a blood-bought people, and such a people shall be a defended and a conquering people. The blood was God's pledge that it would be so. The song declares this (Exod. 15:1-19). There had been no song till now. The hour of redemption from the judgment of the Lord in Egypt had been enjoyed in silence but this hour of deliverance at the Red Sea was celebrated in song. The silence may have been of a deeper tone than even the song, but it was also a more fitting expression of the joy of the moment. Israel enjoyed the thought of the blood that was redeeming them from the righteous judgment of God by feeding on the paschal lamb in silence; they now enjoyed the sight of the vanquished enemy by the lifting up of their voices in a shout of praise. These distinctions are full of beauty. The silence of the paschal hour was of a deeper character, but it was fitting that it should not have been after the manner of the fervent, triumphant hymn of the Red Sea.

Redeemed from judgment and delivered from the enemy that would have overwhelmed them, Israel proceed on their way through the wilderness. There they encounter necessities which call for supplies as well as infirmities and trespasses which need forgiveness and healing. The Lord is present and supplies the resources of His grace. He feeds, He disciplines, He rebukes, and He pardons. No matter what the demands on Him may be, or how often they may be repeated, He never leaves them. If Israel bring a pilgrimage of forty years upon themselves, the Lord will be in the wilderness with them for forty years. As God over all, blessed forever, He is seated between the cherubim, in the sanctuary, the Lord of the very holy of holies. The same glory, however, abides continually in the cloud outside. The God of the camp is the Guide and Companion of the camp, and though He may be grieved and have to express His displeasure, He never leaves them. His hand is not shortened, nor is His ear heavy. In the very heart of the wilderness their circumstances have changed from those in Egypt, but God has not changed. Here the wilderness is all around them, while in Egypt it was only the wilderness before them. The very wilderness in all its circumstances is given to them in order to prove whether they would indeed obey the Lord, and thus to learn what was in their hearts toward Him (Deut. 8:2). Were they ungrateful for such an opportunity or was it unwelcome to them? How would we feel today if we loved someone? Should we resent some call to serve, some occasion to give proof that we had him in our heart, that there was something there for him? We know we should not. We know that we should rather welcome such opportunities, if indeed we loved him.

The wilderness gave to Israel the opportunity to prove their love for the Lord. Life in this world gives the same opportunity to His people today. As often as we are "lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God," we shall be uneasy and fretted and impatient and disappointed. But as often as we love to prove that our hearts are with Christ, these times of journeying through abundance and through need, through good report and through evil report, through humblings and changes, through weariness and solitude, will not be resented.

In themselves, chastenings are not joyous. Nothing can make them other than what they are, grievous. But "the pillar" tells us of the presence of a glorious Friend who condescends to be our Companion from first to last. We are to be a happy people all along the road. The blood, the song and the pillar are different tokens of the very same Jesus who meets all our needs.

At the end of the journey there was a confederacy on the heights of Peor against Israel, as at the beginning there was a confederacy on the borders of the land at the Red Sea. After forty years'

sore trial with Israel the Lord had a great occasion to prove Himself to be the very same to them as He had been at the outset. And so He did. (However we may feel about such opportunities, we may say He welcomes them to prove what is in His heart toward us.) The Lord alone met Balaam and Balak who came with their altars and their enchantments to the heights of Baal and of Peor. Israel was stretched out in the valleys beneath. Their very rest was not allowed to be disturbed by even a report of what was going on, although in one sense it was a moment full of imminent peril to them. As in the day of Pharaoh and the sea, Israel did not need to raise a hand or strike a blow, and all the efforts of the enemy were frustrated. There was no enchantment against Israel. The Lord let the Moabite and the Ammonite know this, while Israel remained in peace and at rest.

If we only valued what we have in Him, if we only estimated our condition in relation to the Lord and not in relation to circumstances, all would be joy in the spirit. In this we fail. We love circumstances and not the divine favor. We live in the power of circumstances and not in the light of the Lord's countenance and this makes us dull and halfhearted. If it were not so with us, our journey, troubled as it may be, would find us as happy a people in the difficult circumstances as in the hour when we first rejoiced in our soul's salvation. It is one and the same Jesus throughout, whether it be in the day of the blood, of the song, or of the pillar. It is the same Jesus who is here with us amid the circumstances of human life who died for us on the cursed tree, who lives in heaven for us, and who will give us His unchanged Self in the glory forever.

For Israel the passage through the Jordan was the hour when the wilderness was put behind them forever, just as there had been the hour in Egypt when the wilderness was all before them. After they crossed the sea, there had been the time when the wilderness was all around them.

At the Jordan it is not the blood, or the song, or the pillar, but the ark, and the feet of the priests. New occasions may display new resources, but it is always the same Lord. There are different administrations, but the same Jesus. His hand is not shortened, and the help of Israel for the Jordan is as perfect as is the help for the Red Sea. Not a wave of the swellings and overflowings of the river touches the sole of the foot of the feeblest or most distant of all the tribes. The waters are again a wall on the right hand and on the left.

The ark stations itself in the very midst of the river, and there it stands till all had gone clear over. Its presence more than encourages them when nature might sink and have a thousand misgivings. Might not these watery walls give way? Will the river from above assert its right and claim its possession of a thousand years? Will the source of that river force its title on the trespassers? The calm and assured presence of the priests, as they bear the ark and stand with it in the very place of the river's height of pride and strength, give all such questionings their answer, and still every misgiving.

The people all pass over dryshod while the ark remains in the river till all are safely over. The waters would have to overwhelm the ark first, before they could touch even a sole of the foot of the feeblest of the people. All this mercy visits them without the Lord for a moment calling to their remembrance a single evil they have committed previously. He gives to them liberally indeed, and upbraids not. He sees no iniquity in Jacob, no perverseness in Israel.

Everything God does, is done by an arm of conquering strength and by a heart of perfect, unrepenting love. Israel passed on to their inheritance under the very same God of grace by whom

they had passed out from the place of death and judgment. God's grace will see us safely through from the beginning to the end of the journey. As the hymn so nicely puts it:

"And grace, when first the war begins, Secures the crowning day."

God's Elect

A great many people are troubled about election, and are occupied in trying to discover whether they are elect or not.

Now God never puts election before unsaved souls; He never says a word to them about it; on the contrary, when He speaks to a sinner, He says, "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Rev. 22:17. And again, "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3:16. Could anything be freer than that? It is a strait gate that leads to life, but if it be, it is set wide open, wide enough to admit "whosoever will" without the question of election being raised.

God has never yet met a needy sinner that wanted Jesus, with the reply, "He is not for you because you are not one of the elect," and blessed be His name, He never will. He cannot deny Himself, and when He says, "Whosoever will," He means it.

It is quite certain, however, that God has an elect people in this world. I read in Eph. 1:1-4, where the Apostle Paul writes "to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus," that they (the saints) had been chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. But observe, they are saints, not unsaved sinners, who are told this. These people to whom Paul was writing had already received "redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." v. 7. And to such only, in Scripture, God ever says a word about election.

The truth is, election is a family secret, only known to the family of God, and so instead of a sinner wasting time in trying to find out if he is elect or not, it would be far better to seek to know how he, a poor guilty sinner, can become one of the children of God.

In Rom. 3:23 I read, "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God," so each one may be quite certain he has sinned, for this verse says all have sinned. Now in Rom. 1 read of God as the Justifier. Of whom do you think He is the Justifier? I suppose you would say, Of the righteous. But the 10th verse of Rom. 3 says, "There is none righteous, no, not one." How then can God be the Justifier of any one? I get the divine answer to this question in verses 24 to 26 of this same 3rd of Romans: "Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness... that He might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." And so I find it is because Jesus has died, because God's righteousness and holiness in dealing with sin have been shown at the cross, and God has been glorified there, that He is now just in being the Justifier of the one that believes in Jesus.

Thus the cross of Christ has placed the righteousness of God on the sinner's side the moment he believes in Jesus.

It is not that God has become indifferent to sin. That could not be, but having dealt with it at the cross-a spotless victim having suffered in the sinner's stead-the moment the sinner takes his true

ground and justifies God in condemning him, God is just in justifying him, and would not be just if He did not.

Now we will compare three verses in this epistle which I think will show clearly who are the elect. "To him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." Rom. 4:5.

"That He might be just, and the JUSTIFIER of him which believeth in Jesus." Rom. 3:26.

"Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that JUSTIFIETH." Rom. 8:33.

I find from these verses that God JUSTIFIES the ungodly sinner who believes in Jesus, and that those whom God JUSTIFIES are called "God's elect." None ever knew or ever will know his election of God before coming to find out in the presence of God that he is a sinner, and receiving Jesus as his Savior. It is the mere folly of utter indifference to say, "If I am elect, I shall be sure to get to heaven." It is but a deception of Satan that has made many a one careless about his soul, only to find out his mistake when too late.

Suppose a man is drowning, and a rope is thrown to him, but instead of grasping it he says, "If it is ordered that I shall be saved, I will be," and then refuses the rope within his reach. Surely he deserves to drown.

So now, when God has come down with salvation to men, and has brought it to them where they are, when one look of faith at Jesus, crucified for sinners, saves the soul, and men will not look because they do not know if they are elect or not, surely they deserve to perish in the lake of fire.

Do not trifle with God's salvation. Come to Jesus now while you may. He does not say, "If you are elect, come;" but He says, "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Rev. 22:17. And when you have come and have been met by the Father, like the prodigal in Luke 15, and have been forgiven, and have on the best robe, then He will put on your finger the ring that tells of His eternal purpose for your blessing. That ring tells that He has had His eye on you from all eternity, and banishes forever from your heart the thought that you chose Him, but opens your lips in praise and thanksgiving for all eternity for the boundless, sovereign grace of which you have been the object.

To illustrate further, if a letter comes addressed to you, and you want to know what is inside, it is clear you must open it. God's salvation is like that; it comes addressed to you on the envelope-

To "Whosoever believeth in Him" (see John 3:16), or

To "Whosoever will" (see Rev. 22:17).

Now, you say, "If I only knew if I were elect or not, I would open the envelope." Well then, you will never know; the secret is inside, and you must open the envelope to find it. I never heard of anyone who opened it-that is, who came to Jesus -who failed to find his own name inside, chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world.

I do not ask you, "Are you one of the elect?" but, "Are you a poor sinner who believes in Jesus, and whom God has justified?" If so, you are one of "God's elect," and will sing with joy:

"Why was I made to hear Thy voice, To enter while there's room,
While thousands make the wretched choice, And rather starve than come?
"Twas the same love that spread the feast, That sweetly forced me in;
Else I had still refused to taste,
And perished in my sin."

God's Heart Revealed

One would have thought, after Adam had been turned out of paradise for transgression, that that would have been sufficient warning, but his firstborn became a murderer. We would have supposed that the flood which swept off the workers of iniquity would have repressed, for a time at least, by the terror of judgment, the outbreak of sin, but immediately afterward we find Noah getting drunk and Ham dishonoring his father. The devouring fire of Sinai, which made even Moses fear and quake, seemed sufficient to subdue the rebel heart and make it bow beneath God's hand, but the golden calf was the awful evidence that the heart of man was "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." Again in Canaan a part of the world was tried to the utmost to be cultivated, but it would not do. A bad tree producing bad fruit was the only type by which God could set Israel forth (see Isa. 5). He might dig about it and fertilize it, but after all these efforts it could only bring forth more bad fruit. At last He said, "I have yet one son, perhaps they will reverence My son," but man preferred having the world for himself, and so crucified Jesus. Looking to His cross, Christ said, "Now is the judgment of this world." John 12:31.

At the crucifixion of Jesus, the veil was rent, and the holiest opened; what God was within the veil then shone out in all its fullness. When grace reveals this to me, I get confidence. I see God as holy and expecting holiness-true. But the peace of God is in knowing what He is to us, and not what we are to Him. He knows all the evil of our hearts. Nothing can be worse than the rejection of Jesus-man's hatred is shown out there, and God's love to the full. The wretched soldier (who, in the cowardly impotence of the consciousness that he could with impunity insult the meek and lowly Jesus, pierced His side with a spear) let out, in that disgraceful act, the water and the blood which was able to cleanse even such as he. Here God's heart was revealed-what He is to the sinner; and this is our salvation.

God's Purpose and the Believer's Portion

It gives great rest to the Christian's heart to know on the authority of the Word of God that our place, our portion, and our prospect all flow from the eternal purpose of God; all is according to the love of His heart, and all to the glory of His great name.

These three facts, God's purpose, God's love and God's glory form the solid foundation of the believer's peace and rest. They are presented with uncommon force and fullness in Eph. 1:3: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places [in the heavenlies J.N.D. Trans] in Christ."

What a place we have "in the heavenlies," "in Christ." What a portion we have-"all spiritual blessings." What perfect security we have! It is not like Israel of old, placed in the land of Canaan, in the enjoyment of an earthly inheritance, but surrounded by enemies, liable to be dislodged from their position and robbed of their portion, holding both the one and the other on the slender and slippery condition of their obedience.

How different is our case! Instead of certain temporal blessings, we have all "spiritual blessings." There is nothing missing, not a single blessing omitted. And it is in the heavenlies, beyond the reach of every enemy and every hostile influence. We can truly say that "there is neither adversary nor evil occurrent" (1 Kings 5:4) in the sphere of our blessings. Certainly we have to wrestle with spiritual wickedness to make good our position and to enjoy our portion. But we are blessed according to all the fullness of that expression used by the Holy Spirit, "all spiritual blessings," and these blessings are not temporal or earthly, but spiritual and in heaven, in Christ.

Our blessings are heavenly, eternal, divine. Nothing can spoil them; no power on earth or hell, men or devils, can wrest a single one of our blessings out of the hand of Him in whom we possess them. Our Lord Christ has won them for us; won them by His death on the tree; won them in pursuance of God's eternal counsels, according to all the love of His heart.

He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love." Eph. 1:4. Here we are conducted to the very source of our blessings. And what a marvelous source! It is God's choice, God's purpose, placed in Christ before the foundation of the world. Can anything occurring in time, anything in us or about us mar this? Can anything hinder the accomplishment of God's purpose? Impossible! That purpose was formed in eternity, and founded in Christ, the eternal Son of the Father.

Surely God will make good His own purpose in spite of every opposing influence. The devil thought to hinder by leading the first man to commit sin; he thought he had gained his end by getting him put out of paradise. But God was above him. His purpose, blessed be His name, was not based on the first man in paradise, but on the Eternal Son, and hence the first man's sin, and his expulsion from the garden, only furnished the occasion for God to bring forth from the treasury of His eternal counsels His purpose of love toward us. It was not possible that any creature, man, devil, or other, should hinder the accomplishment of the blessed purpose of God. Eden itself might

be overrun with thorns and briars; the man who had been set there in innocence to dress it and to keep it might be turned out a complete, hopeless moral ruin. But Eden was not to be the sphere, nor the first man the instrument, of our blessing. God's counsels could not find a solid foundation amid the dust of the old creation, or in the doings of the first man. This could never be; hence, when sin entered, our ever-gracious God took occasion thereby to display the riches of His grace in His kindness toward us by Christ Jesus.

Now, we hear nothing of grace amid the bowers of paradise or throughout the fields of the old creation. We see power, wisdom and goodness, but not grace. There was no need. However, when sin entered, when the first man had fallen irretrievably, the divine purpose in grace was unfolded. This purpose was not to restore the ruin of the first man and of the old creation, but to introduce the second man, and in Him the new creation in which all things are of God, and in which (all praise to sovereign grace and redeeming love) we who are believers have our place forever.

What a mistake the devil made in meddling with man in the garden of Eden! How completely he missed his mark! If indeed the purpose of God had been founded on Adam, if the sphere of its display was to be the first creation, then the enemy would have triumphed. But, thank God it was not so! Adam was not the man, nor was Eden the sphere, but the Man Christ Jesus, and the new creation (1 Tim. 2:5; 2 Cor. 5:17).

The true knowledge of God's purposes, we repeat, gives perfect rest and settled and everlasting repose to the heart. The matter is taken completely out of our hands, and off the ground of mere nature, whether innocent or guilty, fallen or unfallen. The whole fabric of the divine counsels and of our blessings rests only and altogether on the imperishable ground of accomplished redemption. The ruin has been met, and met in such a way as to bring everlasting glory to God, and to put us on a better, higher ground than Adam in innocence could ever have occupied. With joyful emphasis, therefore, we can repeat the Apostle's doxology: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (not merely the God and Creator of Adam) "who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ" (not temporal blessings in Eden): "according as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy" (not merely innocent) "and without blame before Him in love."

How magnificent it all is! How it exceeds all human thought! It brings us back to the unfathomable depths of God's eternal mind, and unfolds before our eyes His marvelous counsels concerning us. Here we learn, to our unspeakable joy and deep consolation, that it was God's purpose to have us in His presence, "holy and without blame," even as His own beloved Son; and He has "predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the beloved." vv. 5, 6.

Can anything exceed the moral grandeur and glory of all this? What can the devil do here? What can sin or death, or anything else do? Who or what can prevent the almighty God from accomplishing His eternal purpose? Can anything in the whole wide range of creation interfere in the smallest degree with the divine determination to have us in His presence, according to His own choice, and according to the love of His heart?

Every believer will do well to get a very firm grasp of the truth on which we have been dwelling. It is the eternal purpose of God to have us in His presence "holy and without blame." And not only so, but it is the joy of His heart to have us there before Him "in love." We hear Him saying, "It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad." Luke 15:32.

The sense of this must assure the believer's heart and set it at perfect liberty for "perfect love casteth out fear." 1 John 4:18. God would not have us in His presence with a single trace of fear or misgiving in our hearts. He must have us perfectly at home, perfectly at ease, and therefore He makes us fit to be there (Col. 1:12).

We must remember that it cost God something to carry out His purpose and gratify His heart with respect to us. We were sinners, guilty, ruined, hell-deserving sinners, "dead in trespasses and sins," walking "according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others." Eph. 2:1-3.

Now the question is, How can a holy, sin-hating God, who is of purer eyes than to behold evil and cannot look on iniquity (Habbakuk 1:13), how can such a One have anything to do with me? If He cannot allow a single taint of sin in His holy presence, how can we be there? This is the very question the enemy of our souls would raise. He would use the truth of divine holiness and human guilt and vileness as an insuperable barrier to the carrying out of God's eternal purpose to have us in His presence, "holy and without blame." But blessed forever be the God of all grace! He has triumphantly and gloriously answered this question. He has removed every barrier and has silenced forever the enemy and the avenger; "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son." John 3:16.

The other side of this great subject is given in John 3:14: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up." Here the full, glorious truth shines before us. The Son of God was given in perfect love, but the Son of man was lifted up in perfect righteousness. This is the solid foundation of the whole matter. God "loved the world," but sin must be judged, must be utterly and eternally condemned. It will not do to take up merely one side of this stupendous question; we must have both sides. If God were to bring us to heaven in our sins, where were the righteousness? If He were to send us to hell because of our sins, where were the love?

There is a glorious answer to the question, a triumphant solution to the difficulty! God gave His Son in love and bruised Him in righteousness. He loved the world, but He hated sin, and when we behold the Son of God and Son of man hanging on the tree, we read in characters divinely deep and broad God's love to sinners and His eternal hatred and condemnation of sin. Thus it is that "grace reign[s] through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord." Magnificent utterance! The very gist and marrow of the gospel! "Grace reign[s]" not at the expense of righteousness, but "through righteousness," and this "unto eternal life," and all "by Jesus Christ our Lord." Rom. 5:21.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

A Good Conscience

No person is so liable to a fall as one who is continually administering the truth of God, if he be not careful to maintain a good conscience. The Apostle does not say, "Pray for us, for we are laboring hard;" but that which gives him confidence in asking for their prayers is that he has a good conscience (Heb. 13:18).

Hannah's Song: the Power of Faith

1 Sam. 1:24-28; 2:1-10

What is beyond natural sight and present circumstances must take possession of the heart and must form by the Spirit the basis of spiritual power in this present world. What power there is in the present walk of one whose mind is set on heavenly things and who is by faith looking above and beyond present circumstances unto Jesus! It is only as one enters in heart and spirit into God's counsels that one is enabled to walk firmly in the right path today.

We see wonderful examples of the faith which looks beyond natural sight in Hannah's song (1 Samuel) at the birth of Samuel, and in Mary's words before the birth of Jesus. In both cases there is the greatest possible human weakness, but there is also what connects one with God's mighty power and that is faith. Hannah's utterance is remarkable. It is such a burst of praise and intelligence. It brings out the full force of that word, "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him; and He will show them His covenant." Psalm 25:14. The glory was about to depart from Israel, but in the midst of it all was a woman of faith, and it was her own faith, for neither Elkanah nor Eli entered into it. Hannah's faith went far beyond the ruin then in Israel. Her faith saw, not merely the birth of a little child, but that God was about to bring in a deliverance for Israel and the whole creation of God. When she says, "My heart rejoiceth in the Lord," her thoughts go beyond the immediate circumstances and the last notes of her psalm go on to the extremity of time and to God's purposes as regards creation.

We must by faith look beyond our present circumstances. God has counsels concerning the Church, the world, the creation. We can enter into and enjoy these counsels in spirit. There is not a single promise that God has made in His Word that is not ours in Christ Jesus. What enables us to keep the word of His patience but the certainty that all these things are ours already? We are not hoping merely for an uncertain thing, but we have the sure confirmation of the promises in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As examples of faith looking beyond present circumstances, consider Samuel and Simeon. Six or seven times over, Samuel is spoken of as the one who is in the house of the Lord, ministering there, and growing there. How few in Israel thought anything about Samuel then, or connected him with the overthrow of the Philistines, or with the establishment of God's counsel. When Simeon took the Lord up in his arms, who connected the coming day of glory with that little Child? Faith only. The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and a wonderful secret it is—a wonderful thing to be in the secret of His counsels.

May the Lord give us to know God's counsels and to cherish them. We might be disheartened if we looked at things around us, but look at Hannah's faith and Mary's faith—hearts bursting forth in praise and looking on to the end of time. Let present circumstances be what they may, we have Christ at the right hand of God—the anchor of the soul—and we have the secret of the Lord, His thoughts and counsels. Let us not get narrow and short-sighted vision because of present

circumstances, but let us ever remember that we are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ.

He Knows

To the common eye there is no individuality in a flock of sheep. The shepherd knows them perhaps by their defects. "You see, that sheep toes in a little," says the shepherd. "That other one has a squint; one has a little piece of wool off; another has a black spot; another has a piece out of its ear."

The Chief Shepherd knows the individual failings of His flock. His watch over them is with a separate, discriminating love. Our Savior, with infinite tenderness, watches each doubt, fear, trial, conflict, victory, defeat-every movement of progress or regression. He watches each and all with a solicitude as special and peculiar as if each were the exclusive object of the Savior's love (John 10: 3,4).

The Heavens Are the Heavens of Jehovah: Earth Hath He Given to Children of Men

Psalm 115:16 J. N. D. Trans.

Let us turn our attention to the planets of our solar system, of which there are nine: Mercury, Venus, the Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto. These are given in the order of their distances from the sun. They have no light of their own, but reflect the light of the sun in varying degrees. Each planet revolves on its axis, and each travels a regular orbit about the sun. The planets range in size from Mercury, the smallest, with a diameter of 3012 miles (the earth is 7926 miles at the equator) to Jupiter, the largest, with an equatorial diameter of 88,800 miles. The earth is medial in size; there are four smaller and four larger ones.

Notwithstanding the relative smallness of the earth when compared to an innumerable host of stellar bodies, it is the most important planet in the heavens for several reasons. It is here and here alone that man is found. Quite obviously no life can exist on the surface of the burning stars, and no astronomical observations to date have observed life of any kind on any of the known planets except Earth which occupies a unique place in the universe of God.

These considerations take us back to Gen. 1 and 2, where we have the divine record of God's having originally created the earth. Next we are told of a subsequent chaotic state, and finally God's careful preparation of the earth for man, after which He created man in His own likeness and image, and gave him dominion over the earth.

A verse in Isaiah is conclusive proof to the Christian that God did not create the earth in a chaotic state-"He created in not in vain" (chaotic); Chap. 45:18. "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God." Heb. 11:3.

We are not told how or when the chaotic state came about, but merely that it was such, and the darkness covered the face of the deep at the time when God began to prepare it for man. Sufficient room is left between the first and second verses of Gen. 1 to account for all the real and conjectured ages of the geologists and pseudo-geologists. God merely tells us of its original creation and then passes down to the time of its being readied for the human family. We need not concern ourselves with what or how many changes it may have undergone. What we need to know, God has told us; that is, He created it originally, and then later set it in order for man. After all was ready, the Godhead took counsel: "Let us make man in our image [representative], after our likeness [moral likeness, sinless]." This is how man came to be upon the earth-all the vain reasoning and conceit of man notwithstanding. God created him and gave him to be its lord; but alas, he soon sinned and fell. He lost the likeness of God, but still retains His image, or is His representative here.

The sun and stars were created in God's original work, but all was placed in its present relation to the earth in the week of His work of preparation. We now learn from astronomers that the earth is

92,897,000 miles distant from the sun. God knew just exactly what distance was needed to have it do its part in sustaining life on earth. If the sun were much closer to the earth, then everything would be burned up; if it were much farther away, everything would have been enveloped in a perpetual deep freeze.

Each year the earth travels 583,400,000 miles around the sun at a velocity of about 66,000 miles per hour (this makes all man's boasted speed of travel look insignificant) and it never falters or needs repair. Its speed is constant. Here again we see the wisdom of God in the speed and in the size of the earth's orbit, for if this were changed it would affect its relation to the sun with resultant disaster for life on earth.

The earth is tilted 23 degrees on its axis; this produces our seasons with utmost regularity. And God has promised that while the earth remains, "Seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease." Gen. 8:22. If the earth were not tilted in this way, life would soon have become impossible here, for without the warming of the polar regions as they are briefly turned toward the sun each year, their increasing accumulation of snow and ice would soon affect all the water balance of the whole earth.

Every 23 hours, 56 minutes, 4.1 seconds, the earth makes a complete revolution on its axis, and this does not change by even a second from generation to generation. Man cannot make such a timepiece. At the equator the earth's surface moves slightly more than 1000 miles per hour. Let us consider how very important this rotation is to our very existence. Saturn makes its rotation in only 10 1/2 hours, which if done by the earth, the days and nights would be far too short for proper benefit to be derived from the sun; for example, it takes the long hot days of summer to mature the corn and other crops. Mercury, on the contrary, only revolves on its axis once in 88 days. Just think of dark nights 88 times 24 hours long, or the

hot burning sun for 88 long days without intermittence. To add to the comparison, Mercury also travels on its orbit about the sun in 88 days; thus by the same timing for its rotation and revolution it always keeps just one side toward the sun. If this were true of the earth, then one side would be burned up and the other side cold, to say nothing of the fact that all the weather and water would be disrupted.

In God's preparation of the earth, He placed the moon in its present relationship as a satellite of Earth. It travels in an orbit around the earth. At least six other planets also have satellites, or moons-Mars and Neptune have two each, Uranus five, Saturn nine, and Jupiter eleven. These are planets. Earth's moon is sometimes called the

secondary "lesser light" which God set to rule the night, and the "greater light" was to rule the day. We might consider the typical significance of these in that the Lord Jesus is spoken of as "the Sun of righteousness" by Malachi, and He will truly be the Light that will rule the millennial day, while morally, at present, this world is enveloped in the darkness of night. The true Light once entered the world and was cast out of it; since then it has been a long dark night. The Church has been set for light here while the Sun of righteousness is hidden. The Church, like the moon, has no light of its own, but sheds reflected light on this poor darkened scene.

People little realize the important place that the moon plays in the affairs of Earth. To mention just one thing, the tides of the oceans (which in some places rise to 50 and 60 feet) are created through the gravitational pull of the moon. The moon keeps an average distance from the earth of 238,860 miles. Suppose that this were only half that distance; then the tides would be so great as to engulf large areas of the world.

We may well apply the words of the Apostle Paul, when he thought on the wonders of God's dispensational ways with men, to the wonders everywhere apparent in creation, if men only had eyes to see them: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been His counselor? or who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory forever. Amen." Rom. 11:33-36. Man was God's crowning work of creation, and then He abundantly supplied him with everything needful, and many things for his pleasure and comfort. All creation is an intricately woven pattern of most delicate balance—the air we breathe, the water we drink, the foods we eat, the sunshine and the rain, the great ocean currents ("the paths of the sea"), and the winds which we feel, besides the great jet streams of air which move at tremendous velocity in the higher elevations.

David sang of God's wonders in the creation of the human body, saying "I will praise Thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made"; and then he adds, "Marvelous are Thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well." Psalm 139:14. "O Lord, how manifold are Thy works! in wisdom hast Thou made them all: the earth is full of Thy riches." Psalm 104:24.

God not only placed man on Earth, but He gave it to him, as we read, "The heaven, even the heavens, are the Lord's: but the earth hath He given to the children of men." Psalm 115:16.

But there is still a stronger claim for the preeminence of the earth above all other heavenly bodies; that is that this is the place where God has been revealed. After man sinned and brought ruin into the scene that God had pronounced very good, he was tried in various ways to see if there could be any recovery. At every fresh test, man only failed, and often more signally than before. Finally God sent His beloved Son into this world. Yes, this small planet is the very place where God came in human form. He came into the scene of His own creation, only to be refused. "He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not." John 1:10. He came in lowly guise—was born in a stable, was a carpenter, a lowly and poor Man who at times had not where to lay His head. He who was so truly human that He was weary with His journey and sat on the well at Samaria, was the Lord of glory. He who came "full of grace and truth" met poor sinners where they were.

"Thou wast 'the image' in man's lowly guise, Of the invisible to mortal eyes;

Come from His bosom, from the heavens above, We see in Thee incarnate, 'God is love.'

"No curse of law, in Thee was sovereign grace, And now what glory in Thine unveiled face! Thou didst attract the wretched and the weak, Thy joy the wanderers and the lost to seek."

The earth bears this distinction, that here it was that God was pleased to reveal Himself in the Person of His Son. It was here on this terrestrial globe that angels for the first time beheld their

Creator. (See Luke 2:13, 14 and 1 Tim. 3:16.) God spoke to the fathers in the Old Testament times, by the prophets, but after that, He spoke in the Person of His Son (Heb. 1:1, 2). Wonder of wonders that God should come so near to His poor fallen creatures! and that He should occupy Himself with this little planet. The Apostle John said by revelation: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (for the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us)." 1 John 1:1, 2.

That blessed One came so near that they could hear, nor was it indistinctly; they could see, and not obscurely, for He remained long enough for men to contemplate Him. They could even handle Him, as John who rested on His bosom at supper time, and alas, He was taken by wicked hands and crucified.

When He was here He was light revealing darkness, but He was also love. If there had been only light it would have repelled the sinner, but the love drew many to Him. The poor woman of the 4th of John, did not respond to His overtures of love and offers of a gift, so He as light exposed her whole life in His presence. This together with the love that first manifested itself to her brought out a full confession of her sins, and at the same time won her heart.

"Thou the light that showed our sin, Showed how guilty we had been: Thine the love that us to save,

Thine own Son for sinners gave."

The physical wonders of creation may well astonish us, but the glory of God revealed in Jesus the Son on earth is beyond words to express. Truly this earth is the center of all God's ways, and the place where His love, His grace, His goodness, His holiness and truth, are also displayed. Everything meets in the Son, and fully at the cross. There too the perverse wickedness of the human heart was told out to its fullest extent-its innate hatred to God when He came in grace and truth.

Well may we praise Him for this display of His heart. "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him." 1 John 4:9. His beneficent goodness to His creature in creation is wonderful, but all pales into comparative insignificance before the full revelation of HIMSELF. It is in this that we learn to know God.

"O God, how wide Thy glory shines!

How high Thy wonders rise!

Known through the earth by thousand signs,

By thousands through the skies.

"Those mighty orbs proclaim Thy power;

Their motions speak Thy skill;

And on the wings of every hour,
We read Thy patience still.
"Part of Thy name divinely stands
On ev'ry work impressed;
Each is the labor of Thy hands,
By each Thy power's confessed.
"But when we view Thy strange design
To save rebellious worms,
Where vengeance and compassion join
In their divinest forms,
"Here Thy bright character is known,
Nor dares a creature guess
Which of the glories brightest shone-
The justice or the grace.
"Now the full glories of the Lamb
Adorn the heavenly throne,
While saints on earth that know His name,
Their Lord and Savior own.
"How blest are we who have a part
In the immortal song!
Wonder and joy become our heart,
And praise and thanks, our tongue."

The Heavens Declare the Glory of God

Man has from the beginning stood on this planet on which he was placed and peered off into the great space beyond to behold and wonder. The sun, the moon, and the countless stars have fascinated him while arousing his intense curiosity. Even to the naked eye the magnitude of what he saw was awe-inspiring and overwhelming, so that the "sweet psalmist of Israel" chanted:

"When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained; what is man, that Thou art mindful of him?" Psalm 8:3, 4. Why should the God who created all that vast celestial system take note of poor mortal man, a comparatively infinitesimal speck?

God left to man a standing witness to the power and wisdom of his Creator, as David says in another psalm; "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth His handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge." Psalm 19:1, 2. Man had corrupted the earth, but the heavens still speak of the glory of their Creator, and give witness to Him day and night in unmistakable language. A better translation of the next two verses is, "There is no speech and there are no words, yet their voice is heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their language to the extremity of the world." vv. 3, 4. Without audible words the testimony of the heavens spoke a universal language which none could mistake. So forceful was it, that even though mankind had given up God for vain idols, they were rendered inexcusable by reason of its attestation. The Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul said:

"Because what is known of God is manifest among them, for God has manifested it to them,- for from the world's creation the invisible things of Him are perceived, being apprehended by the mind through the things that are made, both His eternal power and divinity,-so as to render inexcusable." Rom. 1:19, 20. JND Trans.

If the heathen were especially accountable to God by reason of His constant testimony to them through the visible creation, which was a distinct voice to their conscience, how much more so are present-day astronomers (and people in general) whose knowledge far transcends anything known by men in old times? Today there is also the full revelation of God in the Son, and the proclamation of the gospel far and wide which renders man so much the more inexcusable.

The book of Job lets us know that the ancients of the east had considerable knowledge of the heavens, and the Chinese and Babylonians are supposed to have been the first to build elevated platforms with unobstructed views for the observation of the heavens. Then the Greeks, about the 6th century B.C., developed a fairly sound astronomy, and in about 300 B.C. built a famous observatory at Alexandria, Egypt, which remained in continuous operation for 500 years. During this time, Hipparchus of Bithynia cataloged 1081 stars. Galileo Galilei was the first to use a telescope (1609) which began to open up better means of observative astronomy. Then Sir Isaac Newton in 1669 built a reflector-type telescope, the prototype of modern telescopes. He also made many important discoveries which put the science of astronomy on a solid basis. (It is worthy of

note that Sir Isaac Newton was a devout Christian; he was a faithful student of the Scriptures and wrote a treatise on prophecy.)

In man's quest for knowledge of the stellar universe, he has built larger and better telescopes until at length he has produced the giant 200-inch reflector telescope on Mt. Palomar, California. This has greatly increased his capacity to reach out into the hitherto unknown, and make pictures and observations with astonishing accuracy.

Before we notice some of the information gleaned by the great Mt. Palomar telescope, let us preface our remarks with a pertinent verse of Scripture:

"Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: He calleth them all by names by the greatness of His might, for that He is strong in power; not one faileth." Isa. 40:26. O that all would scan the heavens and as they do, think not only of the vastness of the universe, but of the majesty, wisdom, and power of Him who created and who sustains all things! Let us obey this call and lift up our eyes and see not only the creation, but the Creator as known thereby. He calls all those heavenly bodies by names, and in the light of what is now known, this is an immense work in itself—something that man could not do.

On a dark, clear night, away from the lights of the big cities, many stars are to be seen, but only about 5000 stars are visible to the naked eye from any one spot on earth. The luminous band across the sky which we call the Milky Way is really the light from billions of stars which can only be seen through a telescope. The earth is a part of the Milky Way, which is a thin, lens-shaped Galaxy containing an aggregation of about 200,000,000,000 stars. Our sun is only a small one of these. The whole system rotates in space, with each star being at a great distance from its nearest neighbor, so that the distance is measured in light years; that is, the distance that light travels in one year at the rate of 185,000 miles per second. This amounts to the staggering total of 870,000,000,000 miles per year. To get some idea of the immensity of this one galaxy, the Milky Way, it should be pointed out that it is about 100,000 of these light years in diameter, and 10,000 light years in thickness.

Powerful telescopes are able to reach out and photograph other galaxies beyond the Milky Way. The 100-inch Mt. Wilson telescope has a range of 500,000,000 light years, and within that distance 100,000,000 galaxies, similar to the Milky Way, and composed of billions of stars each, are to be found. Now the 200-inch Mt. Palomar telescope has a range of 100,000,000,000 light years, within which are an estimated 800,000,000 galaxies. So great is the actual number of stars which man can now see that it dwarfs the imagination. And the One who cares for each one of us, and who watches over the sparrows, has made them all. "O Lord, how manifold are Thy works! in wisdom hast Thou made them all." Psalm 104:24. Surely even the feeble conception we have of the vastness of the creation awakens within us the spirit of praise and adoration to His great name.

Then if we turn our thoughts to the size of these great celestial orbs, we are again awe-struck; for example, the star Betelgeuse, in the constellation Orion, has a diameter of 215,000,000 miles as against a diameter of 865,000 miles for our sun. The largest star, the dimensions of which are known with reasonable accuracy, is Aurigae. It is about 390,000,000 miles in diameter, or approximately 450 times that of the sun. The smallest star known, Von Maanen's star, is thought to be about the same size as the earth, with a diameter of only 7900 miles. At every turn we can

exclaim with the psalmist, "When I consider Thy heavens... what is man?" Strange that he should feel himself to be so great that he can reason against his Creator! or fail to accept the Bible as His revelation-that Book which has never been opposed to any scientific fact, but has stood out as an unflinching beacon to those who might be shipwrecked on the rocks of human speculation. And yet, Dr. Max Mason, who wrote the foreword to a book entitled, "Photographic Giants of Palomar" says, "Man wants to know and nothing will stop him. We grope dimly through our ignorance, driven by an insatiable curiosity inherited from our simian ancestors." (Italics ours.) It is beyond us to understand how one can gaze into the heavens with the instruments of today and then turn back and speak of an ape ancestry of the human race- to turn from facts beyond all fancy and imagination to an unsupported and unprovable hypothesis.

If we think of what man has accomplished, even in the realm of observative astronomy, we may well praise God who endowed him with such faculties. But how little thanks, or even credit, the Creator receives from His tiny creature whose intellectual powers are often used to reason against God and His revelation. But God will be God in spite of all, and He will be glorified in both the salvation of the believing sinner who trusts in the precious blood of Christ, and in the damnation of those who despise and neglect "so great salvation."

In closing, let us turn our thoughts to God and His wisdom and grace while we adoringly meditate on the words of an old hymn:

"Great God of wonders! all Thy ways
Are wondrous, matchless, and divine;
But the blest triumphs of Thy grace,
Most marvelous, unrivaled shine.
Who is a pardoning God like Thee?
Or who has grace so rich and free?
"Crimes of such horror to forgive,
Such guilty, daring worms to spare;
This is Thy grand prerogative,
And none can in that honor share.
Pardon, O God! is only Thine;
Mercy and grace are all divine.
"In wonder lost, with trembling joy,
We hail the pardon of our God;
Pardon for crimes of deepest dye,
A pardon traced in Jesus' blood.

To pardon thus is Thine alone;
Mercy and grace are both Thine own.
"Soon shall this strange, this wondrous grace,
This perfect miracle of love
Fill the wide earth, while sweeter praise
Sounds its own note in heaven above.
Who is a pardoning God like Thee?
Or who has grace so rich, so free?

Our Place His Place

We are left for a while in a world where everything is against us because it is against Christ, and we belong to Him. But we know that He waits to come for us, and we wait for Him from heaven; and while the waiting lasts, we are to expect, if faithful to the Lord, nothing but suffering from the world. And yet we can be happy in it, assured that the cross of reproach on earth and the glory of Christ in heaven go together. The cup of trial, the reproach and scorn of men, may be less severe at one time than another. This is for our Father to give as He sees fit. But if we look for anything else as our natural portion here as Christians, we are unfaithful to our calling. Rejection is ours because we are His; "Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not." 1 John 3:1.

The Holy Spirit, the Seal

The Holy Ghost was the seal of Christ's work, not of John's preaching righteousness. The second time He received the Holy Ghost was for the Church. He received for Himself (Matt. 3) at His baptism, but for us when He ascended, having finished the work of our salvation. The fruits of the Spirit in us are the consequences of the grace and righteousness in Him, He being the only righteous man. The first fruits of the Spirit in us are love, joy, peace-then come the practical fruits toward men. The first named fruits are toward God, then patience, temperance, etc., toward man. The Holy Ghost cannot be the subject for the Church, as such, to ask for now, seeing He has thus been given. Christ received Him for us. We pray by, or in, the Holy Ghost, not for Him now. We should pray for more of the working of the Spirit in us, and desire to be filled with the Spirit-poor little hearts indeed, but they may be filled. It does not at all follow that we are filled with the Spirit because we are sealed with the Spirit. To be filled with the Spirit would keep out evil thoughts. It will not take away the evil nature, which remains in this life, but that evil nature will be kept down when one is filled with the Spirit.

In a Great House

"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." 2 Tim. 2:20, 21.

The difficulty which is often felt by many as to this scripture would be at once removed by giving attention to the exact language employed by the Apostle. He does not say, "In the house of God," but "In a great house there are not only vessels," etc. In fact, he uses an illustration to set forth what professing Christianity-the house of God, indeed, as built by man (1 Cor. 3)-has become; that is, it has become a mixed thing like a great house with vessels of honor and vessels of dishonor in it. The question therefore whether the vessels are teachers or saints proceeds upon a misconception, inasmuch as they only illustrate the facts pointed out, that the professing church has become so mixed and corrupt that separation is now necessary within its own borders. Whether converted or unconverted is not the point, for all are, on that ground as professors, and all, whether converted or otherwise, must be separated from it if, like the vessels to dishonor, they are polluted by unholy associations or employments.

If a man therefore purge himself from these- the vessels to dishonor-he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work. The next verse (22) points out that there must also be moral separation, and fellowship with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

The Israel of God

"Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16) seems to be used here, not as a general phrase for every saint, but for the believing ones in Israel-those Jews who had repudiated their own works and found shelter only in Christ Jesus. Two parties are spoken of, and not one only. "As many as walk according to this rule" are rather the Gentile believers, and the "Israel of God" are the Jewish saints, not the mere literal Israel, but "the Israel of God." They are the Israelites indeed, whom grace made willing to receive the Savior.

Jacob or Israel

It is interesting to notice the way in which the titles "Jacob" and "Israel" are introduced in the close of the book of Genesis; as, for example, "One told Jacob, and said, Behold, thy son Joseph cometh unto thee: and Israel strengthened himself, and sat upon the bed." Then, it is immediately added, "And Jacob said unto Joseph, God Almighty appeared unto me at Luz." Now, we know, there is nothing in Scripture without its specific meaning, and hence this interchange of names contains some instruction. In general, it may be remarked that "Jacob" sets forth the depth to which God has descended-"Israel" the height to which Jacob was raised.

Jesus Himself Is Coming

At the end of the book of Revelation, the Lord brings us back to Himself from the prophetic testimony which occupies most of our attention through the book. He says, "I Jesus.... I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star." Rev. 22:16. The moment He presents Himself as the bright and morning star, "The Spirit and the bride say, Come." This response is connected with Himself; the mention of Himself attracts and awakens the answer of the Spirit. God, in the love of His own heart, has associated the Church with Jesus, and the very mention of His name awakens the cry, "Come!" for it touches a chord which gives an immediate response. In this instance He does not, say, "Behold, I come quickly," for the question here is not when He will come, but that He Himself is coming.

We are for Himself, and shall be with Himself- it cannot be anything short of this, for He calls us "His body." What a glorious place we have, to be identified with the Christ of God! No explanation of prophetic scripture (however nice and true and useful as a solemn warning regarding this world) should ever usurp in the soul the knowledge of its living union with Christ and of the present waiting for Himself.

The mere explanation of His coming as a doctrine is not the proper hope of the saint. That hope is not prophecy. It is the blessed and sanctifying expectancy of a soul that knows Jesus and waits to see and be with Himself.

The bride alone hears the voice of the Bridegroom. She at once calls out the expression of her desire for His coming. To this He responds, assuring her of it, "Surely I come quickly." The Revelation closes with this as her own expectation. The Lord Jesus is represented as descending Himself to take His bride to be with Him. Afterward, when the world is saying, "Peace and safety," sudden destruction will come upon those who have rejected the gospel. They shall not escape.

Jesus of Nazareth Passeth by

"And they came to Jericho: and as He went out of Jericho with His disciples and a great number of people, blind Bartimeus, the son of Timeus, sat by the highway side begging.

"And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth; he began to cry out, and say, Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me.

"And many charged him that he should hold his peace: but he cried the more a great deal, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me.

"And Jesus stood still, and commanded him to be called. And they call the blind man, saying unto him, "Be of good comfort, rise; He calleth thee."

"And he, casting away his garment, rose, and came to Jesus.

"And Jesus answered and said unto him, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee? The blind man said unto Him, Lord, that I might receive my sight.

"And Jesus said unto him, Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole. And immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way." Mark 10:46-52.

We frequently find incidents in the gospels such as our story of blind Bartimeus which illustrate the way in which a sinner lays hold of Christ. Here we have a lovely picture of how a seeking Savior meets a seeking sinner. In Luke's gospel is the text of the sermon preached, as it were, to this blind man. It is a very short sermon "Jesus of Nazareth passeth by."

Bartimeus had come to the turning point of his history, for had he missed the Savior that day, he would never have had his eyes opened. Jesus never passed that way again. That day He was on His way to the cross where He accomplished the work of redemption, shed His precious blood, died, and rose again; now He is on His way to execute judgment and bring in the glory.

Because judgment is coming, I urge every unsaved soul to be like Bartimeus. He seized immediately his one and only opportunity. How often moments like his in the history of souls are slighted, and they never return. Procrastinators lose their opportunity by saying, "I shall have plenty of opportunities; people do not often die as young as I am." They float easily down the stream of time; they go quietly out of the world, perhaps without any fear of hell. Some are exercised, and for a time are in an agony of conviction, but many slight the warning as to the eternal judgment ahead.

There comes a moment in a person's life when God says, as it were, "Let him alone," and his heart is hardened. This hardening of the heart is a solemn thing, and it is more solemn when we think of God's doing so. We have an example of this in Pharaoh. God warned him in nine solemn judgments and then, as it were, gave him one more chance. Pharaoh did not yield his will to God; he hardened his heart against God, and God hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he went to destruction. In the face of such a fact, I press upon you the need of promptness in the matter of

salvation. The Lord is long-suffering; He waits on His road to judgment, but at any moment the day of grace may be closed.

Bartimeus was blind, but he heard that Jesus passed by. God's resource for the blind sinner is the "hearing of faith." This was the avenue to his soul. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Rom. 10:17. Notice the little word "when" (v. 47). Bartimeus might have said, Here is a golden opportunity; I will receive much today from this multitude. Perhaps crowds like this were not often seen on the roadside between Jericho and Jerusalem. The great multitudes were following Jesus that day; He had many followers, but few friends. Bartimeus might have reasoned: I will speak to Jesus some other time, and gather the silver coins today. Such an opportunity will not come again, and Jesus may be met at any time. But he did not reason thus. And yet how many do, saying, "I will give myself to getting rich now through one enterprise or another, and then I will retire. I wish to be saved, but I must attend to other things now; later I will look after my soul.

Bartimeus felt that the present was too great an opportunity to lose. "When" Jesus passed by he cried out. He was in earnest, and his promptness to seize his opportunity is lovely to behold. It was his turning point. Saints and sinners all have their turning points. If he had missed his, the opportunity would never have come again. We boldly say this, for Jesus never passed that way again. He was on His way for His last entry into the City of Solemnities, Jerusalem, from where after a few days He was taken out and crucified.

Have you an unsatisfied need in your heart? Then cry out, and Jesus will hear. Your cry of need will arrest His steps just where you are this moment. Be like Bartimeus who, when Jesus was passing, cried out, "Son of David, have mercy on me." When was there a cry of need on earth which He refused? Will He refuse the cry of need now that He is in the glory? Will He not stay His steps this moment and meet the need-fill the void of your heart?

"And Jesus stood still, and commanded him to be called." In each of the three gospels which tell the story of Bartimeus, His "calling" is given in a different way. In Matt. 20:32 it is simply "Jesus... called." This is the sovereign call of mercy through grace which belongs to God alone. In Mark 10:49 Jesus "commanded him to be called." This shows the instrumental call, the call of the preacher. What a word of exhortation this is for those who preach the gospel. They are the "commanded" ambassadors of God's grace. In Luke 18:40 Jesus "commanded him to be brought unto Him." This was done by the earnest, effectual guiding hands of others. It encourages the believing wife to bring her unbelieving husband under the sound of the gospel, the parent to bring his child and the child to bring his parent, if still unsaved. It suggests, too, the work of the Spirit of God to bring souls to the Savior.

How often has the Lord answered the faith of those who have brought others to hear the word of grace preached by saving the souls of those who have been brought! It is sad indeed to see the empty seats in many meeting rooms where there is an earnest preacher who longs to bring souls to Christ.

But "many charged him that he should hold his peace." v. 48. They tried to hinder his coming to Christ. The devil always finds ready instruments for this service. Those who labor beside an anxious seeking soul in the factory, in the office, etc. are ready to scoff at him. But there are many ways of hindering besides the open taunt. One of them is Christians criticizing the gospel that is

preached. I remember reading of one case in point. A Christian lady brought her unconverted husband to hear a preaching of the gospel. The servant of the Lord who spoke that night was "no great preacher," as people say. On their way home she remarked about the failures—the poverty of the address. She was pulling the whole thing to pieces, but on turning to see why she got no response from her husband, it was to see the tears coursing down his cheeks. On asking him what was the matter, he replied, "Ah, I found Christ tonight in that preaching." That gospel was God's quickening word to the soul of her husband. Oh, take care how you criticize the measure of gift of a preacher. Remember the preaching of the cross, and not the gift of the preacher, is the power of God unto salvation. Believers can hinder souls after a gospel meeting or at any time by careless ways or careless speech.

The failure of saved sinners does not excuse the lost sinner in the least. He is responsible to come to Christ, and God will hold him so. He does not come because his will is against God. In the judgment scene of Matt. 25, it is the absence of good, not the commission of evil, for which the sentence is passed. "Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to Me."

And "Jesus stood still." v. 49. Thus He waits on you in grace because "He delighteth in mercy." Mic. 7:18. And Bartimeus, "casting away his garment, rose, and came to Jesus." How many things are allowed to hinder the soul in coming to Jesus! Perhaps it is some garment, a habit or some secret indulgence which must be cast aside.

And Jesus answered and said to him, "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?" Jesus expected nothing from him. But hear what Jesus says: "What wilt thou?" Have you a desire? He who came from heaven, died and rose, now waits in heaven to save and to serve the poor sinner who comes with his need.

What is the request of Bartimeus? "Lord, that I might receive my sight." And Luke (chap. 18) tells us of the echoing reply from the heart of God.

"Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee." Faint and tremulous was the request of faith, but clear and blessed the response of the Lord. Not a doubt remains; his eyes are opened, and he is saved.

Have you a need to bring to Him? Will you trust Him? God's heart will bless you to the full. It was so with the poor prodigal (Luke 15). He hoped for a servant's place, and the father's heart exceeded all his expectations. He kissed him and received him as a son. It was more than the echo of the desire; the answer of grace ever exceeds the request of faith. It was so with the thief on the cross. He asked for a place in the kingdom, but received one in paradise that very day!

When Bartimeus opened his eyes, the first object before him was the Lord. He saw beauty in the Lord, his Object for eternity. What will the joy of the most blessed saint be throughout eternity? Surely the same Object—Jesus! Jesus only! And he "followed Jesus in the way." It was then the way to the cross; it is now the path of rejection leading to the glory. He is on His way to the kingdom and glory. Like Bartimeus did, follow Jesus in the way; suffer with Him; be true in heart to Him in the day of His rejection, and when He takes His place as "King of kings," you shall reign with Him.

Joyful in Tribulation

I doubt if I ever saw such an instance of accumulated sufferings of the most terrific kind in any one person as I found in Robert. At the time of my visit with him, he was 38 years old and had been ill for 18 years. He evidently had once been a large, healthy man, but to the eye of nature it was pitiable to see the "outward man" as I saw him. He was bent down almost double, his face turned in toward his chest, with his chin pressing hard upon his breastbone, so that for two years he had seen nothing but the light. His jaws were so locked that he could only take food the thickness of a penny, which had to be slipped in between his teeth. His limbs were not only deformed, but useless to him. He could move only two fingers when I saw him; all the rest of his body, except his tongue, was as immovable as if it has been a wood carving. This his Father was pleased to leave him the full use of, and as he had a heart completely at rest and fully satisfied-for he had CHRIST there -he used the member left him to speak of the love and mercy of that gracious God who gave His Son for sinners, and of that blessed Lord Jesus Christ who had filled his soul with sunshine. Some time after I had seen him, his eyes failed before the ravages of disease so that, physically, he was to sit in darkness for the rest of his days on earth. Besides this, the two fingers that he had been able to move became as rigid as the rest of his body. It was when in this state that he called someone to him to write down the following poem:

"Once I could see, but ne'er again Shall I behold the verdant plain, Jeweled with flowers of colors bright, Bathed in a flood of golden light.

The birds, the brilliant butterflies, These all in thought before me rise; The shining rivulet, whose song Comes sweetly murmuring along;

The sky, the clouds, the grass, the trees, All waving, glancing in the breeze-

I see them pictured in my mind, But there alone, for I am blind. Blind, did I say? How can that be? Since I, by faith, my Savior see Exalted on the throne above,

Beaming with mercy, grace and love. A view like this is better far

Than sun, or moon, or glittering star, Or glowing landscape, sunny skies, Or sight that's fair to mortal eyes.

I THANK my God that He has put A veil before mine eyes, and shut All earthly objects from my sight, And Christ revealed in glory bright. Henceforth my word shall ever be, Once I was blind, but NOW I see."

This brother, beloved of the Lord, has since gone to be forever with Him to whom he belonged. Converted from darkness and sin and chastened, not in wrath, but in love, he enjoyed that which he possessed by faith. HE HAD CHRIST; his heart was satisfied.

Justification

There are three parties to my justification: God, Christ, and myself. On God's part there is grace-"Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24); on Christ's part there is His blood-"Being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him" (Rom. 5:9); on my part there is faith-"Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1). Grace is the source, blood the basis, and faith the principle of my justification. This being so, what credit and glory God and His blessed Son get, and what full blessing is the portion of the non-working but believing sinners! We also learn elsewhere that we cannot take any credit for our faith, for it is "the gift of God."

Known and Searched

Psalm 139; Exod. 34:29-35; 2 Cor. 3:18; 2 Cor. 4:1-6

Everyone at some time or other must have to do with God. People do not like to think of or admit this, so you find many who seem to have some kind of vague idea that they will be able to pass in the crowd, and that God will not require any account from them. But this is all wrong; "Every one of us shall give account of himself to God." nom. 14:12. Look at the opening verses of Psalm 139: "O Lord, Thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising." And in verse 3, "Thou... art acquainted with all my ways." Now think for a moment of the intimate knowledge God has of all our actions. This is very solemn, and not a pleasant thing for a sinner to learn, but it is the very first step to blessing.

The psalm divides itself into two parts: from the first to the thirteenth verse, and from the fourteenth to the end. In the first part the soul finds itself thoroughly known and exposed, and the desire is to get away from God. This is found to be impossible. Then, when it is, as it were, cornered, it learns God's heart and works, and the result, the second part, is praise.

Have you ever observed that God condescends to mark every little circumstance connected with you, that He responds to the little things as well as to the big? Even the seed you sow in your field is quickened by God. Each individual seed is acted on by His power. I have been struck with this lately in reading Deut. 22:6 and 7. Think of God telling them even what to do with a bird's nest! Here we read, in the second verse, that He understands our thoughts. Now men are sometimes ashamed of their actions, and do not like to have them known; but what do you think of your thoughts being exposed? No one would like that. Well, God knows them all. "Thou understandest my thought afar off." And again, "There is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, Thou knowest it altogether." The result of finding this out is simply to make one honest with God. It makes a man tell God the truth about himself. Are you honest with God when you pray? Do you tell God the truth about yourself, and do you ask for what you want? People often deceive themselves in prayer. They do not want or expect what they ask for at all, and they would be very sorry if they received it.

In verse 5 we read, "Thou halt beset me behind and before." The presence of God is everywhere. All around you, wherever you go, you are never out of it, though you may not be consciously aware of it. You may desire to get away from it, but it is impossible. You cannot get away. Even darkness cannot hide you from Him. "The darkness and the light are both alike to Thee." It is thus the soul is compelled to have to do with God. If you do not, be assured of this, you must have to do with Him hereafter.

Do you remember the two thieves? One of them was honest about himself, and just in time. He condemned himself, and acknowledged that the judgment which had overtaken him was just and "the due reward" of his deeds. He turned to the Lord Jesus, who hung on the cross beside him, acknowledged Him as Lord, and got far more than he asked-an entrance into paradise that day in company with the Lord Himself. Depend upon it, having to do with God is the beginning of

blessing. Saul, in Acts 9, was brought into the conscious presence of God. There he learned what he was, and what he had done, and that the One against whom he had sinned was his Savior. Thus he was converted.

In verse 14 of our psalm we have, "I will praise Thee." Many can talk of God as Creator; but it is another thing to talk of Him as Redeemer. In our psalm the soul not only knows His works, but knows His thoughts and finds them precious. What do we know about His thoughts and heart? We get them unfolded in John 3:16: "For God so loved the world." The gospel all comes from God's side. The rejecters of it are reckoned among the "fearful" in Rev. 21:8.

If God would save sinners, He must do it in a righteous way. Judgment must fall on another. The cross of Christ shows this. The Lord Jesus was the only One of whom it could be said, "He was obedient unto death." It is not obedience on our part to die. We have no right to live; He had; He never forfeited by sin His right to life. But in Isa. 53 we read that it pleased the Lord to bruise Him and that the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all. This was the work of redemption, and God thinks so much of it that He raised Him from the dead, and set Him on His own throne in glory.

What a contrast there is between us who behold His glory now and Israel who beheld the glory of Moses. They saw the glory in the face of Moses when he came down from the mount with the tables of the law (Exod. 34:29-35). It was the glory of the law they had broken, and it condemned them. But we behold the glory in the face of Jesus Christ. Beholding His glory does not condemn us, but instead we are changed into the same image (2 Cor. 3:18). We get an instance of this in Stephen (Acts 7). He looked up, "saw the glory of God," and the result was to change him into the same image. It made him like Christ, and, like Him, he was able to pray for his murderers: "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." Practical conformity to Christ is the result of beholding Him in glory. I am not afraid to look at the glory when it is in the face of the Man who died for me. People talk of clinging to the cross. I should be very sorry to cling to an empty cross. There is no sense in it. Christ is not on the cross now, nor is He in the tomb. If He were, I should have no Savior and no peace. But He is exalted now, and the higher He is exalted, the more it brings out the glory of the One who died for me; He couldn't be there in glory if my sins were not atoned for.

Who can fathom the thoughts of God? Impossible! The psalmist even says he cannot count them, and in Eph. 2 we find that He waits for coming ages to show by us (His people) the exceeding riches of His grace. His thoughts "are more in number than the sand."

As I learn God's thoughts, do I want to get away from Him? Oh, no! But I have still more to learn; for as soon as I find God is on my side and find myself at home in His presence, then I find out the enmity of the world. It is as contrary to God now as ever it was, and in Scripture I read that "the friendship of the world is enmity with God." Are you keeping up a friendship with the world? You say you must have to do with it. True; but you still can go through this world as a stranger, not as a friend. God says, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate." If you are faithful, you will have little trouble, for they will soon separate from you. Look at Deut. 11:18-25 and see what the word of God was to be to the Israelites. They were to lay it up in their hearts. It was to be in their hands, their mouths, and their houses to control them. Christians find it hard to get on because they do not use the Word in this way. If they did, they would be invincible. If they were more faithful, the world would take sides against them. In verse 23 of our psalm, Psalm 139, we have one who knows God's thoughts, and what is his language? "Search me, O God, and know my

heart: try me, and know my thoughts." Am I afraid now of His making any discoveries, or His heart being turned from me? No. We have many discoveries to make about ourselves. God has none. He knew us when we had done our worst. He knows all.

The Lamb in the Midst of the Throne

Rev. 4:1-6; 5:6-14

"In the midst of the throne, and of the four beasts [living creatures], and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb." I hesitate to say anything about a scene like this lest I should detract from its glory, and hinder our own joy in contemplating it. My thought concentrates on what links us with the scene. It is nothing less than He who is the central Object of it all, the One around whom we are gathered. In reading chapter 4 you cannot fail to feel that in all the glory of it-wonderful as it is -there is a lack, something wanting to fix the heart. John finds in it no single object, but this lack is more than filled in chapter 5 when we get for the first time the center of all these circles of glory. They said to John, "Behold, the Lion," and he looked and beheld a Lamb! and a Lamb as slain. John recognized Him as the very One he had known and loved on earth. His first sight of Him in heaven was in the same character as that which had first attracted him away from all else, to follow Jesus on earth.

It was at the testimony of the Baptist, "Behold the Lamb of God," that his two disciples dropped off from him, and followed Jesus. We know that Peter's brother Andrew was one of them, and possibly the nameless one was John himself, for he avoids mentioning himself in writing the Gospel. Jesus heard the question, "Master, where dwellest Thou?" and replied, "Come and see." They came and saw where He dwelt and abode with Him that day. This was precious unison with the heart of God that found all its delight in that lowly One on earth. Later, at Patmos, John saw this same Lamb in heaven, as having been slain. This linked him with the scene and it links us too with the Lamb in glory.

It is true we have our own place in these chapters, and although we are not yet in that scene, the Lamb in the midst of it all is the summation of all our blessing, even here below. He has redeemed us by His blood. All in heaven fall down before Him and worship, but we lead the song. We are able to say as angels cannot, "Thou art worthy... for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood."

Here around His table we have the same Object before us and the same occupation, which is worship. In John 3:34-36 we find how this brings us into communion with the Father. "The Father loveth the Son." All His delight is in the Son, and in this we have common thoughts with Him, for He has become the Object of our delight too. All the Father's counsels are for Him. When once He is put forth, everything is decided in reference to Him. This is the connection of verse 36, "He that believeth," etc. Those who honor the Son by believing on Him, the Father will bless; those who do not, the wrath of God abides on them. We see here that He was the Father's Object upon earth, as in Rev. 5, we find He is His Object in heaven.

John 12 gives us a new center of attraction, yet the same Jesus. "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me." It is the cross. There He was lifted up between earth and heaven to be the center to which everything that is of God on earth must flow. But further, He is exalted to the

Father's right hand. It is there that we know Him who was made a little lower than the angels and who is now crowned with glory and honor. The day is coming when all things shall be put in subjection under Him. But "we see not yet all things put under Him. But [as we gaze into the open heaven] we see Jesus." (See Heb. 2:6-9.)

Eph. 1 connects us with Him there. He is Head over all things to His Church, which is His body. When He ascended, the Holy Spirit came down to earth. Was it that the object of the Father's interest was changed? Had the Holy Spirit come down to take the place of Christ on earth, or to be a new center for our hearts? No, the Holy Spirit is here to associate us with Him there and to lead our hearts into constant occupation with Him. He would unfold all His perfections to us that we may love Him better and count Him to be the One who alone is worthy of our adoration on earth.

Now we are prepared for such a word as Heb. 13:13, "Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp." The camp was the earthly system of religion, once ordained by God, but now set aside. We are to go forth to Him, and that will necessarily lead us outside all that is recognized among men as religion-all accredited systems. For as truly as He is the center and gathering point in heaven, so truly is He the only divine center and gathering point on earth, and to follow Him must take us outside all that is owned by men.

2 Thess. 2 is most interesting from this point of view. "We beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and... our gathering together unto Him." It is shown as impossible that He should come, and we not be gathered to Him! His place always decides ours. If He is "outside the camp," we must go forth unto Him. If He comes, we must be gathered to Him. When He moves, we move. When He moves from the throne on which He sits, to the air, we move from the earth to the air-our new gathering point, where He is coming to take us back with Him to the Father's house. Think what the Father's house will be! The home of such a heart as Christ's, where all His divine affections flow out, and are fully answered! That is where He is going to take us, where He is at home! Truly our blessing and joy will be full then!

Then the worship will be unrestrained, unhindered by the flesh and in the full energy of the Spirit of God. Now we so often have to mourn over failure-to grieve that our hearts are so slow to lay hold of what is before us. Then, blessed be God, there will be no failure to mourn over- nothing to turn us aside from absorbing occupation with Christ.

Lay Aside

Coming to Christ involves change. For all of us it means forsaking and turning from our sins. And in each of our personal lives there are more specific items we must repudiate and turn away from. It may be some business practice or association. It could be some element of recreation or pleasure or hobby. It may be a habit that we must leave behind to follow Christ.

For each of us, the issue will be different, but I doubt very much that anyone could come to Christ without very quickly finding out that something has to go. Something has to be left behind.

Not everything that we must forsake is necessarily sinful, but when Christ calls, our priorities are shifted. How we spend our time, and what deserves our effort and energy will change.

There is a dangerous notion around today that there is no cost involved in following Christ. Some well-meaning souls paint a rosy picture of what it means to be a Christian. They portray a smooth, easy life, free from cares or effort. But the Christian life does involve some negative aspects, and one of the most important parts is a willingness to turn our backs on certain things in our lives that God may point out as being less than pleasing to Him, and things that may hold us back from serving Him.

But God doesn't ask us to give something up without the promise of replacing it with something much, much better.

What would His disciples have missed if they had been unwilling to leave their nets and their boats, or if they had turned back to their fishing! Oh, my friends, what blessings we miss when we slide back from our walk with Christ and get into the old patterns and the old habits.

May we commit ourselves to hold firm against the temptation to return to the old ways. Then we can claim the promise of Matt. 19:29, that whoever forsakes houses, or family, or land for Jesus' sake, "shall receive a hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life."

Light and Love

Mark 7

It is a great thing to have grace and truth together. If truth had come without grace, we could not have borne it a moment. Man is a sinner utterly unfit for heaven, but it is an immense comfort that grace and truth have come together. God's two essential names are Light and Love. If we had not love with light, it would have condemned us, but we have perfect light in presence of perfect love. Our comfort is that light does come and reveal everything. Being in God's very nature, we cannot separate the two things, light and love.

In many instances in Scripture we see how light penetrates, but there is an attractive power along with it. There is never real working in man's soul without attractive power. The Christian stands "accepted in the beloved," but the light of God shines through in all his ways. Consider the prodigal; the light shines in and shows that he is a lost sinner, but there is attractive power too-"I will arise and go to my father." Take the woman that was a sinner; there was a sense of sinfulness because light came in, but the measure in which light shone into her soul cannot be separated from the love that came with it. Consider Peter's falling at Jesus' feet and saying at the same time, "Depart from me." Wherever the Blessed God reveals Himself to our souls, nothing is left in the dark. We have a perfect revelation of God as light and as love, and both are working in the soul.

If you have an idea of God's love without the conscience being reached, it may pass away as the morning dew. It is a blessed thing that we are brought to God, and that everything is fully out.

The blessed Lord bore, our sins; there was full light and full love at the cross. There are two parts in the gospel; one is the revelation of God, and the other is the work done by the Lord as man for us on the cross. First, we find the revelation of God Himself, then the work of the Lord.

Look

The story from beginning to end is "Look and live." As a sinner, I looked to Him and lived. And now, as a saint, I still look on, and every look brings back to me the light, and character, and beauty, and impress of the blessed One at whom I look.

The Lord's Coming

If you hear the truth of the Lord's second coming and see your portion as the bride of Christ, and you do not lay hold of it practically so as to possess it (have communion with God about it, which is possession), you will presently lose the expectation of His coming and forget your place of separation from the world. The truth will gradually slip away because you are not holding it in your soul before God. Consequently your soul becomes dead and dull, and you lose the very truth you have received.

Thus, if one lives daily as waiting for the Lord from heaven, there will be no planning for the future, no laying up for the morrow; such a man will learn more and more as other truths will open round this one grand central one, and he will be kept in the truth. If, on the other hand, he drops this important truth by saying, "He cannot come yet; so many things must happen first," then the progress of such a one's communion with God is hindered, for, as we have said, it is according to what a man has heard and holds with God that there can be any growth. What is the use of teaching me that the Lord may come tomorrow, if I am living as though He were not coming for a hundred years? Or where is the comfort and blessedness of the truth to my soul if I am saying in my heart, "My lord delayeth his coming"? Though I cannot lose my eternal life, yet if I am losing the truth and light I have had, I shall be merely floating on the current of life-half world and half Christ-and all the power of Christian life will be dimmed in my soul. If the truth is held in communion with God, it separates to Himself.

Truth is to produce fruit, and you have no truth that does not bear fruit. Truth must build up the soul. "Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy word is truth." Christ becomes precious in and by the truth that I learn; and if it has not that power, it all drops out, coming to nothing, and is taken away. If Christ is precious to me, I shall be waiting for Him with affection, and if it is not so, the bare truth will soon be given up.

The Man of the Pharisees

We do not find any miracle in John 1. Andrew, Peter, and Nathanael were all brought to Jesus without miracles. The work was in their souls. The word, "Behold the Lamb of God!" had awakened this desire to approach the Lord, and to seek Him as "the Lamb of God," is to seek Him as those who have discovered their moral condition, that is, as helpless sinners. This is far different from having been drawn to Him by witnessing a miracle (see Acts 8:13), and the difference that followed was great. The Lord gives Himself to those who reach Him in chapter 1, but He will not commit Himself to those in chapter 2 who believed Him because they saw His miracles.

Again in chapter 4 we see that there is no miracle under the eye of either the Samaritan woman or the villagers of Sychar. Conscience was stirred. They receive Him as "the Savior," and He is at home with them at once. He commits Himself to them as He does not to those in chapter 2, but as He received Andrew and his companions to His dwelling place in chapter 1, so now He goes into the dwelling places of the Samaritans in chapter 4.

In the midst of these moral illustrations we find Nicodemus, the "man of the Pharisees," occupying his own peculiar place (chapter 3). He was attracted by the miracles, as those of chapter 2 had been, but then his soul was reached as theirs had not been. It did not end with him as it had begun. He did not merely wonder and believe, but he wonders, ponders, is exercised in his soul, and although he seeks, timidly to be sure, still he seeks, and finds Jesus. The miracle had made him search for Jesus as someone more than a mere worker of wonders, and the Lord works with him in a special way.

The Lord does not take Nicodemus to Himself at once, as He had done with those in chapters 1 and 4, nor does He refuse to commit Himself to him as He had refused to do with them in chapter 2. He is patient, and yet decided. He exposes him, forcing him to learn himself, but still encouraging him and in a measure committing Himself to him.

What does this committing of Himself to others mean? It means forming a real, living alliance with them—consenting to know them with personal knowledge and in the bonds of fellowship. Jesus cannot do this with one who believes in Him merely historically, as it were, or by force of evidence, as the multitude in Jerusalem then did, and as Christendom now does. It is with a sinner He has come to form alliance, and friendship, and fellowship for eternity. The fragments of convicted hearts must be the links between man and Himself and the outgoings of divine saving grace. Our need as sinners and His fullness as the Savior must form these links.

Such links are formed between Jesus the Savior and Nicodemus the sinner. In chapter 7 he is seen a second time, standing for righteousness in the Person of Jesus in the midst of the Jewish elders. But this, it seems to me, is but a little way beyond where he is in chapter 3. He is still the companion of the Jewish rulers and is acting with them though doubtless under some misgivings of soul. He is timid still as the one that had come to Jesus by night, and yet in a small measure he

owns the Righteous One.

In chapter 19, however, he has surely advanced. Here he puts himself on the side of the world victim. He stands, as with God Himself, in relation to Jesus there. God will provide that Blessed Sufferer with a glorious, triumphant resurrection by-and-by; Nicodemus and his companion Joseph will in their way provide Him with a tomb and grave clothes now. Their spices perfume that sepulcher which was soon to be opened by divine power.

Surely Nicodemus, in this chapter, occupies the place of which the early words of Jesus in John 3:14 had told him. He is now, in spirit, looking at the uplifted serpent, the crucified, healing Son of man. And may we not judge that from henceforth he was one to whom Jesus committed Himself?

Manna

How vain for an Israelite to have searched for a large piece of manna-and yet when all the small pieces (the "small round thing") were put together, they formed a large piece, quite sufficient for each man "according to his eating." While vainly searching for a large piece, he would neglect to gather up the small pieces which were like coriander seed, and so his time was spent, and the large piece was not found. Do we keep looking for great mercies?-for large revelations of Christ? Do we neglect to gather together and to store up and feed upon the little (?) mercies and revelations of Himself which strew our pathway all the day and in which we learn the heart of Him who has strewed them around us on all sides? Could my eyes be wandering in search of a large piece when the wilderness is strewed on all sides around me with small pieces? Have I gathered them all up today? If so, depend upon it, I have more than my eating-"I have all things and abound"-surely I have enough at any rate.

The soul is on the way to find itself longing for fish, onions and garlic, if it is wandering after a large piece of manna. Life is made up of little things, and the soul finds Christ in the little things (the "small round thing," as it were); and finding Him, I gather Him up and feed upon Him, and find myself stronger and stronger.

The Martyr Stephen

Acts 7:55-60

There are two grand facts which characterize Christianity and mark it off from all that has gone before. First, Man is glorified in heaven, and second, God is dwelling in man on the earth. These are unquestionably stupendous facts, divinely glorious, and fitted to produce the most powerful effect upon the heart and life of the Christian.

But they are peculiar to Christianity. They were never known until redemption was fully accomplished and the Redeemer took His seat at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens. Then was seen, for the first time in the annals of eternity, a Man on the throne of God. Wondrous sight! Magnificent result of accomplished redemption! The enemy seemed to have triumphed when the first man was expelled from Eden, but the second Man has made His victorious way into heaven and taken His seat on the eternal throne of God.

This is a fact of transcendent glory, and the counterpart is that God the Holy Spirit is dwelling with and in man on the earth. These things were unknown in Old Testament times. What did Abraham know of a glorified man in heaven? What did any of the Old Testament men of faith know of it? Nothing; how could they? There was no man on the throne of heaven until Jesus took His seat there, and until He was glorified in heaven, the Holy Spirit could not take up His abode in man on the earth. "He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)" John 7:38, 39. "Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you." John 16:7.

Here we have our two facts linked together in the most direct and positive manner-Christ glorified above, and the Holy Spirit dwelling in man below. The two are inseparably connected. The latter is entirely dependent upon the former and both together form the two great distinguishing features of that glorious Christianity revealed in the gospel of God.

It is not by any means our purpose to enter upon any elaborate proof of these truths. We assume that they are established. We also assume that the Christian reader readily receives and holds them as eternal truths, and that he is prepared to appreciate the illustration of their practical power and formative influence presented in the history of Stephen as recorded in Acts 7:55-60. Let us draw near and gaze on the marvelous picture-the picture of a true Christian.

The principal part of this chapter is occupied with a most powerful unfolding of the history of the nation of Israel-a history stretching from the call of Abraham to the death of Christ. At the close of his address, Stephen made a pungent application to the consciences of his hearers, which drew forth all their most bitter animosity and deadly rage. "When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth." Here we see the effect of religiousness without Christ. These men were the professed guardians of religion, and the guides of the people,

but it proves to be a religion versus Christianity. In them we have the terrible exponent of a godless, Christless religion, just as in Stephen we have the lovely exhibition of true Christianity. They were full of, religious animosity and rage; he was full of the Holy Ghost. They gnashed their teeth; his face was like that of an angel. What a contrast! "But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God."

Here are two great facts again, displayed in a man of like passions with ourselves. Stephen was full of the Holy Ghost, and his earnest gaze was fixed on a glorified Man in heaven. This is Christianity. This is the true, the normal idea of a Christian. He is a man full of the Holy Ghost, looking up with the steady gaze of faith into heaven, and occupied with a glorified Christ. We cannot accept any lower standard than this, even though we may come short of it practically. No doubt it is very high and very holy, and, moreover, we have to confess how very little we are up to it. Still it is the divine standard, and every devoted heart will aspire to it and nothing less. It is the happy privilege of every Christian to be full of the Holy Ghost, and to have the eye of faith fixed on the glorified Man in heaven. There is no divine reason why it should not be so. Redemption is accomplished; sin is put away; grace reigns through righteousness; there is a Man on the throne of God; the Holy Ghost has come down to this earth and taken up His abode in the believer individually, and in the Church corporately.

Thus it stands. And, be it carefully noted, these things are not mere speculations or cold, uninfluential theories. They may be held as such, but in themselves they are not such. On the contrary, they are immensely practical, divinely formative and powerfully influential, as we can distinctly see in the case of the blessed martyr Stephen. It is impossible to read the closing verses of Acts 7 and not see the powerful effect produced upon Stephen by the Object which filled the vision of his soul. There we behold a man surrounded by the most terrible circumstances, malignant enemies rushing upon him, death staring him in the face; but instead of being in any wise affected or governed by those circumstances, he was entirely governed by heavenly objects. He looked up steadfastly into heaven, and there he saw Jesus. Earth was rejecting him as it had already rejected his Lord; but heaven was opened to him and, looking up into that open heaven, he caught some of the rays of glory shining in the face of his risen Lord, and not only caught them but reflected them back upon the moral gloom which surrounded him.

Is not this most deeply practical? Assuredly it is. Stephen was not only lifted above his surroundings in the most wonderful manner, but he was enabled to exhibit to his persecutors the meekness and grace of Christian him we see a most striking illustration of 2 Cor. 3:18—a passage of singular depth and fullness. "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord!"

("Beholding as in a glass" hardly conveys the force, fullness, and beauty of the original word. The English reader should be informed that the entire clause is expressed by the one Greek word which conveys the double idea of beholding and reflecting. The passage might be rendered thus: "We all, with open face mirroring the glory, are changed," etc. The real idea is that the Christian reflects, like a mirror, the glory on which he gazes, and thus becomes conformed to the image of his Lord by the powerful ministry of the Spirit. The whole verse is one of the most condensed, yet

comprehensive and magnificent statements of practical Christianity in the Scriptures. It furnishes a pithy commentary on the facts, of which Stephen is a vivid illustration. Would that we all more fully entered into and more faithfully exhibited the power of these things!)

Only see how all this is livingly unfolded in the scene before us. The very highest expression of heavenly Christianity is met by the deepest, darkest, and most deadly display of religious rancor. We see the two culminating in the death of the first Christian martyr. "Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep."

Here then is genuine, practical Christianity- living conformity to the image of Christ. Here we see a man so lifted above circumstances, so lifted out of himself, as to be able-after the pattern of his Lord-to pray for his murderers. Instead of being occupied with himself or thinking of his own sufferings, he thinks of others and pleads for them. So far as he was concerned, all was settled. His eye was fixed on the glory-so fixed as to catch its concentrated beams and reflect them back upon the very faces of his murderers. His countenance was radiant with the light of that glory into which he was about to enter, and he was enabled, by the power of the Holy Ghost, to imitate his blessed Master, and to spend his last breath in praying for his murderers: "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." And what then? Why then he had nothing more to do but fall asleep- to close his eyes upon a scene of death and open them upon a scene of deathless glory, or rather to enter upon that scene which already filled the vision of his enraptured soul.

Let us remember that this is true Christianity. It is the happy privilege of a Christian to be full of the Holy Ghost, looking off from himself and up from his surroundings, whatever they may be, gazing steadfastly into heaven, and occupied with the glorified Man, Christ Jesus. The necessary result of being thus occupied is practical living conformity to that blessed One on whom the eye is fixed. We become like Him in spirit, in ways, in our entire character. It must be so. We all, with open face mirroring the glory, are changed into the same image.

It is of the very utmost importance to see and know that nothing short of this is up to the mark of the Christianity presented in the New Testament. This is the divine standard; we should be satisfied with no less. We see in Stephen a man reflecting the glory of Christ in a very positive, practical way. He was not merely talking about glory, but actually reflecting it. We may talk largely about heavenly glory while our practical ways are anything but heavenly. It was not so with Stephen. He was a living mirror in which men could see the glory reflected. And should it not be so with us? Unquestionably. But is it so? Are we so absorbed with our risen Lord-so fixed on Him, so centered in Him-that our fellow men, those with whom we meet from day to day, can see the traits, the features, the lineaments of His image reflected in our character, our habits, our spirit, our style? Unhappily, we cannot say much on this score. But then, dearly beloved Christian, can we not at least say, "It is our heart's deep and earnest desire to be so occupied and filled with Christ that His lovely grace may shine out in us to the praise of His name"? God in His rich mercy grant that our eye may be so fixed on Jesus that we too may in some degree mirror the glory and thus shed some tiny ray of that glory upon the darkness around!

The Master's Touch

There are those who could appreciate the wonders of the heavens, but are dull to perceive the divine construction of a daisy; yet to anyone who estimates aright, the perfect hand of God even in a daisy is just as clear and certain as in the solar system. It is only a question of the place which each creature of God occupies in His own immense scheme. His wisdom and power are displayed no less in the minute than in the grand and massive and sublime. Thus there is no doubt that, if the telescope opens many a wonder to man, the microscope is not less impressive. They are both important instruments in the hand of man, and they are both intended, doubtless in God's providence, to show man from the natural world a witness of divine power in what is above and also in that which is beneath.

The Need of Meditation

The quietness of communion seems to be but little known in this busy day. There is a lack of real response. Many are indifferent, but with others there are unsatisfied longings and ardent desires that have never been met. Where are those who are in the conscious knowledge of their union with Christ where He is? It is this that imparts rest and detaches us from the earth and its things. It is "the house of wine" where Christ delights to entertain His own during the weary hours of this far-spent night (Song of Solomon 2:4).

More of Christ

Do you desire to know more, to have more, of Christ? There are few who could hesitate to reply, Yes, I do. And yet it is quite true, as often said, that each of us possesses as much of Christ as he desires. Of the Israelites in the wilderness we read that they gathered of the manna every man according to his eating. The appetite determined the amount collected. So it really is with ourselves. Christ never withholds Himself from those who truly seek Him; no, He responds to us far beyond our desires. The fact is, we want to have more of Christ, and something else besides. This cannot be. It must be Christ alone—Christ our only object—and then He will satisfy even beyond our utmost expectations.

Motives

There must be no other motive for action than the will of God, which, for men, is ALWAYS to be found in the Word of God, because when Satan tempts us to act, as he always does, by some other motive, this motive is seen to be opposed to God's Word, which is in the heart and is therefore judged as being opposed to it. This is the reason why it is so often important, when we are in doubt, to ask ourselves by what motive we are influenced.

Nineveh's Repentance

"The men of Nineveh shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here." Luke 11:32.

Such is the testimony of the Lord Jesus to the effect of the short sermon of the unwilling preacher. "They repented at the preaching of Jonas." If we turn to this sermon and mark its effects, we shall see what repentance is, and how faith did and must precede it. (Read Jonah 3.)

Jonah was sent by the Lord the second time, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee." It was not to be a sermon of his own composing, or the suggestion of his own thoughts, but, "Preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee." Oh, what different sermons there would be in this day if the preacher's ear were opened to hear that voice saying, "Preach... the preaching that I bid thee." Many a preacher would rise up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord; some would be most unwilling to declare the coming judgments on this ungodly world.

"So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord." "And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." What a sermon! The English translation is just eight words. Not a word about repentance. Not a hope of mercy, or forgiveness, or sparing. This is the whole sermon; the message of Jehovah was of coming judgment, speedy overthrow. The testimony of the Lord Jesus is, "They repented at the preaching of Jonas." But did they repent first, and then believe? or believe first, and this produce repentance? The answer could not be clearer or more decisive. The immediate effect of this sermon of eight words on the scores of thousands of the people of Nineveh was this: "So the people of Nineveh BELIEVED GOD, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them."

How could they have done this if they had not believed God? Would they have proclaimed a fast? No; they would have treated Jonah as a lying impostor. It does not say they believed Jonah, but they believed God and repented at the preaching of Jonah.

"For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes." Yes, the sure effect of faith in God's word is to bring man from his throne.

We will now look at the second step, as brought out in this scripture, "And he laid his robe from him." If any man had a robe (of righteousness) worth keeping, Saul of Tarsus was the man. He says, "And be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." Phil. 3:9. Have you laid aside your robe, your righteousness, your hope of being able to stand righteously before God by works of law? This is not all.

The third step recorded is, "and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes." This is deep, deep work in the soul. What an expression of self-aborrence! Have you taken this place-the entire old man covered with sackcloth? This is not merely sorrow for sins we have committed. For example, Job did not just say, I hate the sin I have committed (although surely we should do this), but he said, "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth Thee: wherefore / abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Job 42:5, 6. God must be known and believed, to produce this self-aborrence. When God is thus known, instead of my own fancied righteousness, it is sackcloth and ashes.

We will now notice the fourth step. "And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything: let them not feed, nor drink water." Most assuredly a mere assent to the truths of the gospel is not the repentance spoken of in the Scriptures. Has that mighty proclamation been made in every recess of your soul (as it was in all the streets of Nineveh), so that your eyes and mouth have been closed to everything the world and Satan can present to you? Oh for a mighty work of the Spirit to bring souls before God in brokenness of heart!

And, further, the fifth step. "But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God." Listen to the cry of the awakened jailer, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" These are the inspired marks of repentance.

Then there is a sixth step in the words of the king. "Yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands." Would it have been true repentance in this case, had Nineveh continued to practice the fearful wickedness of an eastern imperial city? Neither is that true repentance in anyone who, while assenting to the truths of the gospel, continues to practice iniquity.

Nothing could be more striking than the divine order in this scripture. God sends the word, using His poor, weak servant. That word comes in mighty power. That word was believed. It brings man from his throne, strips him of his robe of self-righteousness and opens his eyes to see his vileness. He abhors, himself in sackcloth and ashes. He judges himself according to that word. He fasts, that is, nothing can satisfy his soul until Christ is known in His Person and work. Everything fails; he now cries out mightily to the Lord. He is heard, and this leads to fruits of repentance in a holy life.

What a witness this repentance at the eight words of Jonah will be in the day of judgment! There was no hope of mercy held out, but they believed God and repented; now they count on God and trust Him. They say, "Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away His fierce anger, that we perish not?" Thus it was the goodness of God that led them to repentance. And did God disappoint the trust of the vast multitude of Nineveh? No. "And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that He had said that He would do unto them; and He did it not." And Jesus says, "The men of Nineveh shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and behold, a greater than Jonas is here."

Jonas, an unwilling preacher, came from Palestine to Nineveh, and preached eight words, and scores of thousands believed God, and repented. The Son of God has come from heaven and

revealed the whole character of God in righteousness, yet love-of certain and everlasting wrath coming on all who do not believe on Him, yet He presented repentance and forgiveness of sins preached in His name. It is not now, "Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from His fierce anger, that we perish not?" Not a shadow of uncertainty remains. "Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." Luke 24:47. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Acts 16:31. Jesus has been lifted up on the cross; He has died for our sins. God has raised Him from the dead for our justification. God is pledged in righteousness and love. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3:16.

Yes, God is now fully revealed in Christ. With the Scripture in our hands we can come into His presence and hear the words of Christ. We hear God speaking to us in the Person of His Son. But do not forget, God is now commanding all men to repent. "Because He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead." Acts 17:31. Oh how gracious of God! He does not merely announce judgment, as in Jonah's sermon, but now the atoning work is done; God commands all men everywhere to repent.

It is thus the goodness of God that leads to repentance. Oh, be not deceived; sin and self must be judged now in the presence of God in grace, or all must be brought out in judgment. Do not trust in a false peace-a mere assent to the truth without any exercise of soul as to sin, or even to a renouncing of the pleasures of a world which is hastening on to judgment. We fear many souls are deceived in this way. They adopt a mere form of godliness, but deny the power.

No Parting

It was he whose trial abounded, who had suffered the loss of all things, who wrote the triumphant words: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?...Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors,"-not through our love to Him, but "through Him that loved us." Let us firmly grasp this truth, and beholding, we shall reflect this joy of the Lord, and be able, not merely at some times, but at all times, to "rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

None Like Him!

In His relationships to the world which was around Him, we see the Lord Jesus Christ at once a Conqueror, a Sufferer, and a Benefactor. What moral glories shine forth! He overcame the world, refusing all its attractions; He suffered from it, bearing witness against its whole course; He blessed it, dispensing the fruit of His grace and power incessantly. Its temptations only made Him a Conqueror-its pollutions and enmities a Sufferer-its miseries only a Benefactor! What a combination!

Our First Duty

Surely, beloved, we should seek intimacy of heart with Him. The first duty, as well as the highest privilege, yes, and the sublimest acting of faith, is just to take our place before the Lord, acquainting ourselves with Him, and being at peace. Instead of painfully inquiring of ourselves whether we are making suited returns to Him, we should charge our hearts to enjoy Him in these wondrous manifestations of Himself. Our first duty to the light that shines in Him is to learn what He is—calmly, and thankfully, and joyfully to learn that, and not anxiously and painfully to begin by measuring ourselves by it, or seeking to imitate it. His presence should be our home, so that, in the twinkling of an eye, whether at morning, at noonday, or at eventide, we might pass in there with ease and naturalness, with an abundant entrance, as one expressed it years ago, "like those who have nothing to lose, but all to gain."

Our Standing

It is blessed to know that having believed the gospel of our salvation, our sins were not only put away, but that "sin in the flesh" was condemned, or judged, in the death of Christ (Rom. 8:3), so the believer is in a new standing before God. He is no longer looked upon as in Adam, or as having any connection with Adam; but he is "in Christ" before God, in new creation where "all things are become new. And all things are of God" (2 Cor. 5:16-18). In salvation there is not only forgiveness, but deliverance from our whole state in Adam.

The Parable of the Ten Virgins

Matt. 25:1-13

It is the Lord Jesus Christ, and no other, who is referred to as the bridegroom in this parable. The virgins go out to meet Him; He is the one referred to in the midnight cry, "Behold, the bridegroom!", and those who are ready go in with Him to the marriage. But what is meant by the coming of the Bridegroom, and when does He come? Is the valley of the shadow of death referred to as the Bridegroom's coming? Is that the event pictured here under the joyous figure of a bridegroom and a marriage? No. The coming of the Bridegroom is the coming of Him who said to His sorrowing disciples, "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." It is the fulfillment of that faithful promise.

Other scriptures abundantly confirm this. The angels witnessed to it as the astonished disciples looked steadfastly up into heaven, their eyes and hearts following their ascending Lord. "This same Jesus," they said, "which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven." Acts 1:11. It was a visible and personal going away; it will be a visible and personal coming again.

The great truth of the Lord's coming in person the second time shines in the pages of inspiration like a great star in the midnight sky. How sad that it has been so forgotten! But the Lord foresaw this and foretold it. "While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept." Not only the foolish, but also the wise ceased to watch and wait. In time the coming of the Lord ceased to be an object of joyous hope and expectation, and the promise of His coming was either spiritualized and explained away, or else it dropped out of sight altogether. In the early days of Christianity, however, it was far otherwise. The Lord's return, like a golden thread, was interwoven with all other truth, and the youngest convert was led to look at once for the Savior. As 1 Thess. 1:9, 10 states, "Ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come."

Some say, We have always believed the Lord Jesus would come in judgment at the end of the world-that is nothing new. We are not speaking, however, of that dread appearing. Without doubt He will come to judge, for we are told that God "hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained." Acts 17:31. When He thus appears, it will be in flaming fire and with the angels of His might to take vengeance on them who know not God and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thess. 1:7, 8). That is solemnly true, but if we were to explain our parable as if it related to Christ's appearing, we should mar its beauty and pervert its meaning, for it refers to the coming of the Bridegroom, not of the Judge. Guilty criminals may hear with alarm of the Judge's approach, knowing in themselves that the hour of punishment is at hand, but the Bridegroom's coming is waited for with earnest desire by those who are assured of His faithful love. Accordingly, at the close of the Revelation, when the Lord Jesus calls Himself the bright and morning star, the Spirit and the bride say to Him, "Come." And the last word spoken by Him from the glory is, "Surely I come quickly." To this assurance, so

cheering and sustaining, there is the ready response, "Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus." Who could even imagine that such language would be used if we looked for Him as Judge?

"At midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him." From this we understand that a clear testimony was to go forth immediately before the bridegroom came. Surely that cry has been raised and, whether men will heed it or not, the fact that the Lord is coming again has been sounded out far and wide. At any moment He may come, and then it shall come to pass that "The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." 1 Thess. 4:16, 17. Then it will be said, The Bridegroom has come, and they that were ready have gone in with Him to the marriage.

If we believe that the midnight cry has gone forth and that the Bridegroom is at the door, how needful it is that we should see that our lamps are well trimmed, so that they may burn with a brighter, purer, steadier flame than ever. "Ye were sometime darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light." Eph. 5:8. Again, the same Spirit by the same servant says to us, "Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for a helmet, the hope of salvation.

For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him." 1 Thess. 5:5-10. Brethren, we shall do well to heed the Spirit's word of exhortation, calling us, as it does, to watchfulness and sobriety of mind, to the exercise of faith and love and hope in view of our Lord's return.

"A little while-He'll come again;

Let us the precious hours redeem; Our only grief to give Him pain,

Our joy to serve and follow Him. Watching and ready may we be,

As those that wait their Lord to see."

Are you ready for the Bridegroom's coming? Only those who were ready went in with Him to the marriage. "And the door was shut," adds the Lord with terrible significance. The foolish virgins-the professing but Christless multitudes -were not there. They had no oil in their vessels with their lamps, and they only discovered their deficiency when it was too late to supply it, for while they went to buy, the Bridegroom came. How foolish to forget the one thing that would make the lamp of any use at all. Is it so with you? Perhaps at this moment no one but God knows you have no oil in your vessel, that is, that the Spirit of God does not dwell in you. You have taken your place with the virgins; you carry the lamp of Christian profession, and are enrolled among the followers of Christ, but your lamp has no oil. How serious this is! You can never have oil unless you first receive forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus, and are born of God. The Holy Spirit only indwells those who trust in Jesus. Ask yourself as under the eye of God, Have I oil in my vessel with my lamp? Is Christ mine? Does the Holy Ghost indwell me? If you cannot say "yes" to these

questions, then, as a lost sinner come to Him who still says, "Come, buy... without money and without price." Do not delay for "Behold, the bridegroom cometh: go ye out to meet him."

"The heavenly Bridegroom soon will come,

To claim His bride and take her home,

To dwell with Him on high.

The Bridegroom comes, let no man doubt;

Alas! for those whose lamps are out,

They'll find no oil to buy."

Partakers of the Divine Nature

Partakers of the Divine Nature (Notes from an address by C.H. Brown)

2 Pet. 1:2-12

Being made "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4) is not so much the result of new birth, as it is the practical result being experienced in the Christian life. How are we going to prove this in a practical way? The answer is found in the first part of the verse, "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises; that by these ye might be partakers," etc. That is, if the soul lays hold on these promises, living in the enjoyment of them, the result will be the manifestation of the divine nature. Of course this word is addressed to those who do have the divine nature.

I suppose none of us Christians would be satisfied just to get into heaven; we do have the desire to have an "abundant entrance." It is not very good for a ship to have to be dragged into port by a tugboat, but it is better than going down at sea. How much more dignified for the ship to come in under full colors. How proud the sailors and the captain are, and with what joy they pull in after a long toilsome voyage! If we are Christians, we are definitely going to make port. We'll get there all right. The question is, what kind of entrance are we going to have?

Verse 11 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 you would like to have that kind of entrance. The directions-the precepts for it-are right here. I apprehend that the abundant entrance is not the swinging open of the doors at the end, but rather that which is ministered all along the way.

I rather think that when one comes down to the time of facing departure from this world (that is, if he is permitted to face it consciously), to go into the presence of the Lord, it will be found that the kind of an entrance he proved the last year-the Christian life and experience he had been enjoying -will mark the degree of "abundance" he will know right there at the end.

We do not expect a Christian who has been living a half-hearted life at a distance from the Lord to have an ecstasy at that moment, in the same degree as the one who has lived and walked with God. The way to look forward with confidence to that change is to have these virtues, spoken of in the intervening verses of our chapter, operative in the soul.

The third verse states: "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 your shallowness on the ground that the circumstances in which you find yourself are not advantageous to the kind of life you would like to live. Have you reasoned it out and thought that it would be better if you were living in a different position? If your circumstances were altered, do you think you would be able to live the kind of Christian life you would like to live? Our verse says, "His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto

life and godliness." There is not one thing lacking. We have complete equipment. God is not going to put us into a position where we cannot live for Him, and then 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 possible equipment to live for Him. It is not necessary for one to have to wait until he is older, or knows his Bible better, before he can 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 them (what God has done, is doing, and is yet going to do) as realities. The result is we are so attracted and under the power of them, that other things lose their attractiveness and we become mere "imitators of God," being occupied with that which gives concern to Him and which occupies His heart. 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 truly in the enjoyment of being "partakers of the divine nature."

How different from the world is the newborn appetite of those who know the Lord Jesus Christ. The satisfaction of such a one with divine realities gives peace and quiet to the soul. What a blessed thing to be preserved from this ungodly scene. Do we not grieve to see the pace of many of those about us today?-the shamelessness of their walk -lacking restraint of any kind-turned loose to glut themselves with what this world has to offer. "A wild and crazy age," some have said, and surely the expression is not too strong.

We who have Christ have been graciously taken out of such an atmosphere. In its place we have found such a worthy Object-the Christ of God. This cannot help but have a tremendous affect upon our lives if we are in the good of it. We have the Christ of God, the most worthy Object of the universe, and His glory brought before us again and again in a special way when we partake of the memorials He has left us. To have His worth repeated in our ears again and again produces a transforming power in our souls.

What a blessed thing it is to escape "the corruption that is in the world through lust." There is no more blessed place than to be gathered to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and to have the association of those who love Him in sincerity and in truth. Where the Person, work, and word of Christ are (by the grace of God) jealously guarded and enjoyed by His people is indeed a wonderful place. We cannot value it too highly, dear young people. If escaping the world's lusts caused thankfulness in the days of Peter, how doubly true today.

In verses 5, 6 and 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 wants to get a reputation of being lazy in material things. There is a lot in Scripture about being diligent in divine things, as well. When you see a Christian especially devoted, especially godly, you may be sure he didn't get that character by going on in an indifferent way. He wasn't indolent. Yes, there must be purpose of heart, as the Scripture says, "giving all diligence," etc. That is true with anything in this world wherein people succeed. They do not stumble into success. It is a matter of hard work, of having a purpose and of letting that purpose form and control their actions. Be diligent in spiritual things, dear Christian friend.

There is a word in the 27th Psalm along the same line. Verse 4: "One thing have I desired of the Lord." So far so good. It is a good thing to have right desires, but that isn't all of it. The needful part follows: "That will I seek after." Perhaps you have said, I would just love to be a real devoted child of God; I don't want to live a shallow Christian life. Well then, heed the last part of the verse, "That will I seek after." Be diligent and there will be rewarding fruit from earnestly seeking.

Now let us look at 2 Pet. 1:8: "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 want us occupied with the fruitfulness or unfruitfulness of our lives, but none of us wants to be unfruitful. If the things put before us in these verses abound in us, then we will know what it is to be a fruitful branch for the Lord Jesus.

But suppose we lack these things. How sad are the expressions of verse 9: "But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins." There is a kind of government of God operative among His people. One part of this is that if a Christian becomes indifferent and worldly-minded, and lets divine things slip, to be taken up with this poor world, then, in a corresponding measure, he loses the consciousness of the blessedness there is in Christ. He doesn't lose the blessedness; he loses the consciousness of it. It is even possible for a Christian to forget that he was purged. He can get so far away that he doesn't even know whether or not he is a child of God. He just goes on in this condition, either in utter indifference or in despair. He has forgotten he has been purged. Such is the government of God among His people.

We surely want to escape such a sad condition, do we not? We want the constant assurance in our soul that we are headed for glory. We can keep that assurance, and at the same time be neither barren nor unfruitful, if these things be in us and abound. Verse 10 reassures us: "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall." 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 practically good to ourselves.

Finally, verse 11 gives further promise to the believer: "For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." Isn't that a glorious entrance? That is the privilege of every Christian. It is not a question of endowment, gift or ability, but of the heart's 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. Each one of us here who is Christ's is privileged to have an abundant entrance. It is put into our own hands, although we all know that the ability must come from Him. It is a matter of grace from first to last, and none of us is going to take any credit, but may we not cast ourselves unreservedly upon Him and claim that grace He so gladly gives? It is in doing so, and with diligence, that we can have the joy of an abundant entrance "into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

The Path of Faith

Heb. 11

We must remember that faith begins with God, and he who is really walking a path of faith always brings God in. This is the difference between faith and unbelief; unbelief always leaves Him out. Again, faith is the individual soul alone with God, and any intervention of a third party destroys it. Any acting from secondary motives is not faith. It must be God and His Word alone before the soul for the act to be an act of faith.

Faith grows. This can be learned in the history of the children of God, and as detailed in Heb. 11 To bring God into everything is the privilege now of His children. There is nothing too small in our daily path for Him who has numbered even the hairs of our heads to notice. It is this bringing of God into all our matters that produces the walk, the life of faith, which is the subject of Heb. 11 Bringing God into our matters reveals to us the true character of them, for "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all." Thus this, by becoming the continual habit of the soul, becomes at once a preserving power for it in the midst of all the darkness and unbelief of our natural hearts.

The principle for the Christian now is found in the words, "He endured, as seeing Him who is invisible." We must see God in everything.

In the examples of Heb. 11, we see they reckoned on God. This is faith, and this characterizes each one. In Abel's act, God's claim is admitted, and in the sacrifice Abel confesses that he merited death as the sinner. He comes in the provided way and is accepted, "God testifying of his gifts." So God is before Enoch, and Noah, and Abraham, and Moses, and the others. This settled everything for each in his day.

It is important just simply to grasp what real faith is, that it begins with God, and continues to count upon God, and that it is intensely individual. We are glad and thankful to find others in the path of faith with us, but that, having always to count upon God now individually is the power to sustain us in the path even if others fail us, and to produce the works seen in a life of faith. When a trial comes, if there has not been this individual intercourse with God, it is often found that we have been merely imitators of others. We then, like Ephraim, "being armed, and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle." Psalm 78:9. But if we have been in the habit of bringing God in, we shall turn to Him in the day of battle, and turning to Him is not turning our back to the enemy.

"This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." 1 John 5:4.

Paul and Silas in Prison

What could have been more dismal than the plight of Paul and Silas at Philippi? They had been thrust into the inner prison, with their feet shackled in the stocks, and what were they doing? They "prayed, and sang praises unto God." Acts 16:25. They were exercising their holy and their royal priesthood in that prison. When they sang praises they were holy priests; when they said to the terrified jailer, "Do thyself no harm: for we are all here," they were royal priests. It is a charming picture! They were full of joy, and that jailer was converted. That was the wonderful result of their imprisonment and bleeding and wounded backs; this soul was saved. Tribulation will come in various ways, but you must accept the need of it while here-"Knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." Rom. 5:3-5.

Perfect Submission

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."

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

"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

A third question was then asked, 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 peace which settled upon his countenance as he took up the chalk and wrote-

"Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight."

Submission to the will

Of Him who guides me still,

Is surety of His love revealed;

My soul shall rise above

This world in which we move;

I conquer only where I yield.

Not what I wish to be,

Nor where I wish to go,

For who am I that I should choose my way?

The Lord shall choose for me,

'Tis better far I know;

So let Him bid me go, or stay.

Persevere in Prayer

We should persevere in prayer, but God may keep us waiting. The exercise is very helpful for the soul. There is an encouraging word in Phil. 4 "Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." And what then? Does it say, You shall immediately receive what you ask for? No, but "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." That is a most precious word. It presents a character of prayer so blessedly simple. We are encouraged by it to come to God about everything, no matter how small, and that too without raising a question as to whether we have faith. We are to make known our requests to God-though surely He knows them before. He loves to have us come to Him about our little matters, and rest in the happy assurance that He will do what is right and give us what is good; and whether He gives or withholds, His peace shall garrison our hearts and minds.

The Person of the Son

John 1

The blessed Person, life, and work of our Lord Jesus Christ on earth are set forth in the four gospels. The chief feature in Matthew is His presentation as the Messiah; in Mark, as the Prophet and perfect Servant of God; in Luke, as the Son of man; and in John, as the Son of God. In keeping with this, our Lord's genealogy is traced in Matthew to David and Abraham, is omitted in Mark, is traced back to Adam in Luke, and is omitted in John, for it is obvious that, as the Son of God, He had none. While in all four gospels, other titles, names, and traits are brought forward, the features given above are the most prominent ones.

In John 1 the varied glories of the ever blessed Son of God shine out in a marked way. John begins with the sublime statement, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The Word existed eternally. The Word never had a beginning. In the beginning the Word already was, and "the Word was with God." The latter clause brings before us distinct personality, and, moreover, "the Word was God," which shows His deity. So, in this wondrous verse we have the eternity, personality, and deity of the Word-His glories which eternally abide and which are and were before creation. As another has beautifully written of Him, "He is, and He is the expression of, the whole mind that subsists in God-`the Word.' " The Holy Spirit emphatically adds, "The same [or He] was in the beginning with God," thus carefully guarding His distinct personality in eternity, before creation and time.

This wondrous divine being-the Word, who was with God, and who was God-was the Creator. "All things were made by Him." He it was who spoke, and it was done, who commanded, and it stood fast. He was the One who called heaven and earth into existence, who put untold myriads of stars in the heavens, who said, "Let there be light," and there was light, who clothed the earth with verdure and gave life to every living thing. All things, visible and invisible, were made by Him. Every living creature in heaven or on earth, every principality, power, might, dominion, the innumerable company of angels, and the whole race of man, all owe their existence to the mighty fiat of the everlasting Word. "And without Him was not anything made that was made."

"In Him was life." It was nowhere else. The Word, God, is its eternal source and spring. The life was ever in Him. "And the life was the light of men." The life was revealed, manifested down here in the world. "The life was the light of men," and in 1 John 1:1-3 we read: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (for the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you."

The Holy Spirit passes from the presentation of the Word in eternity to His manifestation here in time among men. He in whom was life came into the world. The life was the light of men, not of angels. Men were in darkness. The world was under the power of darkness through the entrance

and reign of sin, and men as fallen creatures had their minds and hearts darkened. But the Light appeared. "The life was the light of men." Jesus, the ever blessed Son of God, walking here as man upon the earth (sin apart), was the life. But though "the light shineth in darkness," and that with unclouded luster morally, yet so gross was the darkness that it "comprehended it not." Instead of the darkness being dispelled by that shining light, it remained as it was. Man as such was completely under its power. Gross darkness covered the world, and there was no comprehension of that wondrous light.

John, a man sent from God, came and bore witness of the Light that all men through Him might believe. "That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." The true Light did not shine only for that people whom God had blessed of old and who had the law (though the law is light Pro. 6:23), but for all men. The world knew Him not, and the Jews received Him not. There was, however, a people who did receive Him, who were born of God, and to whom He gave the right to be the children of God. Blessed are all they who are now the children of God.

Next in this wondrous chapter we come to the incarnation. "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." John 1:14. Wondrous grace! The eternal Word was here on earth as man, clothed with true humanity (without sin) and holy. A real Man, Jesus, the holy One of God, dwelt among men. "Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh." 1 Tim. 3:16. "We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father [or a glory as of an only begotten with a Father]." John 1:14. How deeply blessed! Who does not know the joy of an earthly parent in an only son? How much greater is the joy and delight of the Father in His only begotten One? How wondrous it is that men should contemplate such a One! No man has seen God at any time. He is invisible, "dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see." 1 Tim. 6:16. He is a Spirit-light, love-the invisible God. The only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, "He hath declared Him." In Him, the only begotten Son, we learn what God is, for He was Immanuel, God with us.

John the Baptist, seeing Jesus coming to him, said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!" Wondrous mystery! This same blessed One is the Redeemer, the One who was about to offer Himself, the Lamb of God, as a sacrifice for sin. Abraham said to his son Isaac, "My son, God will provide Himself a lamb." Here is God's Lamb, the Holy One, without blemish and without spot, the Lamb which taketh away sin. At Calvary, Jesus offered Himself without spot to God, to put away sin (Heb. 9:14, 26). Sin has been put away forever from God's sight for everyone who believes. But He was on the cross in relation to the sin of the world, and eventually, as the result of His work, sin will be taken away from the world altogether. God will establish an eternal system wherein righteousness shall dwell, based on the perfection of the finished work of Jesus, the holy Lamb of God.

John says, when he saw the Spirit descending on Him at His baptism, that this same blessed One is He who baptizes with the Holy Ghost, the Son of God (John 1:33, 34). "Again the next day after... looking upon Jesus as He walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God!" Not only is He the sin-bearer, but He is the Lamb of God in whom God could find His perfect satisfaction and delight, and who, as a burnt offering on the cross, was a sweet savor before Him. Disciples follow Him as they hear John's words, and the gladness spreads from one to another, that the Messiah, the Christ, the anointed One of God, is found. Jesus Himself calls Philip who later finds Nathanael,

who confesses Him as Jesus of Nazareth of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did. write. Nathanael confesses Him as the Son of God and the King of Israel; and Jesus says to him, "hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man." So this precious portion closes with a foreshadowing of that blessed day for this poor earth when, the curse being removed (Rev. 22:3), Jesus, Son of God and Son of man, shall reign as King of Israel. Then all things shall be gathered in one in Him, both in heaven and on earth (Eph. 1:10).

How wondrously the Holy Spirit brings before our souls in this chapter the manifold glories of the Person of God's beloved Son! Surely every heart that knows Him and His love must bow in worship, adoration, and praise, as we think of Him who is the everlasting Word, God, the mighty Creator, and yet who has become a Man that He might glorify God, accomplish redemption, and eventually deliver this groaning scene. This is He who is now seated at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens, crowned with glory and honor, the triumphant Savior in the eternal glory of God.

"Thou art the everlasting Word,

The Father's only Son;

God manifest, God seen and heard,

The heaven's beloved One;

Worthy, O Lamb of God, art Thou

That every knee to Thee should bow."

May God engage our hearts' affections more and more with His blessed Person, and give us a holy jealousy for the glory of His name.

The Epistle to the Philippians

The epistle to the Philippians has a peculiar character, rather distinct from the other epistles. There are indeed traces of the same in Timothy. Taking it characteristically, it is the epistle of Christian experience. We do not find much doctrinal teaching in it, but rather the experience of Christian walk-not the experience of one who is going wrong, but of one who is going right-the experience which the Spirit of God gives. The Apostle is perfectly clear as to his position, yet here he accounts himself not to have attained. He is on the road to the glory; he has not yet reached it, but Christ has laid hold on him for it (Phil. 3:12).

When I speak of my place in Christ, as in Ephesians, it is in heavenly places; but as to our souls, we are here on earth, going through it-a place full of temptation and snares. Philippians does not give account of failure, but tells of the upward path of the Christian, salvation being looked at throughout, as at the end of the wilderness. Paul had no doubt that Christ had secured for him the blessedness, but he had not yet obtained it. Salvation is here looked at as being gained at the end of the journey.

The Power of Affection

There is danger today of making the Bible "easy." The clear and full character of revelation in our dispensation is one of its great distinctions. That is very blessedly true. "Blessed are your eyes, for they see," the Lord said. Still the ease with which divine knowledge may now be attained has its snare and its danger. We may get pleased with the attainment itself without being stirred up, as we ought to be, to walk in those richer affections and in that deeper moral power which alone is consistent with our enlarged measure of light and understanding.

The church at Corinth abounded in knowledge (1 Cor. 1:5), but their walk was so unspiritual that the Apostle would not treat them as though they had knowledge (1 Cor. 3:1). This shows us how the Lord abhors the trafficking in unfelt truth. In heaven there may be ignorance or want of knowledge, but no such thing as the possession of unfelt truth. The angels are heavenly creatures, but they confess their ignorance by their desire to know (1 Pet. 1:12). They are ignorant of certain truths but not uninterested about them. So, righteous men and prophets have been ignorant, but not uninterested (Matt. 13:17; Luke 10:24; Pet. 1:10). In the person of the patriarch Abraham, we see how some of old, in dispensations of less light and communicated knowledge, had such right affections that the Spirit carried them beyond the general measure of understanding of their age.

Speaking of Abraham the Lord says, He "rejoiced to see My day: and he saw it, and was glad." John 8:56. His rejoicing was the early or previous condition of his soul. It tells us that he took an interest in the notices which had been afforded him of Christ. They were comparatively few and faint, but they captivated his soul. The glimpses were powerful, and the Lord honored such affection, and gave His servant a fuller vision. "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day: and he saw it." Then, as we further read, "he was glad." He used the knowledge he attained aright, as he sought it aright. His affections were engaged in the search, and they were not cooled or deadened when he found it.

Here was knowledge sought and used in the due order. Our hearts can say, Oh for more of this within and among us!

Prayer

It has often been said that "prayer moves the arm of Him who moves the universe." Prayer is an expression of dependence upon God. A prayerless Christian might be called an independent Christian, and independence of God is synonymous with the slavery of Satan. Thus, a prayerless Christian is in a most perilous condition and is sure to bring dishonor upon God.

The divine path for the child of God is altogether opposed to man's intelligence, and it is only as we are dependent upon God that we can go on in that path. The world seeks to ensnare us by its charms and allurements. "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh." Gal. 5:17. "The devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." 1 Pet. 5:8. Are we stronger than the world, the flesh, or the devil? Even Christians may seek to draw us aside. Under the plea of liberal-mindedness they may strive to widen the narrow path God has set our feet in. They think that by widening the path Christianity will become more popular and serviceable.

Beloved, it is only as we are dependent upon God, learning His will, and abiding therein, that we can glorify Christ in a world which rejected Him. We are not called to be earthly saints, but heavenly, even as we are heavenly (1 Cor. 15:48).

So in this day, when Satan is arraying his deadly forces against the reproduction on earth of a Christ in glory, and even getting Christians unwittingly on his side, we have the more urgent need of private and public prayer. When the professed leaders of Christianity are giving up the truth and reducing God to the level of man, as in Psalm 50:21: "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself," and when their followers applaud and endorse all this, it does indeed behoove us to pay attention to prayer, that we may be kept.

Prayer occupies a very large place in the Scriptures. We read, "Pray without ceasing" and "continuing instant in prayer" (1 Thess. 5:17; Rom. 12:12). It is only as we in prayer and supplication and thanksgiving let our requests be made unto God, that the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:6, 7). It is a marvelous thing that, amid all the violent heavings and surgings of this poor world, whether politically, religiously, socially, or domestically, we can, through prayer, have this wonderful peace "which passeth all understanding." We have an exhortation in 1 Tim. 2:1-4 which, I believe, is largely neglected by God's children. Paul says, "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty," etc. May we all give more earnest heed to it. Exhortations to prayer might easily be multiplied, but space forbids.

The blessed Lord Jesus Christ when here on earth was a perfect example to us. He was the truly dependent One, and we find Him marked by prayer. "And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, He was there alone."

Matt. 14:23. "And He withdrew Himself into the wilderness, and prayed. " Luke 5:16. In John 17:9 Jesus says of His disciples, "I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which Thou hast given Me." We have only to read through the gospels to see how often, even all night, our blessed Master prayed.

The Apostle Paul, whom the Holy Spirit puts forth as a pattern saint, was a man of prayer. One of the many examples of this is 1 Thess. 3:9, 10: "For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God; night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith?"

The early Christians, as seen in The Acts of the Apostles, were characterized by prayer. "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship; and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." Acts 2:41, 42.

In Acts 12, we find that when Peter was cast into prison "prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him." Then when God answered them, and Rhoda told the praying company that Peter was at the gate, they said to her, "Thou art mad." When she pressed it upon them, they admitted that it might be his angel. Finally, when the gate opened and they saw him, "they were astonished." What a sad tale of unbelief it is when we so little look for an answer to prayer, that we are astonished when it comes, and call it "a remarkable answer."

Surely, the lack of private and public prayer gives a key to our weakness, both individual and collective. For proof of this, see the principle brought out by Christ in Mark 9:29: "This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting."

In conclusion, I would like to give you an example of prayer found in 1 Kings 18:41-46. In the first verse of this chapter we find that God told Elijah that He was going to send rain upon the earth. Many Christians throw their responsibilities and privileges overboard because of God's sovereignty. God in His sovereignty was about to bless Israel, to remove the curse that had for so long dried up her streams and turned the country "flowing with milk and honey" into an arid wilderness. The prophet might have said, Why should I pray, when God has told me that He is going to send the rain? But not so; he went to Mount Carmel-a place of expectancy-from whence he could scan the whole seaward horizon. Then "He cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees." While he looked up for the blessing, he sent his servant seven times-perfection of expectancy-to look out for the blessing. On returning the seventh time, the servant reported, "Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand." Many might think that was a poor and insignificant answer to prayer, but not Elijah. He sent a message of urgent haste to Ahab-"Prepare thy chariot, and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not." Now comes the triumphant answer to the prayer of faith. God's mighty hand is in that little cloud. "And it came to pass in the meanwhile, that the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain."

Would that we were more like Elijah-in the current of God's thoughts, in earnest prayer about what concerns Him and His interests. May we all be stirred up to more public and private prayer, not only about our interests and needs, but also about God's interests and the sinner's needs. There is ample room and urgent necessity for continual earnest prayer to Him that is able to do exceedingly

above all that we ask or think.

On Prayer

"Seek ye My face... Thy face, Lord, will I seek." Psalm 27:8.

In prayer I have not only to ask for things, but to realize the presence of Him to whom I speak. "Seek the Lord, and His strength: seek His face evermore." Psalm 105:4. If I lose the sense of seeing Him by faith, the power of prayer is gone. Prayer is not only asking right things, but having the sense of the Person there. If I have not that, I lose the sense of His love, and of being heard.

The Prodigal

The prodigal found a higher place, and tasted higher communion than he had ever known before. "The fatted calf" had never been slain for him before. "The best robe" had never been on him before. And how was this? Was it a question of the prodigal's merit? Oh! no; it was simply a question of the father's love.

Rejoice With Me

These touching words unfold to us the deep joy of the Lord Himself in the matter of our salvation. This is not sufficiently meditated upon. We are apt to forget that God has His own special joy in receiving back to His bosom of love the poor wanderer—a joy so peculiar that He can say, "Rejoice with Me"—"Let us eat and be merry"—"It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad." He does not say, Let him eat and be merry. This would never do. God had His own joy in redemption. This is the sweet lesson taught in Luke 15. The shepherd was glad to find his sheep. The woman was glad to find her piece of silver. The father was glad to embrace his son. God is glad to get back the lost one. The tide of joy that rolls through the hosts above when a sinner returns, finds its deep, exhaustless source in the eternal bosom of God. "Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." Luke 15:10. No one has such deep joy in the salvation of a soul as God Himself.

The thought of this is most soul-subduing and heart-melting. Nothing can exceed it. It gives a full, clear, and convincing answer to Satan's lie in the garden, and to all the dark suspicion of our hearts. Who could listen for a moment to those accents, "Let us be merry," issuing from the father's lips—the father's heart—and continue to doubt his perfect love? How could the prodigal have had a doubt in his heart when he saw that there was not one in all the house so glad to get him back as the father himself. Surely the words, "Let us be merry," must have fallen upon his heart with peculiar power. He could never have presumed to hope for such a reception. To be let in at all, to be made a hired servant, to get any place in the house, would have fully equaled his highest expectation. But oh! to hear the father say, "Let us be merry!" This truly was beyond all human thought. Yet these were the father's veritable words. It was really true that he was glad to regain the poor, undeserving spendthrift. The prodigal could not tell why, but it was so. The father had embraced and kissed him, even in his rags. Without a single upbraiding word, he had received him to his bosom. At the very moment when he was full of doubt as to whether he could be let in at all, he found the father on his neck. And, as if to crown and banish every trace of doubt and every shadow of fear, he hears the father's cry, "Let us eat, and be merry."

Pause and think of all this. Think deeply of it. Remember, God is glad to get back to Himself the very vilest of the vile. A returning sinner makes God happy. Wondrous thought! profound mystery of love! A poor sinner can minister to the joy of God! Oh, who can cherish a doubt or harbor a fear in the presence of such grace? May the sense of it fill your heart with sweetest confidence and peace.

Resurrection of Judgment

The resurrection for judgment before the great white throne will not consist of a mixture of saved and lost, or of just and unjust. Scripture calls them "dead"- "I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God." Rev. 20:12. This resurrection is called by our Lord, "the resurrection of damnation," or judgment, in contrast to the "resurrection of life," or "the resurrection of the just."

We are further told that all who appear before the great white throne will be judged "every man according to his works," and who could be saved if judged according to his works? There is no account, therefore, of any being saved who are judged at the great white throne. Those who are taken to glory at the coming of our Lord will be raised from among the dead a thousand years before the great white throne judgment. See Rev. 20:5 and 1 Thess. 4:16, 17.

The Righteousness of God

God has displayed His righteousness, not only in the judgment of sin on the cross, but also in setting Jesus at His own right hand in glory. When He suffered for sins and died, it was for us; therefore, God must have us in glory with Him in divine righteousness. We shall be the continual witness in glory to the worth and eternal efficacy of what Christ has done. Christ would not have the fruit of the travail of His soul unless He had us there.

"And now a righteousness divine

Is all my glory, all my trust;

Nor will I fear, since that is mine,

While Jesus lives, and God is just."

Safe

When the question of security is considered, the object which provides that security must be carefully examined. For one can trust in something that is no more solid than a spider's web.

"Some trust in chariots, and some in horses" (Psalm 20:7). Some "trust in princes" (Psalm 146:3); some in "lying words" (Jer. 7:8); others in images (Isa. 42:17); still others in their own works (Jer. 48:7); and in their own hearts (Pro. 28:26). There is only One in whom we can confidently trust for security-and that is the Lord Jesus Christ!

"Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him." Psalm 2:12.

The Secret of Success

"This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success. Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest." Josh. 1:8, 9.

The Secret

In these days many are often perplexed by the widespread indifference, lawlessness, and sin which abounds. We long for the day when our Lord shall assume His great power and reign. But in the meantime we must anchor our faith to the promises of God and stand. We do not always understand why the Lord delays His coming; we do know that He is long-suffering, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

"He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me: and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him." John 14:21.

This is the secret of endurance, the secret of patience, in a day when life is truly difficult, when there are so many things hard to understand. For if the Lord be pleased to manifest Himself unto us day by day, so that we can live in the glory of His unseen presence, and triumph in that presence, then He will enable us to endure.

Seeking the Lost

We learn from 2 Cor. 5 that two motives impelled the Apostle Paul to preach the gospel. One was, "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men." If he thought of the solemn and awful reality of judgment to come, it urged him to go out to "persuade men." Do we feel the weight of this serious and solemn fact, that souls are perishing around us, standing, as it were, on the brink of a lost eternity?

But another motive also acted on the Apostle. He says, "The love of Christ constraineth us." That love had shone like a sunbeam into Paul's heart and produced a revolution in his whole life and thoughts. It had changed the bitter persecutor of the Church, Saul, into the earnest servant of God, Paul.

What a change the love of Christ can bring about! It can melt the hardest heart and break down the most stubborn will. And the knowledge of this can give strength and courage to make it known to others.

May the Lord Jesus so fill our hearts with the joy and blessedness of His love, that we cannot but tell, out of full hearts, the story of His wondrous grace to the poor perishing sinners around!

Separation to Christ

It is not Christ's desire to advance His own to greater earthly positions, and we are not to judge His love by earthly favors. We may be worldly, selfish, earthly-minded, or asleep. If we would have "part," or conscious association with Christ, our feet must be washed (John 13). We must have this cleansing for communion. We must be separated from the world in order that we may enjoy the things that have been opened up for us in another world. But, oh, how we do cling to things here! Do we wish to be cleared of everything unsuitable to Christ? What a test for our hearts! Paul was cleared. Read Phil. 3

The Sepulchre

John 20:1-18

A few women and the beloved disciple, John, were present when the Lord died. Before bowing His head and yielding up His spirit, the Lord uttered the words, "It is finished." They conveyed an infinite scope of blessing to the hearts of the disciples who were thus assured that divine love had taken pity on their state, and had provided for it at all cost. "It is finished." His work left nothing more to be done. The cross could no longer hold its victim and Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus were chosen of God to give the Savior a place with the rich in His death.

The visit of His dear followers to the sepulcher proved to their hearts the truth of His words, "It is finished." What did the sepulcher contain? What had death done with the Savior? Or, What had the Savior done with death? If the grave held Him, His work was vain, and not one of those for whom He had given Himself was acquitted or justified. Mary found the sepulcher open. Peter and John ascertained that it was empty. Peter went in and saw. The attributes of death were there, testifying by their presence that death had been unable to hold its prey, and that, without struggle or conflict, the victory over it had been peaceful. The napkin was wrapped together in a place by itself, as one does with a garment when preparing to go out. The "It is finished" was proved. The love which had undertaken the work had completed it, and the disciples, who as yet knew not the scripture, were convinced by the testimony of their eyes. They believed, and went away again unto their own home with the knowledge of a work thenceforth completed.

Two disciples saw and believed, but they found little in comparison to what a poor, ignorant woman found at the sepulcher. Mary Magdalene, a witness of the love of Christ (for He had delivered her from the seven devils), loved the Lord with an affection which sprang from the greatness of His love and which far exceeded her intelligence. While the intelligence of Peter and John could be engaged and satisfied with a work, Mary's affection could not be; she needed more; she needed the Person who was her Object. Peter had gone into the sepulcher and had seen only the linen clothes and the napkin. As she wept, Mary stooped down and saw two angels in the sepulcher. While the linen clothes sufficed for the disciples, even angels were not enough for Mary. Even in their presence, and without awaiting their answer, she turned back, for she wanted her Lord. At first her utter ignorance of what was happening hindered her from recognizing Him, but when Jesus, the good Shepherd called her by name, "Mary," she immediately recognized and responded to the Shepherd's voice.

There was a link of affection from Jesus to Mary and from Mary to Jesus. Is Mary's affection surprising when we think of the Savior who in the perfection of His Person had made her, a failing, ignorant creature, the object of His goodness and delivered her from her bondage? The most wonderful thing is not Mary's affection for Jesus, but Jesus' affection for Mary. Among thousands of thousands He knew her by name as His sheep. He remembered her who had been the most wretched. She said unto Him, "Master." He replies, not, "Go to My servants," but, "Go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your

God."

Mary's affection in clinging to Christ caused her to receive a revelation greater than all those which Peter had received up to this point. Love which is set on His Person becomes the depository of further knowledge. Knowing only His work, the disciples went away again to their own home. Mary Magdalene, with love which clung to His Person, learned at the Savior's feet the most glorious results of His sacrifice. This weak woman, in all the modesty of her position, outshines the disciples. Their feet were swift, no doubt, to lead them to the sepulcher but Mary was the first to know the path which leads straight to the Father, and, retracing her steps with this marvelous revelation, to carry the message to the disciples.

Service and Communion: a Word to Young Believers

To those who seek to serve their gracious Master in the ministry of the Word in Sunday school work, in street preaching, in tract distribution, or any other form of labor for the Lord, I would say in deep affection, See to it that your service is the outcome of communion with Christ. Rivers of living water can only flow from those who go to Him and drink, and they must go continually. Be careful to allow nothing to cloud your enjoyment of divine love, and seek to realize for yourselves the exceeding preciousness of Christ, so that when you speak of Him it may be out of the fullness of a heart made abundantly happy. It is true, the outward form of service may be sustained by the mere energy of nature, and apart from communion with Christ, but then the key element will be wanting that makes the service acceptable to Him, and your own souls will be enfeebled and become like withered grass.

Also, be on your guard against making service your one object. Those who do so seldom serve well. We have known earnest men who have fallen into this snare. They are never satisfied unless always on the move and they think little of others who do not follow in their steps. Now Martha served much, and found fault with one who seemed to serve less; yet the latter received the Lord's commendation, and Martha missed it. There is a zeal that compasses sea and land, but it is not fed from celestial fires. There is a running to and fro with restless feet, and a doing of this and that which, after all, may be but the religious activity of the flesh, which fades away.

Cultivate communion with God, be much in prayer, and spend time over the Word of God, that your own soul may be fed. How else shall you feed others? "It is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen? Or saith He it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written." 1 Cor. 9:9, 10. In thinking of others, and laboring for their good, God would have us also feed ourselves. We shall soon famish if we do not, and spiritual strength will decline. We shall be keepers of the vineyards of others while our own vineyards have not been kept.

You will find it a deadening habit to read the Word only to search out something for other people. It is Gibeonitish service (Josh. 9:21). Moreover, what you gather up and set before others will be mere religious information in which there will be no heavenly unction. It differs from the living ministry of the Holy Ghost, as chalk from cheese.

Be faithful also in little things; it may be that God will trust you with greater matters. We are a little afraid of those who neglect the commonplace duties of everyday life for what they are pleased to think and call the work of the Lord. At all events, do faithfully and well whatever comes to your hand. In a humble school, far removed from public observation, God trains His servants for their higher mission. Moses was forty years in the back side of the desert, keeping the flocks of his father-in-law, before he was called to lead out the tribes of Israel from the house of bondage; and David in the wilderness, watching over the few sheep of Jesse, was there prepared for his conflict with Goliath in the valley of Elah. The years thus spent were not wasted years; the fruit of them was seen ever afterward.

Sleep Versus With Christ

Memory and consciousness remain with both saved and unsaved after death, as can be seen by reading Luke 16:19 to the end. This is the first time in the Bible that the curtain is brushed aside and we get a little view of the unseen world. "Sleep" in Scripture always refers to the body. The whole subject of 1 Cor. 15 is the resurrection of the body. It sleeps until the resurrection morning, when the dead in Christ will rise to receive an incorruptible, and an immortal body. James tells us in chapter 2, verse 26, that "the body without the spirit is dead." Paul tells us that when caught up to Paradise, he could not tell whether he was in the body or out of it. The transfiguration scene does not teach us the sleep of the soul. Both Moses and Elias spoke of His decease which He would accomplish at Jerusalem, thus showing that they were more intelligent than, the disciples who companied with Jesus. One might ask whether being asleep would be "far better," or being "with the Lord" would mean joy to one's soul, if unconscious in sleep. No, it is the body that is referred to when the word "sleep" is used.

A Sleepless Night

Read Esther 6

"On that night could not the king sleep." How was this? What was it that drove sleep from the monarch's eyes, and slumber from his eyelids? Why could not the mighty Ahasuerus enjoy a mercy which doubtless was the portion of the very meanest of his subjects? Some may say that the heavy cares of royalty robbed him of that which a "laboring man" enjoys. This might be so on other nights, but "on that night" we must account for his restlessness in quite another way. The finger of the Almighty was in that sleepless night. "The Lord God of the Hebrews" had a mighty work to accomplish on behalf of His beloved people and, in order to bring that about, He drove sleep from the luxurious couch of the monarch of one hundred and twenty-seven provinces.

This brings out in a very marked way the character of the book of Esther. The reader will observe that throughout this interesting section of inspiration the name of God is never mentioned, and yet His finger is visibly stumped upon everything. The most trivial circumstance displays His wonderful counsel and excellent working. Nature's vision cannot trace the movement of the wheels of Jehovah's chariot; faith not only traces it but knows the direction in which it tends. The enemy plots, but God is above him. Satan's every movement is seen to be only a link in the marvelous chain of events by which the God of Israel was bringing about His purposes of grace respecting His people. Thus it has been; thus it is, and thus it shall ever be. Satan's malice, man's pride, the most hostile influences, all are but so many instruments in the hand of God for the accomplishment of His gracious purposes. This gives the sweetest rest to the heart amid the ceaseless tossings and fluctuations of human affairs. "The end of the Lord" shall assuredly be seen. "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure." Blessed be His name for this soul sustaining assurance! It quiets the heart at all times. Jehovah is behind the scenes. Every wheel, every screw, every pivot in the vast machine of human affairs is under His control. Though His name be not known or acknowledged by the children of the earth, His finger is seen, His word is trusted, and His end is expected by the children of faith.

How clearly all this is seen in the book of Esther. Vashti's beauty-the king's pride therein -his unseemly command-her indignant refusal- the advice of the king's counselors-all, in short, is but the unfolding of Jehovah's ripening purposes. Of "all the fair young virgins" gathered at "Shushan the palace," not one must be allowed to win the king's heart save Esther, the daughter of an obscure Jewish house, a desolate orphan. Again, of all the officers, ministers, and attendants about the palace, not one must be allowed to discover the conspiracy against the king's life, save "a certain Jew, whose name was Mordecai." And on that sleepless night nothing must be brought to while away the monarch's weary hours save "the book of records of the chronicles." Strange recreation for a voluptuous king! But God was at the back of all this. There was a certain record in that book, about "a certain Jew," which must be brought immediately under the eye of the restless monarch. Mordecai must come into notice. He must be rewarded for his fidelity, and so rewarded as to cover with overwhelming confusion the face of the proud Amalekite. At the very moment that

this record was passing under review, none other than the haughty and wicked Haman must be seen in the court of the king's house. He had come in order to compass the death of Mordecai, but he is forced by the providence of God to plan for Mordecai's triumph and display. His plan had been to get him hanged on a gallows, but he is made to clothe him with the king's robe, to set him on the king's horse, and, like a footman, to conduct him through the street of the city. Like a mere herald, he is forced to announce his triumph.

"Oh! scenes surpassing fable, And yet true."

Who could have imagined that the noblest lord in all dominions of Ahasuerus, a descendant of the house of Agag, should be compelled thus to wait upon a poor Jew-and that too, such a lord, such a Jew, and at such a moment! Surely the finger of the Almighty was in all this. Who but an infidel, an atheist, or a skeptic, could question a truth so obvious.

This much as to the providence of God. Let us now look for a moment at the pride of Haman. Despite all his dignity, wealth, and splendor, his wretched heart was wounded by one little matter not worth a thought in the judgment of a really great mind or a well-regulated heart. He was rendered miserable by the simple fact that Mordecai would not bow to him! Although he occupied the nearest place to the throne-although entrusted with the king's ring-although possessed of princely wealth and placed in a princely station-"Yet," he says, "all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate." Chap. 5:13. Miserable man! The highest position-the greatest wealth-the most extensive influence-the most flattering tokens of royal favor-all availed nothing just because a poor Jew refused to bow to him. Such is the human heart! such is man! such is the world!

But, "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." Haman proved this. At the very moment when he seemed to be about to plant his foot on the loftiest summit of his ambition, a just and retributive Providence had so brought it about that he was in a most marvelous manner compelled to prepare a triumph for Mordecai-a gallows for himself. The man whose very presence embittered a life of magnificence and splendor, he is obliged to wait upon, and the very gallows which he had ordered to be prepared for his intended victim was made use of for his own execution!

And here, let us ask, Why did Mordecai refuse to bow to Haman? Did it not seem like a blind obstinacy to refuse the customary honor to the king's noblest lord-his highest officer? Assuredly not. Haman, it is true, was the highest officer of Ahasuerus; but he was the greatest enemy of Jehovah, being the greatest enemy of the Jews. He was an Amalekite, and Jehovah had sworn that He would "have war with Amalek from generation to generation." Exod. 17:16. How then could a true son of Abraham bow to one with whom Jehovah was at war? Impossible. Mordecai could save the life of an Ahasuerus, but he could never bow to an Amalekite. As a faithful Jew he walked too closely with the God of his fathers to allow him to pay court to one of the seed of Amalek.

Mordecai's stern refusal, then, to bow to Haman was not the fruit of a blind obstinacy and senseless pride, but of lovely faith in and high communion with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He could never relinquish the dignity which belonged to the Israel of God. He would abide by faith under Jehovah's banner, and while so abiding, he could never do obeisance to an Amalekite. What though his people were "scattered and peeled"-though their "beautiful house"

was in ruins-though Jerusalem's ancient glory was departed-was faith, therefore, to abandon the high position assigned by God's counsels to His people? By no means. Faith would recognize the ruin, and walk softly, while at the same time it laid hold of God's promise, and occupied in holy dignity the platform which that promise had opened for all who believed it. Mordecai was made to feel deeply the ruin. He clothed himself in sackcloth, but he would never bow to an Amalekite.

What was the result? His sackcloth was exchanged for royal apparel. His place at the king's gate was exchanged for a place next to the throne. He realized in his own happy experience the truth of that ancient promise that Israel should be "the head, and not the tail." Thus it was with this faithful Jew of old. He took his stand on that elevated ground where faith always places the soul. He shaped his way not according to nature's view of things around, but according to faith's view of the Word of God. Nature might say, 'Why not lower your standard of action to the level of your circumstances? Why not suit yourself to your outward condition? Had you not better acknowledge the Amalekite, seeing the Amalekite is in the place of power? Nature might speak thus, but 'faith's answer was simple: "The Lord hath sworn that the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation." Thus it is always. Faith lays hold of THE LIVING GOD AND HIS ETERNAL WORD and abides in peace and walks in holy elevation.

Christian reader, may the holy instruction of the book of Esther be brought home to our souls in the power of the Holy Spirit. In it we see the providence of God, the pride of man, and the power of faith. Moreover, we are furnished with a striking picture of the actings of Jehovah on behalf of His people Israel-the sudden overthrow of their last proud oppressor-and their final restoration, and everlasting blessedness, rest, and glory.

A Prerequisite for Spiritual Perception

Quickness of moral perception depends on the maintenance of a Nazarite separation from all and everything that might cloud our souls. Take the sons of Aaron, for example. They were commanded not to drink wine or strong drink when they went into the tabernacle of the congregation lest they should die, and that they might put difference between holy and unholy, and between clean and unclean, etc. (Lev. 10). This is an abiding principle, and hence when a believer forgets his heavenly calling, and yields to the indulgence of earthly joys, is "drunk with wine" (or is exhilarated by earthly things) instead of being "filled with the Spirit," it is impossible for him to discern between things that differ, or to perceive what is morally suitable to God. No greater mistake can be made than to expect a right judgment upon moral questions from worldly Christians. They may be perfectly sincere and upright, and may at the same time desire to see the truth, but they have lost their spiritual discernment.

Stewards

It is the Lord's order that, in whatever way He is pleased to make us His stewards, whether as to temporal or spiritual things, if we are indeed acting as stewards and not as owners, He will make us stewards over more.

Even in this life, and as to temporal things, the Lord is pleased to repay those who act for Him as stewards, and who contribute to His work or to the poor, as He may be pleased to prosper them. But how much greater is the spiritual blessing we receive, both in this life and in the world to come if, constrained by the love of Christ, we act as God's stewards, respecting that with which He is pleased to entrust us.

Strengthened and Strong: King Uzziah

Uzziah, we learn from this chapter, "sought God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in the visions of God: and as long as he sought the Lord, God made him to prosper. And he went forth and warred.... and God helped him.... He strengthened himself exceedingly.... Uzziah built towers in Jerusalem... and fortified them... Also... towers in the desert, and digged many wells... he had... husbandmen also, and vinedressers in the mountains, and in Carmel... Moreover Uzziah had a host of fighting men, that went out to war by bands.... The whole number of the chief of the fathers of the mighty men of valor were two thousand and six hundred. And under their hand was an army, three hundred thousand and seven thousand and five hundred, that made war with mighty power, to help the king against the enemy. And Uzziah prepared for them throughout all the hosts shields, and spears, and helmets, and habergeons, and bows, and slings to cast stones. And he made in Jerusalem engines, invented by cunning men, to be on the towers and upon the bulwarks, to shoot arrows and great stones withal. And his name spread far abroad; for he was marvelously helped, till he was strong. But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction." 2 Chron. 26:5-16.

There are few words more remarkable than these. One would have thought that the very object to be gained by Uzziah was to be strong. The strength we naturally covet, however, is independence of God. Saints are found mourning over their weakness, and what do they mean? Is it not that they have no resources in themselves? If we did not forget that all real strength is derived from the fullness that is in Jesus, we always would be able to say with Paul, "When I am weak, then am I strong." We need to be deprived of every resource in ourselves, that we may know our strength to be in Him. When Uzziah felt himself to be strong, he transgressed against the Lord his God.

There is a great danger of our putting multiplied means in the place of the Lord Himself; we may rely on the means, and forget that they are not the source of supply.

What has been the history of the Church? She was marvelously helped till she was strong; when she was strong her heart became lifted up. The saints at Corinth who had multiplied resources: men, wealth, and wisdom, were tempted to think that by exercise of this wisdom they could refute the heathen. The Apostle told them that only by leaning on the "wisdom of God," which is "foolishness with man" and the "strength of God," which is weakness with man, they would be blessed.

The Spirit of God shows us in The Acts that the Church, when few in number, was marvelously helped. But soon the Church began to look to itself and to its own resources and greatness, instead of to the Lord. And does this not speak to us? Our blessing is in taking the place of weakness so that God may help for His own name's sake.

It is dangerous to say or suppose that we have attained to something. It is a mark of failure when a Christian looks for his own honor and credit instead of for the honor of the Lord. The great thing is to be mindful of His name. A single eye will be occupied with Christ.

It is a very strong word that we have here in reference to a saint-"His heart was lifted up to his destruction." But there is as strong a word in the New Testament. "He that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption." If any, even a saint of God, "soweth to his flesh," he will reap a sorrowful harvest of corruption, having misspent all his time. We need to give heed to the searching words of Scripture, not turning away the point of them from ourselves under the supposition that they cannot apply to us. This thought has been the source of much mischief in the Church. That soul will prosper which trembles at God's Word and is willing to face the most searching parts of it. The saint of God can sow to the flesh, can walk "according to the flesh," can "war after the flesh," but the miserable end will be, that he will "of the flesh reap corruption." When Uzziah was strong (his strength being in his own resources), his heart became "lifted up" like the heart of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon (Dan. 4:20) rather than like that of God's anointed king of Judah. A heart that is "lifted up" is in a dangerous state and almost always on the point of falling.

Though Uzziah was God's anointed king, he was not God's anointed priest. Yet, he would have nothing restrained from him and he transgressed "against the Lord his God" by going into the temple of the Lord to burn incense upon the altar of incense which did not pertain to him, but only to the priests, the sons of Aaron who were consecrated to burn incense. Let us, too, beware of dealing with the Lord in unholy familiarity. A humble spirit is always a confident spirit, but a humble spirit can trust only in the blood of Jesus. It does not rush into God's presence as the man who is "lifted up" in heart does. We can only come there through the incense of the Lord Jesus, not on the credit of our own graces, or devotedness, or in fleshly fervor.

"Neither shall it be for thine honor from the Lord God," said Azariah the priest as he with fourscore priests that were valiant men withstood the king. "Then Uzziah was wrath... and while he was wrath with the priests, the leprosy even rose up in his forehead before the priests in the house of the Lord."

This history of Uzziah is written for our admonition. Lifting up of heart is always self-seeking, not God-seeking. We have liberty to enter into the holiest, for we are priests unto God by the blood of Jesus, but it is always through the incense of our great High Priest.

We have a contrast in the next chapter. In 2 Chron. 27:6 we have no mention of Jotham's great army: he "became mighty, because he prepared his ways before the Lord his God." This is the way for the saint to grow in practical strength. Thus it was with the Thessalonians; their "work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope" was "in the sight of God and our Father." Jotham set the Lord always before him and went on in an even tenor of conduct. In the eyes of man, he may not be as mighty as Uzziah, but the Holy Ghost records his name as that of one "mighty" in the eyes of God.

The Times of Jeremiah

The service of the prophets in the various spiritual conditions of Israel, unfolds the grace and forbearance of the living God. The periods at which God raised them up, and the consequent character of their service, make the history of each very interesting, but of all the times during which the prophets prophesied, none were more painful than those of Jeremiah.

It is not in the amount of good done that Jeremiah stands before us as pre-eminent; on the contrary, results of labor are nowhere found so small, perhaps, as from the labors of that prophet. The ministry of Moses had large results. He found them under the galling yoke of Pharaoh; he left them within sight of the promised land. Joshua left them in possession. The history of the varied deliverers before the days of Samuel gives us an account of victories obtained. Elijah's and Elisha's days were marked times of God's goodness to an unfaithful people, but if we ask what were the results of Jeremiah's prophecies, we see nothing but desolation and ruin, and, by-and-by, we lose Jeremiah himself in the great confusion. At the same time, we see incessant service and unwearied faithfulness, so long as there remained a part of the wreck to be faithful to.

Others who had gone before had foretold what the disobedient and rebellious ways of Israel would lead them to, but it was the lot of Jeremiah to be on the ship when it went to pieces. He warned and warned again of the rocks that were ahead, but Israel heeded not. Up to the last moment he was used of God to press home on their consciences their sad condition, but without avail, and even after the captivity, he remained to guide the wayward remnant of those left in the land, only to experience on their part the same obstinacy and determination to be ruined.

The word of the Lord came to him in the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign. Now this was a period of blessing and revival. It was in the eighteenth year that the Passover was kept, of which it was said: "And there was no passover like to that kept in Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet." 2 Chron. 35:18. Jeremiah would have his share in that joy. I have often thought how much depends on the start of a Christian; how easily the heart sympathizes with what is around, whether harmful or healthful. To have the lot in early life cast among the fresh provisions of God's house, and amid the energies of His own Spirit, will give advantages to such a soul which are not the common lot of the Church of God. Such were Jeremiah's first days, the days of Josiah who was cradled in blessing such as had not been tasted in Israel since the days of Samuel. He lamented the death of Josiah. These joys, so fresh, were of short duration. But there is an intimate connection between the joys of communion and faithful warfare. There will be little of the one without the other. Jeremiah had drunk of the sweet drafts of blessing which had been so richly provided, and he was therefore able to feel the bitterness of the cup which Israel had to drink.

The last chapter of 2 Chronicles shows how prominent as a prophet he was. His words were despised, and the result was the casting off for a season of God's people. One of the services of Jeremiah during this period was to break the fall of Israel. Careful reading will show how tenderly the prophet applied himself to the needs of the people, and it is wonderful to see the compassion of God as exhibited by him. Jonah regretted that God's judgment did not fall upon Nineveh, but the

solicitudes of Jeremiah were those of the tender parent who would fain prevent the calamity befalling a disobedient child, but, failing to prevent it, still maintains the parent's heart and tears to soften the rebellious woes of that child. How often do we, in our intercourse with our brethren, act otherwise. If I see willfulness and disobedience, I warn; I tell what the consequences may be; I press home those warnings with diligence; all are unheeded, the calamity comes, perhaps even worse than I foretold. How ready the heart is then to triumph in its own faithfulness, and the poor victim of his own rashness is left to himself, while in a kind of triumph, I tell him, "You deserved it." The heart of Jeremiah could say: "But if ye will not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride; and mine eye shall weep sore, and run down with tears, because the Lord's flock is carried away captive." Jer. 13:17. Such hearts and such ministry are needed now.

It is in the book of this prophet that we have the history of that part of Israel which was not removed out of the land. Jeremiah's service did not close even when the city was taken and the wall broken down. The heart that, like Jeremiah's, is true to God and His people, will always have something to do. The special place he held was to seek to warn the people and to draw them into repentance. He was unheeded, and the judgments of God reached home. No sooner had the captives been borne away, than quite another field of duty arose before him, and one would have supposed that what had just happened would have made him a welcome guest in the house of the poor deserted Israelites. In chapter 42 we see this new labor that Jeremiah found. The destroying flood had swept away all he had formerly been among- the kings, the priests, the princes, the temple, the vessels-and the glory of Israel had departed. How often have we seen that, when services apparently have been disowned, the servant retires. When we have been laboring for an object and suddenly find all dashed from our hands, like a goodly vessel, before the world and to ourselves, the heart tends to faint and grow weary. There was never a more complete failure than that which was before the eye of the prophet. Yet his heart alone remained whole amidst it all; he was ready for fresh service. The remnant assembles before him; their confession seems honest; their hearts seem true. "Let, we beseech thee, our supplication be accepted before thee, and pray for us unto the Lord thy God, even for all this remnant; (for we are left but a few of many, as thine eyes do behold us:) that the Lord thy God may show us the way wherein we may walk, and the thing that we may do." Chap. 42:2, 3.

Jeremiah had had experience with the human heart. Ready to act as before he says, "Whatsoever thing the Lord shall answer you, I will declare it unto you." After ten days the answer was given to the same company (Chap. 42:9-22). The leaning of the hearts of the people was toward Egypt. There is something in Egypt, with all its bondage, to which the heart naturally clings. The remnant, wearied with the struggles they had passed through, sought for rest to the flesh. "Would God we had died in Egypt!" every now and then escapes from the hearts of Israel. There is something in Egypt to attract all our hearts, something that flesh values, and no wonder when we can say, "No; but we will go into the land of Egypt, where we shall see no war, nor hear the sound of the trumpet, nor have hunger of bread." v. 14.

Their disappointed hearts were in danger of turning back. When the people came to Jeremiah, their words were, "That the Lord thy God may show us the way wherein we may walk, and the thing that we may do." God had provision for this time of need. There never was a time when the Lord would not bless them that trust in Him; there never was a place, however desolate or forlorn, where God could not meet His afflicted ones. His word was, "IF ye will still abide in this land, then

will I build you, and not pull you down; and I will plant you, and not pluck you up: for I repent Me of the evil that I have done unto you. Be not afraid of the king of Babylon.... And I will show mercies unto you, that He may have mercy upon you, and cause you to return to your own land." vv. 10-12.

The prophet's words are despised, and notwithstanding the threats if they returned to Egypt, the remnant departs, once more to contend with the judgments of God.

Once more Jeremiah finds himself rejected. Unable to keep them by promises of blessing, or to deter them from going into Egypt by threats of judgment, the power of unbelief has set in so strongly that in spite of the warnings, Johanan, the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces, swept the land, and Jeremiah himself along with the rest into the land of Egypt. But even here we find him with a word from God. The people, once back in Egypt, were soon burning incense unto other gods. When once we get into a current, it will carry us far beyond our intentions. This remnant hoped to reach Egypt that they might no more see war or hear the sound of the trumpet or suffer hunger, but they soon joined in with the idolatry of that people. How often have we seen the same in principle.

In all Israel's history we shall not find a more hardened state than that into which the remnant sunk. See their reply to Jeremiah in chapter 44:15-19. Here we appear to lose the prophet, and might he not say, "I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for naught."

I think we may lose blessing if we do not follow on in the track of God's grace to His people, and if we do, we must keep side by side with Jeremiah. Others had their service away in Babylon. God remembered His own there, but in following with this prophet, we learn the inexhaustible grace there is in God, where there is a heart to trust Him. At the same time we see the evils of the human heart becoming greater and greater as that goodness is manifested.

What varied scenes this man of God passed through from the time when he partook of the passover with joy in the days of Josiah until he saw the utter desolation which he so pathetically describes in his Lamentations. Would there be more hearts like his! "Mine eye runneth down with water... for the destruction of the daughter of my people." Lam. 1:16; 2:11.

As we have previously observed, those who beforehand had served their generation by the will of God saw around them the fruits of their labors. In none of them, however, do we see the same measure of tenderness of heart. God had reserved Jeremiah for his day, and had given him the heart for his work—a heart sorely tried, but one that could weep for Israel's woes. This prophet was the expression of God's heart toward Israel too. "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?" (Hos. 11:8) was Jehovah's language, and His prophet was there as the proof of God's grace. On looking back on the history of the Church of God, we see a constant raising up of one after another to step in to meet the Church's needs. The Spirit of God acts according to His knowledge of present needs. In the latter days of Christendom, I do not doubt but that however lavish the hand of God may be in giving hearts like that of Jeremiah to meet the needs of His saints, the apostasy will be so dark that labor, even of the most devoted character, will scarcely leave a trace of itself. As we draw nearer to the end, on the one hand will be the arduousness of service, and on the other hand will be the futility of it to the human eye.

True to Life

Said the Psalmist: "I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way...I will walk within my house with a perfect heart." Psalm 101:2.

It has been said that the light that shines farthest, shines brightest at home. It is certain that only to the extent that we bear a consistent testimony at home, do we have any real spiritual influence in the community.

Two Mines

About 100 years ago a young man set forth from home and friends in all the excitement of a "gold rush." He was attracted by stories of gold that was being found and was determined to get some for himself. In due time he reached the scenes of many a "rich strike" and set to work with earnestness and enthusiasm. He was not disappointed in achieving the object of his search -he found gold, lots of it, but he had to learn what Scripture would have told him-that riches do take wings and fly away-for he was robbed of all he had gained.

His great disappointment at his loss, together with the severe hardships he endured in his diggings, brought on an illness which rapidly worsened, and he returned home. In all this the Shepherd was seeking that lost soul, and before long the dying man was brought to know his sins forgiven and found peace-"peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Shortly after, he was taken from this scene to be with Christ. The following lines which he had composed were found among his papers.

I once deemed that contentment was bought with gold,
And I went to the land where the rich tide rolled,
And I eagerly sought 'mid disease and death
To grasp it; nor feared I the withering breath
Of the damp chilling mine,
When I saw it shine.
Nay, I laughed when I thought of what wealth was mine.
But it fled, and it left me diseased and worn;
And I grieved 'mid a night which might know no morn.
But I was not deserted, for Jesus came
His suffering blood-bought one from Satan to claim.
And He opened the mine
Of His love divine.
And His word bade its gems round my heart to shine.
Oh! how softly He whispered, " 'Tis Mine to roll
The mountains of sin off thy laboring soul."
How full was her freedom, relieved of her load!

And He gave me a name: 'twas "a son of God."

And He said, "In its mine

Leave earth's gold to shine,

The riches of grace are eternally thine."

The Unity of the Word of God

Passages of the Old Testament cited and referred to as they are in all parts of the New, link the whole of God's Word together and give it a character of unity and completeness. The contents themselves of the book do the same. They give unity and completeness to it, for they are a series of events which stretch from the beginning to the end, from the creation to the millennial kingdom. Prophecies in the Old Testament of events in the New appear as quotations in the New of passages in the Old. In the mouth of several witnesses of the highest dignity, then, we have the oneness and the consistency of the divine book from first to last fully set forth and established. Thus the divine original of the Book, as well as its unity and consistency, is established. We hold to these truths in the face of all the insult which is put upon them by unreasonable and wicked men. Oppositions of criticism only spend themselves in vain like angry waves upon the seashore. God Himself has set the bounds, and these things only return upon themselves, "foaming out their own shame." Jude 13.

Quotations are found abundantly throughout every part of the New Testament, and they are taken from every part of the Old from Genesis to Malachi. So we have, in the structure of the divine volume, nothing less than the closest, fullest, and most intricate interweaving of all parts of it together, the end recalling the beginning, and the beginning anticipating the end. In a certain sense, we are in all parts of the volume when we are in any part of it, though the variety of communications in disclosing the dispensations of God is infinite. Surely it is marvelous! But the Spirit of Him who knows the end from the beginning accounts for it; nothing less can. "The Book, " as has been said, "is a greater miracle than any which it records."

Citations out of His own writings from the Old Testament by God Himself, first in the Person of the Son in the gospels, and then in the Person of the Holy Ghost in the Acts and epistles, are beautiful. God sent forth these writings from Himself at the beginning-being the source of them. So after they have come forth and have been embodied in human forms and accepted of men, He Himself comes to accredit them. He has inspired them and sealed them. We receive them thus introduced to us by Himself, and we ask no more.

We may say of the Scriptures from the beginning to end, that one part of them cannot be touched without all being affected. To use inspired language: "Whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it" (1 Cor. 12:26), God has so tempered all of it together. And I may go further in the same analogy, and say, The uncomely parts have been given more abundant honor-as for instance, in the book of Proverbs, we get as rich and blessed a witness of the Church of God in His mysterious glories as we find anywhere.

The Unmerciful Servant

Matt. 18:23-35

This parable of the unmerciful servant commences with the word, "therefore," and is thus a continuation of the subject which precedes it. Peter had come to the Lord, and asked how often he was to forgive an offending brother-till seven times? "Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven," that is, without limit. "Therefore," was this parable spoken to them, and, indeed, the Lord's words to Peter explain its meaning. We who have been forgiven our many sins-the ten thousand talents-ought to forgive our brother his hundred pence.

The proportion of the two sums mentioned is surely not without significance. Ten thousand talents would be more than 10 million dollars, and a hundred pence about 15 dollars. How small is anything we can be called upon to forgive in another, in comparison with that which God has forgiven us.

In this parable is a principle often overlooked by Christians; namely, that according to what we measure out to others, such will be measured out to us (Matt. 7:2). God in His government brings this about in His dealings with His people, notwithstanding their being Christians. God's grace does not do away with His government.

Some may feel a difficulty as to how the unmerciful servant could be punished after he had been forgiven, as if the forgiveness of God were a sort of conditional pardon that could be withdrawn if we were unfaithful afterward. But there is no such thought in Scripture, and the parable does not say that the servant was punished for the same debt he had been forgiven.

He was forgiven that debt, and then punished for what was afterward due. Man is such a failing creature that, if he were forgiven today's debts he would owe another debt tomorrow.. This we see exemplified in Israel. On the day of atonement the Jew's sins were atoned for and forgiven, but he continued to sin, and there was of necessity a remembrance made of sins every year (Heb. 10:3)-another day of atonement and forgiveness. Now the one sacrifice of Christ perfects the believer forever, but the parable does not enter into the subject of justification, nor was atonement then wrought.

The last part of the parable has also presented another difficulty to some, because it seems to imply the loss of the soul, for the unmerciful servant is delivered to the tormentors until he should pay all that was due. In Scripture, persons are taken up in the character they assume. Here the persons spoken of are "servants," and the parable must not be taken out of its connection. Professed servants may be thus unmerciful, and may be lost eventually. The parable may apply also to those Jews who had been forgiven their "ten thousand talents," but who would not forgive their Gentile fellow servants their "hundred pence."

Still, it has a lesson for us all. Let us not forget the mighty debt we have been forgiven. The unmerciful servant "went out" from the presence of his lord, or he could not have dared to seize his fellow servant. So we may forget what we have been forgiven, and fail to forgive our brethren seventy times seven. As we have seen, God in His government will measure to us according as we have measured to others. The merciful shall obtain mercy, and we surely need this to the journey's end.

Use Him

Are you at this moment in any pressure, in any trial, need or difficulty? If so, let us, entreat you to look simply and solely to the living God. Turn away your eyes completely from the creature. "Cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils." Let your faith take hold now on the strength of God Himself. Put your whole case in His omnipotent hand. Cast your burden, whatever it is, upon Him. Let there be no reserve. He is as willing as. He is able, and as able as He is willing to bear all. Only trust Him fully. He loves to be trusted-loves to be used.

Victory's Way

When the people of God are feeding upon Christ, they are getting a sword for the enemy. God can use even our feeble and partial apprehensions of Christ as a most effective weapon. The lad had only five loaves of barley bread, yet these were enough in the Lord's hand to feed the multitude. So it always is. Will we not learn the simple lesson? Weakness, helplessness, nothingness-in Christ's hands will win the day against all the power of the world. The Lord grant that we may know more of this practically, for the sake of Christ our Lord, and the help of His Church.

Wait

We must wait, even when we suspect it is the power of evil at work, before we pronounce it absolutely. For as there is such a fact as the devil tempting, God also puts a soul to the test, and this may be very sharp. Moreover, even God Himself does not act until a thing is manifest. He shows wonderful patience, most contrary to the haste of man. He comes down to see whether the evil is so great, as in the case of Adam, yea, of Sodom and Gomorrah. But it always remains true that whatever God may be in other things, quick as He is to hear the cry of His own in sorrow, He is exceedingly slow to judge, and there is nothing that more marks the knowledge of Christ practically, and the effect of it in our own souls, than where the same thing is made true in us. Hastiness to judge is man's way in proportion to his want of grace, and patience is not a question of knowledge, but of love that lingers over another, unwilling to pronounce till every hope is gone.

The Water and the Blood

John alone of the evangelists mentions the flowing of the blood and water from Christ's side; he alludes to it in his epistles, too. It is a beautiful testimony of divine grace, answering the last insult man could heap upon Him. They drove Him outside the camp, put Him to death on the cross, and then, to make assurance doubly sure, the soldier gives Him a blow with his spear. Salvation was God's answer to man's insult-sin in his rejection of Him. The blood and water were the signs of it.

In John's epistle the water is named first because, looked at on God's side, water comes first; in the history it cannot: "Forthwith came there out blood and water" (John 19:34); in the epistle, "Not by water only, but by water and blood." 1 John 5:6. The point is that eternal life is not found in the first Adam, but in the second; the witnesses to this are the water, the blood, and the Spirit. You want purifying to have eternal life; you will get it nowhere but in death, and in that of Christ in grace. You want expiation, and the blood of Christ makes that; you want the Holy Spirit.

Christ is not only dead but glorified, and the Spirit is given, the witness that there is no life in the first Adam, but in the Son. His power is found in that which marks the total breach of the first man with God and of God with him, save in sovereign mercy.

In the epistle, John is showing that moral cleansing will not be enough. The Spirit is named first when God applies it. The Word is the instrument, but it is by death itself. You must have cleansing, but the cleansing is death. The water coming forth from the side is purity, and you can have purity by death only, and by His death alone.

What Denomination Is This?

This question is often asked when a tract is given or when we invite someone to a meeting for the study of the Word of God. Doubtless it is a wise question, especially in these days of so much confusion.

But what would have happened if you had asked the same question in the days of the apostles? Let's suppose that you lived at that time, and one day you met the Apostle Peter. You would have asked him, "Peter, what denomination is this?" Could you imagine the answer? Peter, doubtless, would have scratched his head, completely perplexed, because then there were no denominations. Man has tried to add them to the divine order, and has created his own systems.

God has a church in this world, but it isn't a church which you can join. You can very well become a member of a church made by men, and then leave it if it doesn't please you. But you can never become a member of the church of God, which is called the church of the living God (1 Tim. 3:15) and leave it at your will. He who is saved by believing in the Lord is automatically "joined."

What Perfection!

The whole life of Jesus was the great contradiction of the way of Adam! Adam was nothing, but sought to be as God. Jesus was everything, consciously equal with God, yet made Himself nothing and emptied Himself. The person He assumed, the form of a servant; the station He filled on earth, a carpenter's son; His life, His ways, His testimony-all was the full contradiction of him whose departure from God in pride has fashioned the course of "this present evil world." He was ever hiding, ever emptying Himself. He could have commanded legions of angels (as Psalm 91:11 entitled Him; Matt. 26:53), but He was the silent captive of His wicked persecutors. If He taught, and the people wondered, He would say, "My doctrine is not Mine, but His that sent Me." John 7:16. If He worked miracles, He would say, "The Son can do nothing of Himself." John 5:19.

What worship, what fragrant incense before God, was this life of Jesus! What rest and solace to the heart, what satisfaction to the conscience it is to know that God has been so honored, so refreshed, in this world of ours. What savor the death and blood of Jesus renders to the life of Jesus! His blood is the sinner's plea, His only title, but all God's delight in Him aids in enforcing the claim of that blood on the poor sinner's confidence.

Who Strengtheneth Me

The Apostle Paul could do all things through Him who strengthened him. Sweet and precious experience! not only because it gives ability to meet all circumstances, which is of great price, but because the Lord is known-the constant, faithful, mighty friend of the heart. It is not, "I can do all things," but "I can do all things through Him who strengtheneth me." It is a strength which continually flows from a relationship with Christ, a connection with Him maintained in the heart. Neither is it only, "one can do all things." This is true, but Paul had learned it practically. He knew what he could be assured of and reckon on-what ground he stood on. Christ had always been faithful to him, had brought him through so many difficulties and through so many seasons of prosperity, that he had learned to trust in Him, and not in circumstances. And Christ was the same ever.

With Those

A common belief among Christians is that you can cleanse the world by going into it and by associating with it, but the fact is that you cannot fail to be defiled yourself. The instruction to the Christian now is to purge himself from every vessel of dishonor, and to follow after righteousness and peace with those that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

Isolation is wrong; but to separate from what is evil in the Lord's sight is an imperative duty for the Christian-to separate in order to unite, according to God's Word, with those that call on Him with pureness of heart.

Women of Scripture: Abigail

1 Sam. 25

Although Abigail may be a rather difficult character to understand, yet she was a woman of faith, and there is very much that we can learn from her in a moral way and from the place given her in Scripture.

Samuel, God's faithful prophet, is dead he who was the true link between the people and God. Saul, although rejected by God, is still in the place of power, and outwardly acknowledged by the people as king. David, God's anointed one, is rejected and persecuted by the existing powers, and is a wanderer in the land over which, in God's purpose, he is shortly to reign.

Just at this point Abigail is introduced. She is the wife of a man named Nabal, who is prosperous in this world, but believes the general false opinion of David, and is a supporter of Saul's government.

Abigail shares Nabal's prosperity, but in heart she has nothing in common with her foolish, churlish husband. God calls her a woman of good understanding, and this is fully shown in the fact that, in spite of all that opposed, she was in the current of God's thoughts and had His mind, estimating persons and actions in the light of divine wisdom.

David, "the man after God's own heart," was given the first place in hers. David, the despised, scorned, runaway servant, as man regarded him, was in her eyes God's anointed king. David, the pursued wanderer, whose life was in hourly jeopardy at the hand of Saul, was in her esteem "bound in the bundle of life" with the Lord his God.

Abigail, being thus taught of God, does not blindly follow public opinion. She now looks at everything, not according to appearances, but from God's true standpoint, and so she has a right estimate, and everything is measured by the relation in which it stands to David, God's chosen king. She speaks of Saul, the people's king, merely as "a man" risen up to pursue David.

She recognizes the evil and folly of Nabal's attitude toward him, and that he is, in consequence, under the judgment of God.

She counts herself, although a beautiful woman and the wife of one of the largest land-owners of Israel, only as David's handmaid-David, the poor, homeless fugitive! How contrary to what is natural! Nothing but the teaching of God could produce such an attitude of heart.

She seeks two blessings at his hand, forgiveness and remembrance, and David beautifully answers her in true kingly style. "I have hearkened to thy voice, and have accepted thy person," he says, and so when after ten days God's righteous judgment fell on the wicked Nabal, he put his answer into force, and she who had made such a bold declaration of loyalty is united to him and personally shares his rejection.

After the lapse of a few years David is invested with his royal rights, and then the one who has shared his rejection and sorrow, shares his glory and joy.

Surely all this speaks to us. David is a distinct type of the Lord Jesus Christ, and perhaps especially so just at this time in his life, when he walked the path of rejection.

Christ, although occupying the highest place in the glory of God and being the true Man after His own heart, is still the rejected One on earth, and the point for us is whether we are going on with the course of this world-following the public opinion and careless of Christ's claims of love over us-or, on the other hand, whether, like Abigail, we are willing to surrender all and commit ourselves to Him during the time of His rejection, sharing the outside place assigned Him by the world.

Soon that wondrous day of display will arrive when Christ will come forth in His glory, and then those who have been true to Him in the face of opposition during His rejection will share His triumph as belonging to that chosen company that forms His heavenly bride and occupies the closest place in His affections.

What a wondrous portion! Who would not make the important choice and willingly drop their hold of the things that are so soon to pass away, receiving instead the blessings of forgiveness, the Lord's loving remembrance and the joy of being "accepted in the Beloved" (Eph. 1:6)?

Women of Scripture: Mary Magdalene

At our first introduction to Mary Magdalene we are told two striking facts:

That the Lord cast seven devils out of her, and

That she, with others, ministered to Him of her substance. See Luke 8:2, 3.

Satan had full control over that poor woman, which was manifested by seven forms of evil, and he held her absolutely in his power until the One who was stronger than the strong man came, and in His mighty love and power broke the bands and freed the captive. Now she was free to serve, and in response to the love that had done so much for her, she delighted to minister to Him.

What she possessed of this world's wealth (formerly, no doubt, used in self-gratification) was now dedicated to the Lord, who had entirely won her heart's allegiance, and was used to help supply the temporal needs of the One who, though He were rich, had become poor for her sake, that through His poverty she might be rich indeed.

From this moment she definitely became one of His disciples, and with the twelve and several other women, followed Him from city to city, and village to village, where He preached the glad tidings of the kingdom of God.

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His marvelous life on earth was completed-His course here finished-and Jesus, the Savior, was dying on the cross for sin.

Afar off, gazing at the scene in awestruck sorrow, were a few devoted women who had followed Him from Galilee, and of whom Mary Magdalene was one. Her love and attachment to her Savior, however, perhaps overcame the natural aversion to witnessing suffering, and the attraction of love drew her near, for John tells us that she stood "by the cross."

Have we each known what it is to have been in spirit in Mary's position, and there learned something of the extent and depth of the love that led the precious Savior into such suffering-and into such a death-"even the death of the cross"- for our sake? "By the cross" Mary Magdalene remained until all was over. No power could draw her away from the Object of her affection. She heard the dread cry of being forsaken by God fall from the lips of the blessed Sin bearer; the deeply significant "It is finished" also fell on her attentive ears; she heard her Lord commend His spirit to His Father, and witnessed the actual laying down of His precious life and dismissal of His spirit. What deep, deep truths her soul was drinking in!

She was there when the precious body of the Lord was taken down, wrapped in fine linen by Joseph of Arimathea, and laid in his new sepulcher. Mary was present at the burial, for Mark tells us that she beheld where they laid Him.

The deep and far-reaching truths of resurrection could be unfolded to such a devoted heart as hers.

Returning from the tomb she prepared sweet spices and anointing oil, and then rested during the Sabbath. But by dawn on the first day of the week she returned to the sepulcher to anoint the Lord's body, in spite of the great sealed stone that closed the entrance, and the sentinels placed there to watch. Love is superior to all difficulties; they do not come into its calculation. When they reached the tomb, however, she and her companions found the stone rolled back from the entrance, two angels in possession, and the guard powerless as dead men.

There was no need now to ask, "Who shall roll away the stone?"

Mary hastened back to the disciples to tell of the opened sepulcher, and returned with Peter and John, who hastily satisfied themselves that the Lord was not there, and left. But not so Mary; she remained weeping, "because," as she told the angels, "they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him." Her heart was desolate, its Object was gone, and life was nothing without Him. Is the Lord thus enshrined in our hearts? Is this world a real wilderness to our souls because He is not here? We do well to ask ourselves these questions.

See how her devotion was rewarded!

Jesus-her Lord-revealed Himself to her. She, as one of His sheep, knew His voice and responded to the simple "Mary," so lovingly spoken with the one exclamation, "Master!"

Then the Lord had more to say, and to her was entrusted the most wonderful message ever sent to man.

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

John 20:17.

What wonderful relationships-the results of death and resurrection! The Lord claims those who love Him and follow Him as His brethren, and unites them with Himself in relationship with His God and Father. Nothing can break such links, forged by the Lord in relation to a new system of things entirely, where He, instead of being disowned and rejected, is supreme.

What love that procures such heights of bliss for its objects!

"In peaceful wonder we adore

The thoughts of love divine;

Which in that world for evermore

Unite our lot with Thine."

Mary was intelligent as to who were His brethren, for she returned to His disciples and told them "that she had seen the Lord, and that He had spoken these things unto her."

Women of Scripture: Mary, the Mother of Jesus

"My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior." Luke 1:46, 47. Thus begins the beautiful song of praise that burst from the lips of a young maiden of Nazareth under very exceptional circumstances.

She had been the recipient of a wonderful, divine communication brought from God by the angel Gabriel. She, a lowly virgin, had been addressed by her heavenly visitor as "highly favored" and "blessed... among women." Her nervous anxiety caused by this unusual visit had been set at rest by his comforting "Fear not, Mary," and then she meekly listened to the wonderful revelation, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God."

Marvelous and personal as the revelation was, she accepted it in faith and answered it in a spirit of quiet subjection. "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to Thy word." Did Mary fully realize at once the import of the weighty message that she was to become in a miraculous way, by the power of the Holy Ghost, the honored mother of the long-looked-for Messiah of the Jews-Jesus the Savior? Gabriel had told her about her aged cousin Elizabeth, and reminded her that "with God nothing is impossible."

The similarity of the angel's mission to each formed a bond of attraction and fellowship between them, and Mary felt impelled to travel the seventy miles between Nazareth and the hill country of Hebron to visit her relative. Here in the rest and seclusion of the priest's home, with the companionship of Elizabeth, who could fully understand, she spent three quiet months.

It was upon her arrival here too, the first greetings over, that Mary voiced her feelings in the beautiful song with which we started. She had a rejoicing spirit not brought about by earthly circumstances, for they must have been specially trying (see Matt. 1:19), but her soul's vision was filled with the Lord-God her Savior-whom she magnified and exalted. Occupied with Him she fully realized then, if she had not before, the depth of the Lord's dealings with her, and thus beautifully and simply expressed it: "He that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is His name." Her faith in God is very evident here, and she continued to speak of His mercy, always active for those that fear Him, His strength exerted in righteousness in the earth, and His help which was at the disposal of His favored people (vv. 50-54).

Six months had passed away and Joseph followed the angelic injunction to take his espoused wife Mary under his protection. Together they traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem to be enrolled in the census according to the decree of Caesar Augustus.

A deeper reason no doubt lay behind this journey. Micah's beautiful prophecy was about to be fulfilled, "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 of old, from everlasting." Mic. 5:2. While Mary was there, sheltering in a stable belonging to an overcrowded inn, this wonderful "ruler" prophesied of above-the sent One of God-was born!

With her own hands, as in her poverty she probably had none to help her, she wrapped her precious Babe in the customary swathes of linen, and cradled Him in a manger. There was "no room" for God's Christ, Israel's true King, in this world. "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." John 1:11. But though He was unrecognized by men, angelic hosts heralded His advent and proclaimed to some lowly shepherds keeping watch over their flocks during the darkness of night God's "good tidings of great joy." "Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord."

After the heavenly messengers left, the shepherds agreed to go immediately to see that which the Lord had made known to them, so they were the first visitors received by Mary to see her holy Child. Convinced of the truth of all they saw, they spread abroad the "good tidings," so that they who heard wondered at what the shepherds told them. Mary, on the contrary, "kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart." Luke 2:19.

Wonderful truths to keep and ponder, and how they must have strengthened her faith and her rejoicing in God her Savior!

Women of Scripture: Queen of Sheba

1 Kings 10:1-13

The report of the fame and wisdom of Solomon, the third king of Israel travels far away to the province of Sheba in southern Arabia and reaches the ears of its queen. Only a report, but it arrives at an opportune moment and sets the queen's heart and feet in motion. Although a lady of such high rank, her brow is often furrowed by puzzling over the difficulties, the perplexities and the unsolved problems that face her on all sides. Here is an opportunity to have solved many of her "hard questions," and she embraces it. With a present of gold, precious stones and costly spices, a worthy offering in her estimation for so great a personage, she and her attendants make the journey. In her eagerness to reach Solomon and prove his wisdom for herself, the long desert journey with all its discomforts presents no hindrance to her.

At last the anticipated moment arrives, and she finds herself in the presence of the one whose fame had reached her in that far-off land. To him she unburdens her difficulties, communing with him of all that is in her heart. Is Solomon equal to the occasion? Is there any tangle he could not unravel, or one knotty question he could not solve? Does his wisdom fail him when put to such a test? Let Scripture answer: "And Solomon told her all her questions: and there was nothing hid from Solomon which he told her not." 2 Chron. 9:2.

Everything around speaks of his greatness and wisdom. Even the apparel and bearing of his servants and attendants manifests his glory, and she is not blind to all this. In fact, it has such an overwhelming effect upon her that, although a queen, she sinks into insignificance in the presence of such a revelation of glory, and "There was no more spirit in her." She owns in humbleness that it was a true report that she had heard-not overstated or too highly colored, as most reports are. Still, she does not really believe it until, being in his very presence, it was made real to her vision. She comes, she sees, and her heart is conquered. No wonder she exclaims, "Behold, the one half of the greatness of thy wisdom was not told me: for thou exceedest the fame that I heard."

How eloquently Scripture speaks! Cannot we see something deeper in this beautiful, divinely drawn picture than appears on the surface? Primarily, no doubt, it depicts the coming wonderful day of Christ's display when "He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth," when the monarchs of Sheba shall offer gifts and the gold of Sheba shall be given Him, and when all nations shall serve Him and call Him blessed (Psalm 72:8, 10, 11, 15, 17). However, we can also give it a more present and personal application. Can we not trace something in our history that corresponds? Have we not, like the Queen of Sheba, heard a very distinct report of the One who is King of kings and Lord of lords, and perhaps, like her, at first we do not fully believe it, or we underrate its significance? Have we not burdens and difficulties that no earthly friend can resolve? If so, may the divinely-given "report" set our hearts in motion toward the true Solomon, and may we allow no obstacle to keep us from coming into personal touch with Him. He could say when on earth, referring to this very incident: "The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation, and condemn them: for she came from the utmost

parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here." Luke 11:31.

If the Solomon of old could satisfactorily answer all her questions and solve all her difficulties, rest assured that the "greater than Solomon" is perfectly able, and more, is longing to set every heart at rest which is unburdened in His presence. There self-esteem and pride have no place, but the Lord Himself and His glory fill the vision of the soul, and the heart is captivated and conquered. As we thus begin to learn His inestimable worth, the language of our hearts will be, "Thou exceedest the fame" that we heard. This must always be the result of coming to the Lord Jesus Christ and having personal dealings with Him.

One thing more, Solomon was not content that she should witness his wealth and greatness; she must participate in the blessings of it too, and so he gave her-

"Whatsoever she asked." Wonderfully gracious, but the gift is limited to her consciousness of need!

"All her desire." Now he goes beyond her requests merely, and satisfies her heart's unuttered longings. Even this does not content him, and so he gives her

(3) "Of his royal bounty." He does not now consider her capacity to receive, but his own resources from which he draws. Wonderful picture of the attitude of the heart of Christ to all who come to Him in need!

Should we not desire to learn more of the unlimited supply and unfailing character of His royal bounty who loves to give "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" Eph. 3:20?

Women of Scripture: Rhoda

Acts 12:1-9

Rhoda, though young, was linked up with the little band of Christians at Jerusalem in the early days of the Church's history, and in the testing time of persecution.

Stephen, who so boldly and devotedly stood for the testimony connected with "the God of glory," had been stoned by a mob infuriated by his truthful utterances.

James, the Apostle, had been killed with the sword by Herod's orders, and now Peter was lying in prison chained to a guard, awaiting his execution the next day. Was he also to be taken from them? These were sad, anxious, apprehensive days for the Jerusalem saints, and, feeling the situation, they did the best thing, and the only thing they could do—they prayed "without ceasing to God for him." Day after day passed, and Peter was not released, and now it was, as far as they could tell, his last night on earth, the next morning being fixed by the authorities for his execution. How was it spent?

By Peter the night was spent in quiet, restful sleep; by the little company to whom this honored servant of the Lord was so dear it was spent in earnest prayer and supplication to God for him, and Rhoda, though young, was present at this midnight prayer meeting in Mary's house.

Here was a true, brave heart-true to the Lord and His interests on earth, and brave, to be so definitely associated with a tried and persecuted people.

The Lord takes account of her and, although we are not told her parentage, and what position, if any, she held in the household, her connection with His saints is noticed, and her name is handed down to us.

Suddenly the prayer meeting was interrupted by a continual knocking on the street door, and brave little Rhoda went to ask who was there. She knew it might be a band of soldiers to apprehend them for the truth's sake, but instead she recognized a well-known, dearly loved voice asking for admittance. In her childlike delight and excitement she neglected to admit this welcome midnight visitor, but instead ran back to the friends to tell the good news.

They were incredulous in spite of Rhoda's confidence, although they had been so constantly praying for Peter, and doubtless for his release.

The answer to their prayers had come and they could not believe it, but told Rhoda, the bearer of the good tidings, that she was mad.

Do we not see our own unbelieving hearts reflected here? Well might the Lord say, "Whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." Matt. 21:22. How wondrous the grace that oftentimes grants a definite, loving answer to our petitions, although not accompanied with belief!

If Rhoda was not mad in her persistency that Peter was without, then reason, which is always opposed to faith, must ask another solution.

They therefore suggested that it must be his angel or spiritual representative-anything but belief in God's power exerted on behalf of His servant in answer to the desires of His people who had been crying mightily to Him.

The knocking, however, continued; so at last the door was opened, and when they saw that it really was Peter, they were indeed astonished.

Once within, and the ejaculations of surprise silenced, how much there was to tell, and Rhoda, with the others, was an attentive listener to the tale of God's wonderful deliverance of His imprisoned servant.

Roman guards, chains, bolts, bars, and heavy iron gates presented no difficulty to "the angel of the Lord," who got Peter clear of the prison and down the length of one street in the city, before leaving him. His heavenly guide did not dictate where he should go then; that was left to Peter's own choice.

He did not need to consider long; he knew where he was likely to find "his own company"-those who had a heart for the Lord's interests, and there he went and was received as we have already noticed.

What a great thing in these closing days of the Church's history on earth to find ourselves, like Rhoda, connected with a similar company, which, though weak, is yet dependent, and one to which the Lord and His interests are dear!

Women of Scripture: the Shunammite

2 Kings 8

We find here that Jehovah "called for a famine...upon the land" to judge Israel for backsliding and idolatry, and to remind them and their unprincipled king Jehoram, by means of seven years of terrible stress and affliction, that He was still jealous of the nation's loyalty and affection.

But in the midst of judgment it is always God's delight to remember mercy; thus at the very commencement of the dreadful dearth He sent a direct message to the Shunammite woman through Elisha: "Arise, and go thou and thine household, and sojourn wheresoever thou canst sojourn: for the Lord hath called for a famine; and it shall also come upon the land seven years." 2 Kings 8:1.

There was nothing wonderful or miraculous about this way of escape selected by God for this true woman and those dependent upon her, but she recognizes it as a positive command and immediately acts upon it. This made the distinction between herself and probably thousands of others who in due course left their homes by choice to avoid the terrors of want and privation. Her pilgrimage was undertaken at God's special direction, and in the knowledge that it was ordered for her in God's providence, and thus she felt sure of His guidance and support whatever sorrows or difficulties might cross her path.

This emigration must have been a severe trial to one who considered it such a privilege and pleasure to dwell among her own people, and we can judge that the seven years spent in the land of the heathen Philistines, direct enemies of the Lord and His people, were not the happiest of her life.

No doubt being surrounded by idolaters made her rely more upon the God she had learned in resurrection-"the living God"-and thus she was enabled to wait patiently for the termination of the seven years of exile.

It came at last, and Israel's misery and mourning were at an end. It would have been good if they had benefited more by the discipline. The fugitive families were now free to return to the land of their fathers. "Good-by" is readily said to their temporary place of abode, and the Shunammite and her household journey home again. How she must have anticipated this homecoming, little dreaming of the disappointment that awaited her.

Arriving at last at the dearly-loved inheritance, what was her surprise and dismay to find it all in the hand of strangers. Here is a test of faith! Surely she had committed all that she left behind to God's care, confident that He would protect it during her enforced absence, and now it looked as if the worst had been allowed to happen, for her home and land had been taken over by the crown, and others placed there by the order of the unscrupulous Jehoram. But she is to prove further what God can do for her. She is a woman of prompt action, as she had shown on a previous occasion, and does not now give way to a helpless grief. Instead, with her son as her companion, she

immediately makes the journey from Shunem to Samaria, to plead in person to the king for her home and lands.

Quite unknown to her, God in His watchful love goes before her on that journey to the palace, smoothing all difficulties, and preparing the heart of the monarch to receive her request.

People speak of "coincidences," but the child of God can often see in these the hand of the Lord, divinely arranging on his behalf, and so it was in this case.

Gehazi is in the king's presence at the very time that the Shunammite and her son reach the capital, and make their way to the palace. Also the king suddenly becomes possessed with a desire to have Elisha's miracles and great deeds recounted to him by Gehazi, who readily does so.

Just at the moment that Gehazi is relating how Elisha raised the Shunammite's son to life, the woman and her boy are ushered into the king's presence. Gehazi's astonished gaze recognizes them and he exclaims, "My lord, O king, this is the woman, and this is her son, whom Elisha restored to life." The king appeals to the Shunammite for a confirmation of Gehazi's statement, and when she assures him of its truth, his interest in her is awakened, and he immediately orders that not only shall a full restitution be made of all her property, but also that the worth of its produce during the time of her absence should be given her. An officer was also commissioned to see the king's order carried out.

How wonderfully God works for the simplest soul that trusts Him! The hearts of the greatest monarchs are in His hand, and are moved to carry out His purposes when He so wills it.

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