COLLECTED WRITINGS OF J.N. DARBY PRACTICAL 2

by J.N. Darby

A collection of articles and writings by J.N. Darby from Collected Writings of J.N. Darby Practical 2, covering various biblical topics and Christian teaching.

22 Chapters

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Chapter 0

Collected Writings of J.N. Darby Practical 2

Chapter 1

Practical Reflections on the Psalms: First Book

My purpose in this series of papers is not to interpret the Psalms, but to draw from them some portion of the spiritual instruction and edification they afford our souls. The interpretation has been sought to be given elsewhere. The Psalms afford us special light on the government of God and the sympathies of the Spirit of Christ with His people. This, in the first instance, has the Jews for its object and center of display. Still, in making allowance for the difference of their state and ours, and of the relationship of a people with Jehovah and children with a Father, God's ways in government apply to us Christians also. If it is not the highest ground on which a Christian is viewed, for that is heavenly; it is a most important and interesting one, and brings out all the tenderest displays of divine care, the care of Him who counts the very hairs of our head, and the seriousness and vigilance required in walking before God, who never swerves from His holy ways, who is not mocked, nor withdraws His eyes from the righteous, though all be the ministration of His grace for perfecting us according to these ways before Him. Of this application of the government of God to the Christian's ways, the Epistles of Peter are more especially the witness. See, for example, 1 Peter 1:17; 1 Peter 3:10-15, and the spirit and tenor of the whole Epistle. This government in the second Epistle is carried on to the consummation of all things. The first is more the government of the righteous, the second the judgment of the wicked, though that judgment, as closing the power of evil and the deliverance of the just, be alluded to in the first also. He was the apostle of the circumcision, and this subject came specially under his eye in teaching.

Psalm 1. This government in the earth is plainly pointed out in the first psalm, and the character of those whom that government blesses. He it is who keeps separate from the wicked in his way, and delights in the law of Jehovah, and meditates on it. Submission to the Christ, as the depositary of this government in God's counsels at the close of this time of trial, is the subject of the second. Only a few words on the first of these two psalms, which lay the basis of all the rest. The counsel of the ungodly, the way of sinners, and the seat of the scornful are avoided. While here connected with human responsibility in walk, yet it is being kept from the evil. I do not desire to spin out the force of the words, but a few remarks may be made on these words. The ungodly have plans, counsels of their own will, their own way of viewing things, and arrangements to obtain their purpose. There the just is not found. The sinner has a path in which he walks, pleasing himself there: the just does not walk with him. The scornful are at ease, despising God: there the just will not sit. Judgment will come, and such will not be allowed to stand in the congregation of the just then brought to rest by the glory of God.

Psalm 2. This psalm announces the establishment of Christ's earthly triumph and royalty in Zion, when the heathen shall be given Him for an inheritance. This is not yet fulfilled. The government of God does not secure the good from suffering as it will then, but turns suffering to spiritual blessing, and restrains the remainder of wrath, giving a glorious reward for our little sorrows. But for us a Father's name is revealed in them. We call on the Father who, without respect of persons, judges according to every man's work, and we pass the time of our sojourning here in fear, knowing that we are redeemed. Here kings are called on to submit before the coming judgment of the earth. But

this is not yet executed, and we have to learn our own lesson in patience. This the Psalms will teach us.

Psalm 3. Let us see the lessons of the first psalms which follow. Troublers are multiplied, but the first thought of faith is Jehovah. There the spirit is at home, and looks at troublers from thence. Jehovah is thus trusted. When Jehovah comes in the heart before those that trouble me, all is well. Our spirits see Him concerned in matters, and are at peace. He is a glory, shield, and lifter up. Another point is, it is not a lazy, listless, view of evil and good, nor listless confidence. Desire and dependence are active, the links of the soul with Jehovah. I cried, and He heard. That is certain. That is the confidence that, if we ask anything according to His will He hears, and if He hears, we have the petition. We do not desire, if sincere, to have anything not according to His will; but it is an immense thing, in the midst of trial and difficulty, to be sure of God's hearing, and God's arm in what is according to His will. Hence rest and peace. "I laid me down and slept; I awaked: for Jehovah sustained me."

How emphatic and simple! Is it so with you, reader? Does all trouble find your heart so resting on God as your Father, that, when it is multiplied, it leaves your spirit at rest, your sleep sweet, lying down sleeping, and rising as if all was peace around you, because you know God is and disposes of all things? Is He thus between you and your troubles and troublers? And if He is, what can reach you? The thousands of enemies make no difference if God is there. The Assyrian is gone before he can arise to trouble or execute the threats, which, after all, betray his conscious fear. We are foolish as to difficulties and trials, measuring them by our strength instead of God's, who is for us if we are His. What matter that the cities of Canaan were walled up to heaven, if the walls fell at the blast of a ram's horn? Could Peter have walked on a smooth sea better than on a rough one? Our wisdom is to know that we can do nothing without Jesus—with Him everything that is according to His will. The secret of peace is to be occupied with Him for His own sake, and we shall find peace in Him and through Him, and be more than conquerors when trouble comes; not that we shall be insensible to trial, but find Him and His tender care with us when trouble comes.

Psalm 4. This psalm affords us another most important principle, the effect of a good conscience in calling upon God in our distress. It is not here a good conscience as justified from sin, but a practically good conscience, giving confidence towards God. If our heart condemn us not, says the apostle, then have we confidence towards God. "Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness." He does not say, Justify me, O God of my righteousness; but, Hear me. The soul is in trouble, yet had been enlarged, had had experience of God's faithful lovingkindness. His glory and honor was from God. How true this was of Christ! Man turned it into shame, and sought after vanity. Still it remained unalterably true, in the divine government of Him who cannot deny Himself, that He has set apart the godly for Himself. They are Thine, says Christ. We are a peculiar people to Himself. Now this is always true, but in walking in godliness we have the present confidence of it, and our eye sees God brightly, and we know then He will hear us. We have not lost the perception of what He is at the present moment for us. Our soul is not beclouded, and nothing is so soon clouded as present dependence on and confidence in God. Integrity, when there is dependence, gives courage. It is not that God will not hear us from the depths of contrition, but this is another thing. Integrity of heart gives confidence in the day of trouble, because God is seen by the spirit. The eye is then fixed on Him across all the trouble. And so it is here: Commune with your own heart and be still; worship God in integrity, without fear, and trust in Him. In what is around us,

many might say, Where is any good to be found? and, discouraged and disheartened, despair of finding any; but in and through all circumstances the light of God's countenance is the secure and unchangeable good. His favor is better than life. Besides, it secures good. The power of evil is below the power of God. He disposes of it, removes it, turns it to blessing, annuls it as He sees fit. The light of His countenance does this for faith. And the soul rises above evil, and rejoices in God. Hence there is more joy than in temporal blessings. They may be taken away: besides, they are not God Himself, and the light of His countenance in trouble is altogether Himself, and gives the secret to the soul of His being for us. Hence one lies down in peace and sleeps—does not disquiet himself in anxious watchfulness against evil, for after all it is God only that secures him in joy or trouble.

Psalm 5 furnishes the occasion of saying a word on the calls for judgment which are many times found in the book, and with that I shall pass it over. There is constancy of cry in the presence of enemies. It is to Jehovah the tried one looks; but it is on the ground of that righteous character and government of God which makes it impossible for Him to look on evil complacently. He will destroy the violent and deceitful man. And this is right. The Christian feels God ought not to let successful evil go on forever. When his mind rests on the government of God, he looks for the removal of evil by judgment, and rejoices in it; not in thinking of the evil doer, but of the righteousness and the result. Vengeance belongs to God. But it is in no way the element He lives in. The Jew having his portion in the earth—for "the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace" (Psa. 37:11)—looks for the removal of the violent and deceitful man, in order to his own comfort and rest. Not so the Christian. He leaves the violent man here and goes to heaven. He walks, as to his personal walk, in the time of grace, and leaves it for glory. Even in the millennium, when government will be exercised and the wicked cut off, his distinctive place is grace. The river of water flows out of the city; the leaves of the tree of life, of which he eats the full ripe fruit, are for the healing of the nations. Now his place is wholly grace and patience. He does well, suffers for it, and takes it patiently, and knows this is acceptable with God. He would overcome evil with good. He sees the evil, knows it will be judged, that the judgment shall devour the adversaries, and, viewed as adversaries, can be glad that they are removed from hindering good. Righteous judgment, I repeat, his soul owns and acquiesces in. But he looks not for it for his own gain or liberty. He is above this in grace. And this was Christ's place. He will execute judgment. His Spirit calls in these Psalms for judgment. But as walking on earth, in which He was a personal pattern for us, He did not call for judgment on His enemies. "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34) was His word when their violence was directed against Himself; and in judgment He opened not His mouth.

Now Psalm 5 takes up the call for judgment according to God's government of the earth, founded on Jehovah's immutable character, and looks for the happiness and joy of Jehovah's people flowing from it. And so it will; but not ours, because our joy is in heaven, where such deliverances are not needed. We leave the earth. Hence, while the spirit sees and feels the rightness of this psalm, I do not give it as in any way the experience of a Christian, save that his cry in difficulty and trial is undividedly and actively directed to the Lord—we may say to the Father.

Psalm 6 and 7 both partake of this character and call for judgment. But Psalm 6 is on very different ground from Psalm 5, and in certain respects will afford us experimental light for the Christian. When the believing soul is under trial, the recurrence to God as its resource and hope is the

natural movement of faith; the great grace of God in being for us, the sense that there is nothing like this love, and the confidence which accompanies submission of heart, draw out the heart towards Him. Nor is there a sweeter time for the soul that trusts Him than the time of trial. This supposes indeed the will to be broken, and the heart subject, and God's love to be known. When this is not the case, the trial through grace works submission and is then removed, or the soul finds its happiness in the wise and holy will of God, and in the fruit it bears. But there is another case where trial, though ever salutary and gracious, has another element in which it makes confiding love to God more difficult. I mean where the trial has its source in the conduct of the person suffering. If I have brought trial on myself by sin, how difficult to see love in it! how difficult not to groan in the consciousness that it is the fruit of sin, and just rebuke for it, and hence that we have no right to think of love in it! Yet where can we turn but to Him? and how look to Him to deliver whom we have offended? Such is the real and distressing difficulty of a soul which, feeling that it has brought sorrow on itself, feels it has no right to look for deliverance. It is indeed almost tempted to despair and sink under the sense of hopelessness. This was the force of our Lord's intercession for Peter, that his faith might not fail, his confidence in Christ and his love and hope of divine favor not be lost, or he might fall into the hands of Satan through despair and remorse, In his case it was not trial or chastening, but the danger was the same. Faith hinders this despairing feeling, but it does not take away the sense of sin or of the justness of rebuke; but it trusts God and His love and goodness, which now take the character of mercy to the spirit of the sufferer. The sense of sin is deeper, the dread of consequences less, and God is trusted with a humbled heart in spite of all. Still it is felt that rebuke is deserved—nay, the soul may be in a measure under it.

This is the state brought before us in Psalm 6. It pleads the distress and desolateness under which it is lying, and looks for mercy, and pleads that the rebuke may not be in anger. It has confidence in God, though in presence of the thought that the rebuke of His anger would be but the natural consequence. It owns the justness of this, yet resting in faith on grace says, How long? God cannot cast off forever those who trust in Him: light will spring up. There is relationship with God and faith counts on it. So that the heart can plead its extreme sorrow and trial with a God whose compassions are known. The last three verses express this confidence fully. We see how the government of God applies to this world, so that death has the character, in that government, when so falling on any one, of cutting off. This was fully true with the Jew, as we see in Hezekiah and even in Job. But it is true in a measure as to the Christian. There are sins unto death, and death may have the character of discipline, as in 1 Cor. 11, and may be arrested, as we read in James' and John's epistles. The Psalm does not look beyond it, save into darkness, nor does the government of God either. When the believer has peace, he looks at discipline, even when justly severe, in the sense of certain divine favor. Hence his horror of sin is of a much purer kind, for it abhors the sin and not its consequences. It may be that the fiery darts of the wicked reach him or that dread threatens him at least. He looks through it to God's mercy and faithfulness. His faith through Christ's intercession does not fail. Still this is a terrible state; but the heart clings to God and can say, How long?

Psalm 7 is a full and elaborate appeal to righteousness and vengeance, and faith in that judgment. Thus the congregation of the peoples of the earth will own Jehovah and compass Him about.

He looks for God's anger on the wicked as he deprecated it for himself, and he expects it with a certain faith. This we do and own it all to be most right and excellent; but I cannot give the Psalm

as presenting anything of the experience of the Christian, save the consciousness of integrity and the fact of trusting God. It is all true and certain; but it is for those who are in the distress produced by the haughty wicked, and look for deliverance, yet not to suffer like and with Christ that they may be glorified together, that the psalm provides an expression of feeling.

Psalm 8 is the celebration of Jehovah's millennial dominion and the glory of the Son of man in connection with, and in the mouth of, the Jewish people. But the psalm gives us a most interesting insight into the glory of Christ, and, as far as is possible in the Old Testament, our association with Him. It views man, set as the image of the invisible God, ruler over creation. It does not, and could not, in direct revelation, go beyond man's place in this world, for the mystery was not revealed in the Old Testament; but Adam was the image of Him that was to come. Jehovah is the Lord of Israel. What is man? Christ is the answer. But He is Jehovah, and His glory set above the heavens, the earth put under His feet. Even in the days of His humiliation, the enemy and avenger was stilled by babes and sucklings uttering His praise; for the Father took care that, if for His sake the Lord was despised and rejected of men, there should be the testimony to His glory; and so it was, as Son of God, Son of David (as to which these words are quoted), and Son of man. (See John 11 and 12.) But in that day His name will be excellent in all the earth. Meanwhile He is crowned with glory and honor, even while all things are not put under Him. As a mere creature, man is small and feeble. But the Man of God's counsel, the last Adam, is over all. See Proverbs 8, where, before the creation, Christ is seen as the wisdom of God, Jehovah's delight, and His delight in the sons of men. So, when He was born, the angels celebrate God's delight in (not "goodwill towards") men. What is man? is asked by Job, irritated. Why could God not let him alone? (Job 7:17.) And in Psalm 144, why should God so patiently spare the wicked? But here it is Man in the counsels of God, the last Adam, the second Man, Christ, the glory of Jehovah, set as Man above the heavens, and the earth subject under His feet, yea, all things, which as yet we see not, only the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ crowned with glory and honor, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death.

I pass over Psalm 9 and 10, the former celebrating the judgment of the enemies of Israel, the latter descriptive of the wickedness of their oppressors. They express the consciousness during the oppression that God does see it, and does not forget the humble; and then, on the deliverance, they celebrate the faithfulness of Jehovah. The world is judged in righteousness, and Jehovah known by the judgment which He executes. I have only to draw the reader's serious attention to the judgment of the world here spoken of, and the main scene of it in the land of Israel; while in every case, the humble soul in oppression and trial may walk in peaceful assurance that God sees it, and that its cause is in the hands of God; yea, what is more difficult, that when it has brought it on itself, if truly humbled, it may count on God. I now turn to the expression of the feeling of those who are in the trial before the deliverance comes, and while they have to possess their souls in patience.

Psalm 11 sees distinctly—as is always true, though not publicly manifested as at that time—that there is no hope from, no reliance on, man on the earth—that nothing earthly is stable, and that evil has brought in ruin. The foundations are cast down, and what are the righteous to do? This, for faith, is true, since the time that Christ was rejected on earth; only the restraining hand of God checks the power of evil, as long as patience can be exercised, and there are souls yet to be drawn out to the fellowship of Christ. It will be openly the case when the wicked one wields power

in the earth, before God arises to judgment, and to help all the meek of the earth. Cases of peculiar trial bring us often into analogous circumstances in our own little sphere. Only we must remember that we have to do with a Father known as such, who disciplines us for our profit, for our heavenly and eternal gain, with a well-known love which has not spared His own Son, but delivered Him up for us.

The question put in the psalm is: If the foundations be cast down, what can the righteous do?—what they might refer to as of divine stability? For good does not exist, and the wicked are disturbed by no scruple of conscience, and with fraud of heart seek to destroy the righteous. There is a time when the Lord warns to flee, when no action and no patience is of any avail. This is not the case here. It is only so when God delivers up all to the wicked for a time. Fear and unbelief would urge flight, as a bird, away from the scene to a place of refuge and human security. Faith looks higher. “In Jehovah put I my trust.” Trust in Jehovah, who is above all, to whom nothing is unknown, whom nothing escapes, whose faithfulness is unchangeable, without whom not a sparrow falls to the ground, who, after all, orders everything, whatever man’s plans are, who is our Father. Trust in Him is the resource and peace-giving feeling of the righteous. This, in its nature, gives a perfect walk and calmness at all times; because circumstances do not govern the feelings, and the soul has no motive to lead it but the will of God, and can have boldness to do it when called on, through confidence in Him. It gives calmness too, because God is trusted for every result.

But the simple fact of this confidence is not all the psalm teaches us. All is subverted and in confusion on earth; no security for the righteous there. But Jehovah is in His holy temple; His throne is in heaven; and His eyes behold, His eyelids try, the children of men. He does not slumber nor sleep; the righteous may leave his cause to Him. But there is, besides this, an explanation of God’s ways in the time of sorrow. Jehovah tries the righteous. When His eyelids, who sees all things according to His own purity, try the children of men, He has an object as regards the righteous; He proves and sifts them. This is a most important truth—the activity of God in dealing with the righteous, to accomplish His own gracious purposes as to them, to manifest His own character, to judge, and lead them to judge, all that is not according to it, and thus give them the intelligence of what He is, and conform them morally to it, at the same time subjecting their wills, and engaging their affections, by the sense of His faithfulness and love. The breaking of the will is a great means of opening the understanding.

But His temple and His throne govern all this. In His temple every one speaks of His honor. It is the place where man approaches Him, where His nature and character are revealed for man to be associated with Him according to them. And the throne orders all things to associate us rightly with the temple. The flesh, of course, cannot always like it; but this dealing with it is just what is profitable in the matter. He tries the children of men. Their actions do not escape His eye. All things are naked and open to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do, and He judges of them all. But more particularly He tries the righteous. This is in contrast with His hatred of the wicked, on whom He will pour out judgment. In His trial of the righteous one must first think of God’s own character and glory. This He maintains. For, however His countenance beholds the upright, however much He delights in them in love, He cannot deny Himself. He will conform them to what He is, but not relinquish this. He maintains His character in government. He has let the earth know, in Israel, that He will not have wickedness. The nearness of a people to Him is only an additional

motive for this. “You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities” (Amos 3:2). And now, whatever His grace, God is not mocked: what a man sows he will reap. The passages are numberless in which this principle is applied to Israel. It is carefully maintained in Romans 2:6, and following verses. The Epistles of Peter particularly unfold this righteous government of God—the first, as regards the righteous; the second, as against the wicked. In trying the righteous, God vindicates and maintains His character in those near Him.

But it is for the profit also of those who are tried, the precious proof of the constant watchful care of God. “He withdraweth not his eyes from the righteous” (Job 36:7), says Elihu. It is, if need be, that we are in heaviness through manifold temptations or trials. We are to count it even all joy (James 1:2-3) when we fall into divers temptations, seeing that they work patience. And mark the fruit: “Let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.” We are to glory in tribulations (Rom. 5): they work patience; and this brightens, in its result, our hope, the love of God being shed abroad in the heart—the true key to all that comes.

The love of God in the chastening itself leads to two conclusions, expressed in Hebrews 12—not to despise the chastening, for there must be a reason for it in us if love does it; and not to faint, because it is love which does it.

There are two causes which, as we are taught in the book of Job, bring trial on the saint. First, God shows the transgressions in which man has exceeded, that is, positive faults. Secondly, He withdraws man from his purpose, and hides pride from him; Job 33:16, 17; chap. 36: 7-9. This book gives us full divine instruction as to God’s ways in trying the righteous. There we learn another truth, important to exercised souls, who often dwell on secondary causes—that God is the cause, and moves in all these exercises. The origin of all Job’s trials was not Satan’s accusation, but God’s word, “Hast thou considered my servant Job?” God had, and saw that he needed this. The instruments were wicked, or disasters caused by Satan; but God had considered His servant, tried the righteous, but measured exactly the trial— stayed His rough wind in the day of the east wind [“in measure debate with”]; and when He had done His own work (which Satan could not do at all), and shown Job to himself, blessed him abundantly.

He humbles us and proves us, that we may know what is in our heart—feeds us with the bread of faith; but it is to do us good in our latter end.

When the trial is met in the truth and power of spiritual life, it develops and brings out much more softness and maturity of grace—a spirit more separated from the world to God, and more acquainted with God. Where it is met by or meets the flesh, the will of this—its rebellion—is brought to light, the conscience becomes sensible of it before God, and, by the discipline itself, the self-will is, even insensibly, destroyed.

Trial cannot in itself confer grace; but, under God’s hand, it can break the will, and detect hidden and unsuspected evils; so that the new life is more fully and largely developed. God has a larger place in the heart, there is more intelligence in His ways, more lowly dependence, more consciousness that the world is nothing, more distrust of flesh and self. The saint is more emptied of self and filled with the Lord. What is eternal and true, because divine, has a much larger place in the soul; what is false is detected and set aside. There is more ripeness in our relationship with God. We dwell more in the eternal scenes into which He has brought our souls. We can look back

then, and see the love which has brought us through it all, and bless God with dependent thanksgiving for every trial. Such only purge away the dross, and confirm us in brighter, fuller, clearer hope, and increasing our knowledge of God, self being proportionately destroyed.

Psalm 12. It is evident that it is written under the pressure of extreme wrong and violence and the feeling of being isolated. Human power, and those that have confidence in it, are all against the soul. It is rare to be in such a case rightly, that is, to have occasion to suffer as is here described. But it may come. Individual Christians may find themselves isolated and pressed down. Verse 5 introduces Jehovah's judgments, which will put an end to it. This He often does still in His government, but it is not the direct proper hope of the Christian. For him to do well, suffer for it and take it patiently, is acceptable with God. His rest is elsewhere, where God is perfectly glorified; so it was with Christ, and, therefore, with us. He surely did well, suffered for it here on the earth, was not delivered. How acceptable it was with God I need not say. It behooved Christ to suffer. It is our profit; so that we can glory in tribulations also, because of their fruits, a far higher fruit than ease or repose here, and which ripens in heaven, in our being fitted for enjoying God more deeply; and if we suffer for righteousness' and Christ's sake, we can say, Happy are we: the Spirit of glory and of God rests on us. But in many cases of detail, deliverance, if we wait patiently for it, comes even here. At any rate, and this is the point of the psalm, the words of Jehovah are pure words; they prove all that is in man, but they may be thoroughly relied on as genuine. He will hold good in holiness, but make good in power, all that His mouth has uttered. Our wisdom is to hold fast by the word of the Lord, come what will. Outward trials are but instruments of purification and of trying the heart as to faith. The word is the test of all for the soul, the inward measure of its condition before God, and the infallible ground of confidence. If it tries the heart, if the circumstances we are in try the heart, it is only to free it from all that would hinder our leaning on and appropriating every word that has come out of the mouth of God. We shall surely live by it.

Psalm 13 continues the expression of the workings of a soul under the trials we have seen referred to in Psalm to. We have, comparatively speaking, less to do with it. Yet the Christian may be tried by the momentary and apparent triumph of the power of evil, and in such can look to the Lord for deliverance, not to be left as if God did not care for him. We see the difference of the Jewish remnant here and Christ, for outwardly He was left in the hand of the wicked; whereas (though indeed some of the wise will fall by the hand of the enemy in that day, obtaining a better resurrection, but), in general, they will be spared and delivered. But our object now is the moral lesson. Not only in the midst of heartless and conscienceless enemies, but apparently forgotten of God, the soul trusts in His mercy, counts on Himself in goodness and faithfulness of mercy so as to rejoice in deliverance by His power before it comes. So we thank God, when we pray, before we receive the answer, because knowing in our hearts by faith that God has heard and answered us, we bless Him before His answer comes outwardly; and this is just the proof of faith. Such confidence gives wonderful peace in the midst of trials; we may not know how God will deliver, but we are sure He will, and rightly. He has all at His disposal. It is Himself we trust, and in looking to Him the heart receives a real answer on which it relies. The circumstances and the word try the heart. Confidence and divine deliverance rejoice the spirit. One knows, even before the deliverance comes, that God is for us. The taking counsel in the heart is very natural, but not faith. It wears and distresses the spirit. The sorrow tends to work death. The soul, even though submitting, preys on itself; it is turning to the Lord which lightens the soul. The consciousness that

it is the enemy who works against us helps the soul to confidence. It is a solemn, and for man would be an appalling, thought, but with the Lord is a ground of being assured of deliverance.

Psalm 14 is an eminent example of a principle of very frequent application: how psalms or other passages of scripture, clearly applicable literally to the Jews in the last days, and to events then occurring, are used as great principles deciding morally on important truths at all times—truths which are then publicly and judicially brought to light. The apostle applies this psalm as the expression of the divine judgment on the state of the Jews, as declared in their own scriptures, and proving the need of a righteousness not their own. I have not much to remark on it here. We may expect to meet with difficulties which arise from a total absence of the fear of God in those with whom we have to do. It is hardly credible for one that fears God, that this can be so, that there should be no compunction; nothing that stays the heart in wickedness, at least in deliberate wickedness. But we must expect this sometimes, where we should least expect it. But Jehovah sees all this. This is our confidence. He may take time, be patient with evil, or at least with evil doers, and exercise us; but He sees it all. Not only so, but God Himself is in the generation of the righteous. There is an influence produced by the presence of God with the righteous, which the enemies of Jehovah feel, and which in the righteous is known only by faith. We may see an example in what Rahab evidently saw among the Canaanites (Josh. 2:9). The same feeling is referred to in Philippians 1:28. This feeling of fear, in those who oppose the truth, may be accompanied with boasting and violence; but when faith has confidence in Jehovah, the wicked, even if they succeed, have always fear. So the Jews, even when they had crucified Christ, feared lest, after all, His absence from the tomb should make matters worse than before. But there must be the sense of God's presence for the righteous to be thus sustained.

Psalm 15 shows evidently that the direct application of these psalms is to the Jews in the last days. Still there is a present government of God which it is well for saints to remember. It is developed in the Epistles of Peter—in the first in favor of the righteous, in the second in the judgment of the wicked. See 1 Peter 3:10-15, showing the Christian application of the principles on which God dealt with the Jews as a people, and will still more absolutely in the last days, but which have their application to the time of our sojourn here below.

Thus, though this psalm be strictly Jewish in its character, we have principles to act on; and so verse 4 gives what, in principle, pleases the Lord at all times.

Psalm 16. With these few remarks I pass on to Psalm 16, which applies directly to Christ, but in which we shall find the sweetest instruction also for ourselves. It is essentially Christ taking the place of a man, and pointing out the path of life before Him through death, since He came for us, but trusting in Jehovah, into His presence, where is fullness of joy. We must not lose sight of the direct prophetic character; still this path is an example for us. The good Shepherd has gone before the sheep. The great principle proposed in the psalm is trust in the Lord, even in death—the place of dependent obedience; and the Lord Himself's being the whole portion of man excluded all inconsistent with this; we may add, having Him always in view. These are the great principles of divine life, and of divine life come into the scene of sin and death. No doubt we should speak of communion with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ in this path of life; but the great moral principles, the subjective state of soul, is brought out before us here, and that in Christ Himself. And note here, it is His perfection as man, and before God and towards God. It is not divine

perfection, God manifested to man, but what He was as man dependent on God. We have not even His offering Himself, in which we have also to follow Him (1 John 3:16), but His place as man in perfection. It is perfectness before God—the principle that governed Him. Hence even the word, “My goodness extendeth not to thee,” has its application also to us. That our goodness does not actually reach God, it might seem almost absurd to affirm; but when it is applied to Christ as man, who was absolutely perfect, it affords us an apprehension of the nature of this goodness, a principle which we can apply to ourselves, and which puts us in our place. It is man’s perfection towards God, the new path of which Christ is the perfection and example in the earth. But this thought shows the unspeakably blessed place which we have as Christians, though in our own case in the midst not only of weakness but of internal conflicts which were not in Christ, in whom was no sin. But Christ’s place is the perfect expression of our place before God. This is fully unfolded at the close of the Gospel of John, and particularly in chapter 17.

The Epistle of John too, which first presents Christ as the manifestation on earth of that eternal life which was with the Father (its manifestation in a man whom their hands had touched), teaches that this was true in Christians as in Him (1 John 2:8), and unfolds the character of this life in righteousness and in love, adding the presence of the Holy Spirit, through which we can dwell in God and God in us. We have this eternal life, which is come down from heaven but is only said to be in the Son, yet he who has the Son has it; indeed, this gives it all its value. No doubt the Epistle of John unfolds it in all its extent and value, as it cannot be unfolded in the Psalms: still in this psalm we have Christ taking the place itself as amongst the excellent of the earth. I may remark here that the writings of John, though intimating it and just showing that we shall be with Christ above, do not pursue this life to its presentation in glory before God. This is Paul’s office; indeed, he had only so seen Christ. John presents the life in itself and manifested on earth. The life is the light of men.

I have already made some allusion to a restriction which we must put, in speaking of this psalm, to the development of the life of Christ on earth. But this restriction only brings out more directly and blessedly in its place that part of Christ’s life, which is the subject of the psalm itself. Christ was the manifestation of God Himself (I speak of the divine traits of His character, not of His divine nature and title) in His path in this world. Perfect love was seen there, perfect holiness and righteousness. He was the truth in the revelation of all that God is. And this is most blessed; and in this we have to imitate Him. (See Eph. 4:32; Eph. 5:1-2; Col. 3:10.) But this is not the aspect in which the psalm views Him. It depicts His place as the dependent devoted man. It depicts Him as taking His place among the remnant of Israel in contrast with the idolatry of that people. But on that I do not dwell now. The character of the blessed Lord’s life will alone occupy our thoughts.

The expression, “My goodness extendeth not to thee,” would not suit the divine manifestation of goodness on the earth. But, taking His place entirely as a man here, the Lord shows us the true place of man living to God; not in his innocence, not surely in sin, but the very opposite; but perfect, in a world of sin; in righteousness and true holiness, having the knowledge of good and evil, tempted but separate from sin and sinners; not made higher than the heavens, but fit for it in the desires of His nature, and in the path towards it; dependent, obedient, taking no place with God, but before Him as responsible as man upon earth, and looking towards the place of perfect blessedness as man with God by being in His presence, which would be fullness of joy for Him: a place which, when having His nature, we can have with Christ. It is man trusting God, deriving His

pleasure and joy from God, living by faith, and in that sense apart from Him—not God manifested in the flesh, which we know was also true of the blessed Lord. This, while it is our place on earth as sanctified through the truth, is above the place of the Jewish remnant. We have another in the consciousness of union with Christ through the Holy Spirit.

The Lord takes the place we are considering, when He says to the young man, “Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is God.” Thus far it went outwardly well with the young ruler; but there was more than this to characterize the life where divine life was, in a world of sin and sinners, in its path towards the place of the fullness of joy— what has been shown in Abraham, and in the saints of God, in the Davids and the prophets—“Jehovah is the portion of mine inheritance”—having the Lord Himself as that which governed and led the heart: “Go sell that thou hast and give to the poor... and come, follow me.” But the Lord was not, at any rate then, the portion of his inheritance: only one knows not what may have become afterward his state through grace.

The state described in this psalm is that of man considered apart from God (I do not mean, of course, morally separated, nor touch upon the union of the divine and human nature in Christ); but it is man partaker of the divine nature, for so only it could be, but having God for his object, his confidence, as alone having authority over him, entirely dependent on God, and perfect in faith in Him. This could only be in one personally partaker of the divine nature, God Himself in man, as Christ was, or derivatively as in one born of God; but, as we have seen, Christ is not here viewed in this aspect nor the believer as united to Him. The divine presence in Him is viewed, not in the manifestation of God in Him, but in its effect in His absolute perfection as man. He is walking as man morally in view of God. Christ here depends on Jehovah for His resurrection. He says, “Thou wilt not leave,” though He could say, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” Yet He could say, as perfect Man, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.” As Peter among the Jews could say, He hath made Him whom ye have crucified both Lord and Christ: while Thomas could say, My Lord and my God. Indeed Peter never leaves this ground—the rejected Man, the Messiah, exalted by God—nor preaches the Son of God (as Paul did at once in the synagogues), though the first, by divine revelation, to confess Him such.

Hence Christ as seen here is a perfect model for us—shows what the perfect man is. The first great principle, and that which characterizes the whole psalm, is the referring Himself entirely, and with confidence, to the care of God. He does not preserve Himself, take care of Himself, or depend at all on Himself; He refers to God. “Preserve me, O God, for in thee do I put my trust.” But this goes far. As God, Christ could have preserved Himself; but He did not come for this. In that sense it was impossible. He came in love to suffer, obey, and so by grace also to save, but to glorify God. From this, morally speaking, He could not swerve; but as to power, He could have preserved Himself, or as to title to favor as Son, He could have asked and had twelve legions of angels. But thus, as He says, He could not have fulfilled the counsels, the revealed counsels, of God.

It was free submission and dependence, but perfect submission and dependence—the one right thing in the position which He had taken. This was perfect faith. He was the leader and completer of faith—absence of self, dependence, and confidence. And, we may add, the word of God was the revelation on which He acted, that which He obeyed, the weapon He used, as we see in His temptation in the desert. He was the word and the truth personally, and all He said expressed what

He was; John 8:25. But it is not less true that He used and acted on and obeyed the Scriptures as Man. But here He takes the place of dependence and confidence. As Man, He says, “Preserve me, O God. In thee do I put my trust.”

The next point, partly anticipated necessarily in what I have said, is entire subservience to the will of God. Here to God, as revealed among the Jews, Jehovah; to us it would be the Father and the Son—one God, even the Father, and one Lord Jesus Christ. “Thou hast said unto Jehovah, Thou art my Lord.” Remark, “Thou hast said.” He had taken this place. He was Jehovah, but not taking that place at all here in His path. In the form of God, thinking it no robbery to be equal with God, He had taken the form of a servant, and was found in fashion as a man—freely taken, perfectly preserved in, through death, His taken place through humiliation. Freely to take it is a divine title and action. Creatures have to keep their own; though, when not kept by God, none have done so. His given, but deserved, place as Man is glory; John 17. He humbles Himself, and is highly exalted. He had said to Jehovah, “Thou art my Lord”; that is, I am subservient to Thee. He had taken a place, while never ceasing to be God, and which Godhead alone could fulfill the conditions of, outside Godhead; but in which as man to satisfy God, to glorify God in an earth of apostasy and sin, indeed with all on earth and Satan’s power against Him—at the close, even God’s wrath, if to fulfill His glory in righteousness.

Hence the Lord Jesus says, “My goodness extendeth not to thee”—up to Thee. He was to fulfill man’s place in the condition in which God’s glory was now concerned in it. A perfect man, when a perfect man, was alone in perfectness; none to sustain—none even to have compassion on Him. He must trust God in life and through death, yea, through wrath. But here it is in the path of life, and even this shown Him (vs. 11).

But, further, there were objects of divine favor from whom He did not dissociate Himself. But He does not speak of them as chosen by Himself here—as in John of His disciples, “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you” (though there also for service), nor as chosen of God in grace, but as objects of divine delight in the path they trod, as manifested morally— those who were in the path He had to tread in—“the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent.” This is full of interest. It is still His moral place as man, delighting in what God delighted in, as becomes one perfect with God, as we see in full figure in Moses (Heb. 11:24-26). He takes His place with the saints—those really sanctified to God. This we see in fact, and in the way of the most perfect obedience and humiliation, in that the Savior went to be baptized with the baptism of John, when those moved by the Spirit of God to humble themselves went there. In the first and lowest step of divine life, that of the heart giving itself up to God in the acknowledgment of sin, He who knew no sin went with those who owned it; for their owning it was divine life, and it was consecrating themselves to God. They were the true excellent of the earth. How sweet and consoling in the wilderness to see Christ treading this path, victorious over all temptation in it, as shown directly after His baptism by John; binding the strong man, in life possessed of, and victorious over, all the power of the enemy.

One sees easily here, that though it be the divine life, the fruit of grace, it is not in itself God manifesting Himself, a goodness in its character in itself reaching to God; for it was owning sin, though it was divine grace in Christ to do it. Just as it was not properly of God, as such, to die; though nothing but the perfect love, that is, One who was God Himself, could have died as Christ

did, given Himself, laid down His life, given a motive to His Father to love Him for what He did. We see One acting as man in man's place (only absolutely, perfectly, and freely as loving the Father, which He could not have done if not divine) before God and towards God as men had to act. That a divine Person should do this has a value beyond all thought, and it is what, as much else, the blessed Savior did for us, a man in our place, that is, in the perfection of it as God's delight, and according to what it ought to be, in the midst of this sinful world, what glorified God in it.

And it is of all importance for us to see Christ thus an object of delight, adoring delight, for instruction and confirmation to the soul. It is a path the vulture's eye has not seen and that no man's thought could have traced, if Christ, the perfect One, had not walked in it. We have it in life—in a Person—as it only so could be, the path of life in a living One who was the thing to be loved. No doubt the written word gives us the elements of this life in all details, but at the same time it gives much of it, however many blessed precepts direct our path, in the life of Christ Himself; so that this life is understood according to the degree of spirituality which apprehends that life as depicted in the Gospels or other parts of scripture, its motives, or rather its motive and nature. Even in precept we find a direction to walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing. How evidently does this require the true knowledge of what He is!

The view which we have taken of this divine life, perfect in itself, but displayed in a knowledge of good and evil and proved in the midst of evil—in us renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him that created us—is brought out distinctly in positive separation from evil, but especially in the motive and spring of life, the confession of Jehovah. He (vs. 4) repels all that can be called another God. He will have nothing at all to say to it. It is absolute rejection. He cleaves to Jehovah. Fidelity to Jehovah characterizes the life of Christ as so walking on earth. We can say fidelity to Christ Himself. Christ is all and in all. Jehovah is not only Lord to obey, He is the portion of His inheritance. He sought naught else; as of the priest of old and yet better, as in heart and desire, the Lord was His inheritance and the portion of His cup, His lot here, which He had to drink; His enjoyment in hope, His portion by the way.

This, I apprehend, is the difference between heritage and cup. The inheritance is the permanent portion of the soul; the cup, what its feelings are occupied with, what comes to a man to occupy his spirit by the way. He gives the cup of wrath to the wicked to drink; the blessed Lord had to drink the cup of wrath on the cross. "My cup runneth over "was filled to overflow with blessing; so we say, habitually, it was a bitter cup. It is not merely the circumstances we pass through, unless the soul be subject to them; but that which we taste in the circumstances, what our spirits feel, that which presses on them in the circumstances. Thus, in Psalm 23, the circumstances were all sorrowful, but Jehovah being shepherd, all through them, his cup ran over with joy and blessing. Thus Jehovah was the permanent portion of the heart of Christ; and, as walking through this world, that on which His heart rested—what formed and characterized His feelings more than the sorrow He went through, save on the cross." My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work" (John 4:34). Man (no, not even His disciples) never entered into His thoughts. One who sat at His feet once in affection felt that to which He could give a voice but only to bring out more sadly the failure of all else; but He had meat to eat they knew not of. Jehovah was the portion of His cup, nearer than all circumstances which otherwise could have pressed upon His heart as man, and which He fully felt, if we except the cross, or rather indeed more than ever there, for it was the wrath of Jehovah Himself that pressed upon His soul in the cup He then drank. But otherwise so

truly was Jehovah the great circumstance and substance of His life in and through everything, that He could only wish that His joy might be fulfilled in His disciples. But then it was from Jehovah only, and therein His perfection; the world was absolutely a dry and thirsty land, where no water was; but Jehovah's favor was better than life, and was His life practically through a world where all was felt, but felt with Jehovah realized; Jehovah and His favor, the life of His soul, between Him and all. So the Christian, forsaken perhaps and imprisoned: "Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice" (Phil. 4:4). Nature has circumstances between itself and God; faith has God between the heart and circumstances. And what a difference!

No peace like the peace, which hiding in the tabernacle from the provokings of all men gives. But this is a divine life through the world; Jehovah—we say the Father and the Son, a brighter development through the Son Himself—the permanent portion of the soul, its inheritance; Jehovah, the present joy and strength that fills the soul and gives its taste to life. Compare Psalm 64 and 23. And, thirdly, the blessed confidence that Jehovah maintains our lot. We trust not ourselves, not favorable circumstances, not a mountain which the Lord Himself has made strong, but Jehovah Himself. "Delight thyself also in Jehovah, and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart" (Psa. 37:4). Faith leans on Jehovah, on the Father's love and Jesus'; for the securing infallibly happiness and peace we need not look to circumstances, save to pass through them with Him. This was perfect in Christ. He had only this, nor looked for aught else. We see it brightly manifested in Paul. In principle, it is the path of every Christian; and some time or other he is exercised in it. The life of faith is this: God Himself the portion of our inheritance and of our cup; He maintaineth our lot. This is blessedly developed for us in the knowledge of the Father and Son. But the great principle is the same. It is the life of Christ, and this is enjoyed in contrast with and to the exclusion of all else that could become the confidence or the portion of the heart; expressed here in Jewish relationship, but always essentially true.

I may here remark a distinct characteristic of this psalm which comes into greater relief by the contrast of the one which follows. It touches on no circumstances, though it supposes them. It is divine life with God, and it knows and lives in the present consciousness of only Him. We find that there must have been death, hades, and the grave, but they are only mentioned as the occasion of the power and faithfulness of Jehovah. The psalm is man living through, with, and in view of God in this world, and so enjoying Him forever in spite of death. Circumstances are but circumstances, and not the subject of the psalm. Divine life never passes away. "While we look not," says the apostle, "at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:18). Such is the Christian expression of this. The former part of the phrase, which I do not cite, tells the effect of this as to circumstances, and is to be compared rather with the following psalm. The apostle beautifully expresses life itself in one word: "for to me to live is Christ, and to die," no wonder, was "gain." But it is important to remember, that there is an inward divine life which dwells and joys in God, having nothing to do with circumstances, though enabling us to go through them, and in us helped by them, because annulling the flesh and the will, so that we live more entirely of the inward life with God.

But the consequence in the soul is the deep consciousness of blessing. "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places." Christ could not have said this in the same way, had He had the kingdom living on earth; nor could we, were we in the garden of Eden, or the world at our disposal. This

living relationship with God casts a light, a halo on all; it lights the soul up with such a direct consciousness of divine blessing that nothing is like it, save the full realization of it in the presence of God. A man with God, enjoying Him in a nature capable of doing so with all the necessary conscious result where it shall be fulfilled without a cloud—a man as Christ was in this world with God—is the most perfect joy possible, save the everlasting fulfillment of all known and felt in it. It is not Messiah's portion, it is that joy of which Christ speaks when He says, "that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves" (John 17:13). No doubt, He will inherit all things: but I do not think this to be the thought here. This was not the joy set before Him for which He endured the cross and despised the shame. There is "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us" (1 Peter 1:4). This is known in joying in God. Life has its delight there. In God's presence is fullness of joy. The lines fallen in pleasant places I believe to be His joy as man in God, and in what was before God. Compare Colossians 3:1-3.

In what follows we have the active expression of this life in reference to God. "I will bless Jehovah who hath given me counsel." We need in divine life the positive instruction of wisdom—counsel; wisdom, a divine clue and direction in the confusion of evil in this world; to be wise concerning that which is good; "not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time…not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is." Jehovah gives counsel. So if any man "lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not" (James 1:5). There is the immense privilege of the positive direction and guidance of God, the interest He feels in guiding the godly man aright, in the true path suited to God Himself, across the wilderness where there is no way. For innocence enjoying the blessings of God, there was no need of a way. In a world departed from God what way can be found? It would be to return, but this is impossible; no sinner ever returned to innocence. The way of the tree of life is shut up on that side; but how a way in a world without God? But God can make a way, if He gives a new life, with a new object to that life—Himself as known in heaven—if there is a new creation, and we are new created. Now Christ is a new life, and passes through the world, according to this life, to a new place given to man; and He does so as man, dependent man. God has prepared the path for man endowed with this life, and so for Christ, who was this life, and so the light of men. He has even prepared the special works suited to it: "good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). This last thought indeed goes somewhat beyond our psalm. It at any rate includes the activity of the divine nature in man, and is not limited to the right and holy path of man having this life before God, a thing as important in its place as the other. So Moses asks not, "Show me a way across the desert," but "Show me now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight" (Ex. 33:13). What Moses sought, Jehovah gives— the counsel and guidance of His love. So Christ walked; so He guides His sheep, going before them; and now we are led of the Spirit of God as ourselves sons of God. It is the divine path of wisdom which "the vulture's eye hath not seen" (Job 28:7): the path of man, but of man with the life of God, going towards the presence of God, and the incorruptible inheritance, in an uncorrupted way—the path of God across the world; but God gives counsel for it. There is dependence on God for this, and Christ walked in it. "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel," says even the remnant of Israel; as Jehovah in Psalm 32, "I will guide thee with mine eye." I repeat, He is interested in the guidance of the man of God, and the soul blesses Him. In this path Christ trod. The written word is the great means of this; still there is the direct action of God in us by His Spirit.

But there is also divine intelligence. “My reins also instruct me in the night seasons.” The divine life is intelligent life. I do not separate this from divine grace in us, but it is different from counsel given. We can be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding (Col. 1:9-10). “Why even of yourselves,” says the Lord to the Pharisees, “judge ye not what is right?” (Luke 13:57). Thus, when removed from external influences, the secret workings and thoughts of the heart show what is suited to the path and way of God in the world. A man is spiritually minded and discerns all things. It is the working of life within (in us through grace) on divine things, and in the perception of the divine path, that is well pleasing. In Christ this was perfect, in us in the measure of our spirituality; but that to which the Christian has to give much heed, that he neglect not the holy suggestions and conclusions of the divinely instructed life when free from the influence of surrounding circumstances. It may seem folly, but, if found in humbly waiting on God, will in the end prove His wisdom. It can always be discerned from an exalted imagination.

In the first place, the state of the soul is exactly the opposite, for pretension to special spiritual guidance is never humble. But, besides, the controlling judgment of God’s word, which overrules the whole divine life, is there to judge false pretensions to it. To this divine life is always absolutely subject. Christ, who was this life—yea, was the Word and Wisdom—yet (and because He was) always wholly honored the written word as the guidance and authority of God for man.

But guidance by the Lord is not quite all the practical process of the exercise of divine life. It looks entirely to the Lord. “I have set,” says Christ, walking as man on earth, “Jehovah always before me.” He kept Him always in view. How have our hearts to own that this is not always so! How withdrawn from all evil—how powerful morally in the midst of this world—should we be, were it always so! There is nothing in this world like the dignity of a man always walking with God. Yet nothing is farther from failure in humility: indeed it is here it is perfect. Self-exaltation is neither possible nor desired in the presence and enjoyment of God. What absence of self, what renouncement of all will, what singleness of eye, and hence bright and earnest activity of purpose, when the Lord is the only object and end! I say the Lord, for no other such object can command and sanctify the heart. All would go against duty to Him. He alone can make the whole heart full of light, when duty and purpose of heart go together, and are but one. Indeed this is what James calls “the perfect law of liberty”—perfect obedience, yet perfect purpose of heart, as Jesus says, “that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do” (John 14:31). We say, as Christians, Christ is all, and he that loves Him keeps His commandments.

Thus Jesus set Jehovah always before His face. This is man’s perfection as man. This is the measure of our degree of spirituality, the constancy and purity with which we do this. But if Jesus did this, surely Jehovah could not fail Him nor us. So walking, He maintains the saint in the path which is His own. “I have set the Lord Jehovah always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.” This is known by faith. He may let us suffer for righteousness’ sake (Christ did so)—be put to death (Christ was); but not a hair of our head can He let fall to the ground, nor fail in making us enter into life according to the path in which we walk. But here it is confidence in Jehovah Himself. It is faith; not the question of righteousness in Jehovah, which is in the next psalm. Faith, in walking in the path of man according to God’s will, and towards God solely as the sanctifying end and object, knows that God is at its right hand. Jehovah will secure. How, or through what, is not the question. It will be Jehovah’s security. What strength this gives in passing

through a world where all is against us, and what sanctifying power it has! There is no motive, no resource, but Jehovah, which could satisfy any other craving, or by which the heart desires to secure itself in seeking aught else.

Hence, come what would, Christ waited patiently for Jehovah, looked for no other deliverance. Nor have we to seek any other, and this makes the way perfect. We turn not aside to make the path easier. And to this the psalm turns. Death was before Christ. As Abraham was called to slay his son in whom the promises were to be fulfilled, Christ, as living on the earth, had to renounce all the promises to which He was entitled, and life with them.

The sorrow of this to Him—for He felt all perfectly—is depicted in Psalm 102 but as Abraham trusted Jehovah, and received Isaac from the dead in a figure, so the Lord here, the leader and finisher of faith, trusts Jehovah in view of His own death—is perfect in trust in it. He had set Jehovah always before Him. He was at His right hand: therefore His heart was glad, and His glory rejoiced; His flesh rested in hope, for the Jehovah He trusted would not leave His soul in hades, nor suffer His Holy One to see corruption. “Holy One” is not here the same as “saints that are in the earth.” “Saints” are those set apart—consecrated to God. Thy “Holy” One is one walking in piety, agreeable to God. It is Christ known in this character. He is also given this name in Psalm 89:19, where read “of thy holy one.” Remark that it is “thy Holy One,” One who morally belongs to God by the perfection of His character. Christians are such, only full of imperfections. They are saints, set apart to God, but they are also—and are to walk as—the “elect of God, holy and beloved” (Col. 3:12); and as such to put on the character of grace, in which Christ walked. The former part of Colossians 3 displays this life at large in us. Ephesians 1:4 shows it in its perfection in result. This confidence of the pious soul in the faithfulness of Jehovah, the reasoning of faith from this nature that it could not be otherwise, and the consciousness of relationship with God as His delight, is very beautiful here. It is not, “thou wilt raise me”; but it is not possible in the thought of One in whom is the power of life, that Jehovah should leave the soul that has this life in hades, far from Him in death, and the object of His delight to sink into corruption.

This moral confidence and conclusion is exceedingly beautiful. “It was not,” says Peter, “possible that he should be holden of it” (Acts 2:24). This may include His Person, but His power cannot be separated from this grace. The same confidence, flowing from life, is manifested as to Jehovah’s showing Him the path of life. It is the perfection of faith as to life, but in Jehovah. “Thou wilt show me the path of life,” perhaps through death; for there, if He was to be perfect with God, this path led—but not to stay there, or it were not a path of life, Jehovah could show Him no other. Man had taken, in spite of warning, the path of death—the path of his own will and disobedience; but Christ comes, the obedient Man. There was no path for man in paradise, no natural path of life in the desert of sin. Man had not life in himself; but what path of the new divine life in man could there be for man in the world of sin, amongst men already departed from God? The law had indeed proposed one, but it only brought out the sinfulness of man’s nature. The knowledge of sin was by it, and its exceeding sinfulness. Christ, who had life, no doubt, could have kept it, yea, did so, because in Him was no sin, but there He was in this wholly dissociated from us who are sinners. He was alone, separate from sinners. But in a path of faith He could be associated with those quickened by the word—confessors of sin, not keepers of law, judges of all evil, separated by quickening grace from sinners, and treading the path of faith across the world, not of it, towards the full issue of this divine life, which was not here, which must go through the death of flesh. He

had nothing to judge, nothing to confess, nothing to die to or for in Himself; but He could walk in the holy path of faith across the world in which they, as renewed, had to walk. But for them this holy path was necessarily death, for theirs was a life of sin. He could have abode alone, and had twelve legions of angels, and gone on high; but, speaking reverently, though this would have been righteous as to Him, there was no sense in His becoming a man for this.

And not only does He die for them (for expiation is not the subject of this psalm, but life) but, having set out to go with, yea, before them, He treads this path through death, that He may destroy its power for us, and treads it alone, as He had overcome Satan's power in this world, and now destroyed it in death too—treads it alone. The disciples could not follow Him there, till He had destroyed Satan's power in it. "Thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterward" (John 13:36). No earnestness of human will, no affection, could abide there.

But when dead to sin, and strengthened with the strength of Christ, he could let another bind him and carry him (as Jesus did) whither nature would not. Christ then associated Himself from John's baptism with these saints in the earth—trod the path, only perfectly apart from sin, and only with God, doing His will, showed this path of life in man; then, having died to sin, and, in the full result of this life in its own place, where no evil is, lives to God. He did so by faith, when down on earth, always; but as man, in a world apart from God, and taking the word as His guide, living by every word that came out of the mouth of God, as we have to do. The resurrection demonstrated the perfectness of a life which was always according to the Spirit of holiness; but now He lives in it in its own place, and this is what, though through death, in an undiscontinued life, He anticipates. "In thy presence is fulness of joy." This, always His delight, was now His perfect enjoyment, and "at thy right hand" (divine power had brought Him to this place of power and acceptance—the witness of His being perfectly acceptable to God) are "pleasures for evermore."

Such is life, as life is with God, life shown as man in this world, associating itself with the saints on the earth, and treading their path (not Christ uniting them to Himself), life before God, and looking ever at Him: a life which, though free from sin, neither innocence nor sinful man could know, which in fact had not to be lived in paradise, which could not be lived as belonging to the world, but which was lived to God through it, setting Jehovah always before it as its object. Such is the life we have to live. "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). Christ, as the psalm shows us, lived the life of faith, and never of anything but faith; and this was His perfection. In this world there is no other for a man, a life which has no object but the Lord Himself.

This is a wonderful point—not one object in the world at all. For otherwise it is not faith, but sight, or lust. Innocent man had no object; he enjoyed in peace God's goodness. Man, departed from God, had many objects; but all these separate his heart from God, and end in death. Morally separated from God he may find a famine in the land, but has in no way God for his object. But the new life which comes down from the Father looks up with desire to its source, and becomes the nature in man which tends towards God, has the Son of God for its object—as Paul says, "that I may win Christ." This life has no portion in this world at all; and, as life in man, looks to God, leans on God, and seeks no other assurance or prop, obeys God, and can live only by faith. But this is a man's life, it does not extend to God. God, as such, is holy, is righteous, is love; but cannot, it is

evident, live by faith. He is its object. Nor is it exactly an angel's life, though they are holy, obedient, and loving. It is man's life, living wholly for and towards God in a world departed from Him— hence, towards Him and by faith; for it is not merely that they serve in it: that angels can do. But though not morally of it, for the life is come down from heaven, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (John 17:14). Yet, as to their place as man, they are of it, and hence have to live, in order not to be of it morally, objectively entirely out of it; thus having to say to God, or it would be idolatry.

But thus, while it is a man's life, and no more as such, yet it must be absolutely for God according to His nature: and it lives, in that it lives, to God. The living Father had sent Christ, and He lived on account of the Father, "so he that eateth me, even he shall live on account of me" (John 6:57). God is the measure of perfection in motive—hence, hereafter in enjoyment, and a heart wholly formed on Him. This life of man Christ led, and filled the whole career of. Out of this Satan wanted Him to come in the wilderness, and have a will—make the stones bread, distrust—try if the Lord would fulfill His promise or fail Him, have an object—the kingdoms of the world. This last destroyed the very nature of the life, and Satan is openly detected and dismissed. Christ would not come out of man's dependent, obedient, place of unquestioning trust in Jehovah. His path here was with the excellent of the earth, perfect in the life which was come down from heaven, but which was lived on earth, looking up to heaven.

Whatever our privileges in union with Christ, it is all-important for the Christian to live in the fear and faith of God, according to the life of Christ. It is not man's responsibility without law or under law as a child of Adam; it is all over with us on that ground. It is the responsibility of the new life of faith, which is a pilgrim and a stranger here—a life come down from heaven ("God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life"), but a life which man lives in passing through this world, yet wholly out of it in its object—a life of faith, which finds in God's presence fullness of joy. A man's life does not extend to God, though perfect for God, and in its delight in God. Such was Christ, though He was much more than this. Such are we as far as we are Christians; only we have to remember that the development of this life in us is not, as in the psalm, in connection with the name of Jehovah, but with the full revelation of the Father and the Son. The blessed One who thus lived as man on earth is as man at God's right hand, where are pleasures for evermore, with Him in whose presence is fullness of joy. His flesh saw no corruption, and His soul was not left in hades. For this joy set before Him, He despised the shame and endured the cross, the leader and finisher of faith.

This psalm gives us the inward spiritual life of Christ, and so ours, ending in the highest joy of God's presence.

Psalm 17 considers this life practically here below and in respect to its difficulties with man opposed to what is right. The state of the soul is still marked by entire dependence on God, but, as to integrity towards God, and as against man, the soul can plead righteousness. Still it does not avenge itself, but casts itself entirely on God, and thus gets the fruits of His righteous dealings. This is a great secret of practical wisdom not avenging self—the patience of the new life in the midst of evil, and looking, and leaving all to God. This supposes the righteous path as man of the divine life, which therefore can appeal to God's necessary judgment about it, knowing what He is, and also trusting in Him; but even here deliverance is sought, not vengeance, only the

disappointing the plans of wickedness. If we have not walked uprightly, still confidence in God is our true place. He spares and restores in mercy most graciously; but this, though other psalms take it up, is not the subject of this psalm. Here it is the righteous life which God looks at and vindicates against the men of this world, for it is Christ, and Christians as far as they live the life of Christ. Immediately, as ever, it is Christ and the remnant. Jehovah hears the righteous, and the prayer which goes not out of feigned lips.

Remark, that in this psalm the life of Christ is supposed and found to meet opposition, and oppression in the world from the men of this world. We have seen how separated it was, associated with the excellent of the earth, passing as a stranger through it, though humanly in it. But then faith—and this shows how entirely Jehovah is still looked to—sees that the men of this world are the men of God's hand. They serve to prove the heart, and, in us who are ever in danger to slip into the world, to keep us strangers in it. Still God delivers from them. Christ, for blessed reasons, was not delivered, yet as freely giving Himself. The heart has the sense of righteousness here, and hence counts on deliverance; but there is no spirit of vengeance. It is the Spirit of Christ Himself, and hence above the spirit of the remnant, and much more the Christian spirit. There is the consciousness of righteousness and of integrity, but entire dependence on the Lord in respect of it, not as regards justification—it is not the question here— but confidence. "I know nothing by myself," says Paul, "yet am I not hereby justified" (1 Cor. 4:4). Again, "if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God" (1 John 3:1). So Jesus: "The Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him" (John 8:29). There is the consciousness of righteousness and confidence in God. And the heart appeals to Him, because of righteousness. And all this is right, thinks rightly of God, and trusts to God that He will not be inconsistent with Himself, and cannot be. If there be desire of vengeance, we have sunk below this.

Remark the further traits of the conscious life. It is not merely righteous walk, but a proved heart, where the secret movements of the heart are alone with God. When the reins instruct, God proves, but nothing is found. This, absolutely true of Christ, is true of the Christian as to the purpose of his heart, and so far as he keeps nothing back, nothing reserved from God. This can be, though then in utter humiliation, where even there has been failure. "Thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee." So in Job. He held fast the consciousness of his integrity—not that he had not failed. The shortcomings of nature had to be checked and judged, and this he only did when humbled in the presence of God. He had for a long while, as God witnesses, held fast his integrity in every sense. He did as with God all through, but did not know himself as this was needed. Christ ever walked so, and the provings of His heart only found integrity to God.

There was purpose: His mouth also should not transgress. He was a perfect man, as James says. Next, as regards the works of men, for He walked as a man in this world, the word was His absolute rule. By it He kept Himself from the paths of the destroyer. But there is no pride, but entire dependence on Jehovah in the right path. "Hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not." Such was the practical life of Christ in this world. This was His life and walk in itself.

In what follows from verse 6 it is shown in looking to God as regards the opposition and oppression of the wicked. He looks for Jehovah's loving-kindness as his sole stay in the presence of his enemies. This, again, is perfection. His path was with God; no yielding to please men and be spared; no complaint that he had not his portion in this world. He sees the success and prosperity

of the men of this world, without envy. Faith fully tried is faith still. If we trust the Lord and have Him for our portion, we have courage to walk in His path and not find nature satisfied; but this is faith. If this be not so, there will be some craving after what the natural heart could have, and so danger of yielding in order to have what nature craves and the world gives—after all, husks that perish. But the human heart must have something. If it has the Lord, it suffices, but this tests it. Here we have perfection in respect of the heart and path in this world. The great secret is to have the heart filled with Christ, and so be in the path at God's will. Thus there is no room for will and acts which harass the soul, and of which self is always the center, as Christ is in the heart walking in faith. Hence His presence in righteousness is what is before the soul as the blessed result. It is in righteousness.

It is not the absolute joy in God of Psalm 16, but the righteousness which gives joy in His presence for those who have suffered for it and by it here below in God's paths, in an opposing world, an absence or denial of self. "God is not unrighteous to forget" (Heb. 6:10). "It is a righteous thing with God to recompense ... to you who are troubled rest with us" (2 Thess. 1:6-7). And the heart, too, is satisfied, not here exactly with what God is, but with what we are. "I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness"; so "we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). We are predestinated "to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29). Holy delight in God, having Him always before the face, leads to perfect delight and joy in God when His presence makes it full. Faithfulness internal and external, to God in the midst of an opposing and perhaps oppressing world, leads to righteous recompense of glory and God's presence in righteousness. Both are perfect in Christ, and through Christ, the portion of the saints.

Verses 7, 11, give the general application to those associated with Christ; still, though applicable to the remnant, the psalm gives the proper perfection of Christ and so of the Christian. Deliverance now is looked for in this psalm, not in Psalm 16. There it was the perfect passage of life with God through death, up to fullness of joy in Him in His presence. Here righteous deliverance from men is looked for. And for this— though we may be honored with martyrdom, according to the pattern of Christ's sufferings—the Christian may look. "The Lord shall deliver me," says the apostle, "from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom" (2 Tim. 4:18). The soul may confidently and entirely trust God, as against all the machinations of the wicked, as walking in the path of righteousness. God saves such by His right hand. He may trust for restoration, if he has failed; but there is a path of righteousness which Christ has traced here below in a world of sin, and left the blessed track of His steps, and the witness of the movements of His heart, for us to walk in and live by.

Psalm 18 is of the deepest interest, as regards the interpretation, presenting as it does the sufferings of Christ as the center of all the deliverance of Israel. His cry there called out upon Israel all the favor of God in power. But I have not a great deal to say upon it, for that very reason, in its application to us. The great principle developed—and it is a precious one— is the cry to a trusted God in distress, which He surely hears. Of this Christ is the example, as elsewhere. "This poor man cried, and Jehovah heard him." Only that here it is not, as in Psalm 34, tender commiseration towards the suffering poor; but the interest that Jehovah takes in a suffering Christ, who has walked in perfect obedience to the law. The psalm is a psalm of praise, because He has been heard and Jehovah known as a rock and a deliverer; but this, as often remarked, is the result

expressed in the first verses, and what leads to it is then pursued.

“I will call upon Jehovah,” for His name it is, and His alone, the God of His people, which inspires confidence. It is His name which is celebrated, but what has drawn all His praise out is the answer to the cry raised to Him in distress in the midst of enemies, in the sorrows of death. In that distress Jehovah heard out of His temple. This associates it at once with the earth, and deliverance, and triumph there. But another point of the highest interest does so too—obedience to the law laid as the ground of His being heard in the day of distress (vss. 20-26). The righteous obedience on earth and dependence of Messiah on Jehovah, calling on Him in distress, brought Him earthly deliverance and earthly triumph. The two previous psalms look onward to heavenly blessing, though the latter of them for the disappointment of the enemy also; and the hope held out is heavenly, the righteousness not legal; but in the former the heart set on Jehovah, in the latter a heart right with God, and in this world, and looking for righteousness.

Here, in Psalm 18, there is obedience to His statutes, a cry in distress even to the pains of death, and deliverance, and triumph on the earth. Such is the result of the legal righteousness of Christ when in distress, in the midst of the floods of ungodly men and His strong enemy.

Note, it is the power of men and death, and His crying thus to God, and His cry comes before Him—in no way God’s hand upon Him as suffering for sin. Messiah’s legal righteousness and distress bring earthly triumph and supremacy to David and to his seed. It is the government of God (see verses 25-26), having regard to righteousness on the earth which in Christ was perfect. But this, perfectly accomplished when Christ’s enemies are put under His feet, is not actually so now, because God prepared His saints for a heavenly dwelling and joy, and, during all the proving of the first Adam, shows by their trials that their rest is not here.

Still there are some precious points for every soul. In uprightness and suffering through it, he can surely count upon God; and remark here that there interest and sympathy of God, awakening in us the blessedest affections, are sweetly shown. The Lord hears when we call in distress, and in the greatest depths we can have confidence, and what ought to seem to shut us out from it is just the occasion of it.

The psalm instructs us thus to call upon the Lord in distress, come how or why it may, to call on the Lord; and thus not only the deliverance is known, but the Lord is known in His sympathy, and kindness, and interest in us. I love Jehovah, he says; or rather the heart turns to Jehovah Himself and says, “I will love thee, O Jehovah, my strength,” and then the heart thinks of all He is for us. “Jehovah is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, the horn of my salvation, and my high tower.” The heart enlarges in the sense of what He has been for us. And so He is. Though our deliverances may not be exactly of the same kind, yet difficulties and distress often beset us, and there is deliverance in crying to the Lord. Note also, there are holy affections drawn out by the dealings of the Lord, as by His eternal salvation, holy and confiding affections, piety; not merely praise, because He has redeemed us forever, but daily exercise of sympathy and tender thoughts of compassion. He cannot bear to see us suffer, save when needed, and there are trials which draw out love to Him. Surely He says, “Is Ephraim is my dear son?...for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still” (Jer. 31:20). There indeed it was the remembrance of him when under chastisement. Here it is suffering in integrity, but at bottom there is integrity in the Christian, and in Christ. He can cry in that distress. The

psalm, however, is the cry of a holy and calm spirit, confiding in God and finding the abundant results in His faithfulness. The heart is drawn to Himself. In Psalm 16, 17 and 18, we have found Christ Himself—His personal position, the joy set before Him in heaven, and His final triumph on earth as suffering when legally righteous.

In Psalm 19-21 we have the godly remnant contemplating the different testimonies presented to the responsibility of man. A few remarks on each are called for.

First, there is the testimony of creation, and in particular the heavens, for the earth has been given to man and is corrupt. Here, remark, God is spoken of, not Jehovah—His hope in God as such. Hence the godly man sees that the witness goes out into all lands, and that the Gentiles are the objects of God's testimony. This is a very important point, which the Jews ought to have understood, and which Paul, by the Holy Spirit, did understand, citing this psalm to show it—not resting on what the testimony was, but on the fact that the testimony of God went out into all lands to the ends of the earth. The godly man can delight in this testimony to the glory of His God; but he sees it reaches out to all. He enters into and understands the penetrating pervading character of this testimony, and that it is God who is witnessed to by it. Such, I add, will be the estimate of the restored remnant in the last days. See Psalm 148.

But the godly man estimates the experimental excellence of the law of Jehovah also; and, though of course for Israel it was the law as given by Moses, we must take it here as the testimony of the word of God to the conscience. I say the conscience, because it is not the revelation of the riches of grace, or the unfolding of the Person of Christ and the ways of God in Him, but the testimony of God's word respecting man, to the conscience of man, even when it is taken in the largest sense. He does not say the law of God here, but "the law of Jehovah," a God known in covenant relationship. His law is given to His people, to His servants. It is perfect, the exact mind of God as to what man ought to be before God, according to God's will, now that evil is known; but man's mind is not such, even when the law of God is delighted in. It sets the soul therefore right. One has the consciousness of its doing so: for the soul, having life, appreciates it when revealed (though it may not have had it in mind), and is livingly susceptible of its truth. It has living power as the word of God for him who lives. But where it is not forgotten, there is enlightening and direction. It is pure and enlightens the eyes, gives to see clearly when we were obscure in heart and spirituality. But the psalm connects this with the state of the heart. There is a reference, not merely to the law, but to the Lord Himself—the effect of the sense of God's presence in the conscience, the fear of the Lord—the introduction of God into everything, and the reference of the heart to Him, and the judgment which He has of everything. This is clean; no spot can remain there, and it is an eternal principle, for it depends on the nature of God Himself. Further, God's dealings and ways as pronounced (for "judgments" include that, as well as judgments executed—He does show His judgment of things in His chastisements—but in general every judgment He forms, however shown) are true and righteous altogether. But they are not only this, but as gold, and the honeycomb to the faithful; they are the expressions of God's mind, and that is infinitely precious and sweet to the saints.

But, besides this, the heart is in the midst of dangers and human tendencies, which draw us far from God. The judgments of the Lord on all human conduct warn us: for the joy of the word, and, in the case of the Christian, of heaven, do not suffice. We need the wisdom and prudence which can

point out a divine path in the confusion of evil, to guide our steps out of the reach of evil here. God's word meets us even here. And in keeping His judgments there is great reward, great positive blessing and peace of heart here. The soul is happy with God, and walks in peace through the world; and, as a Christian, the heart is thus wholly free to serve others.

Remark that it is not merely what the law is, but what the heart knows it to be: the servant of Jehovah is warned by it. There is delight in it, according to the new nature, and the consciousness of relationship; for we are servants of God, though we have higher, more intimate and glorious, relationships. But in this confidence the effect of this nearness is to turn the eye to another point: the want of full self-knowledge, distrust of self. "Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret [faults]." In many things, although delighting in the word, and appreciating it when thinking of it, I may not have judged my own heart, or be able morally to prove it, so as to judge it according to that perfection: for there is growth in spiritual judgment. But there is integrity and confidence in the Lord, and he demands to be cleansed from his secret faults, and to be kept from all presumptuous faults—what one would commit with open disregard of God. Thus he would be undefiled, and be kept with God, not turning aside to idols or vanity. For small and neglected sins and unjudged confidence of heart lead to forgetfulness of God, and denial of Him in the truth. I do not speak here of security by grace, but of the path in which these evils lead.

Finally, the true desire of the heart is shown, that the words of the mouth, and the meditations of the heart, may be acceptable in God's sight. This is the true test of a godly life, when good is sought inwardly, when only in God's sight: the research of good with God, not before man or in the knowledge of man. I speak not of hypocrisy, but of walking with God. But in all true righteousness God is owned as our Rock and Redeemer; for we cannot be "with" Him, with the real apprehensions of a new life, without feeling our need of Him in both characters.

Psalm 20 and 21, as remarked elsewhere, present to us the third witness presented to the responsibility of men—Christ. But this is not our only subject here: Psalm 20 shows us the profound interest which the heart takes in watching the Faithful One in His sorrows—in a Jewish form no doubt; still, as elsewhere, the substance is the same for us. It is still confidence in Jehovah which characterizes the feeling of Him who speaks; for the God of Jacob is before His thoughts. There is faith in Him in this relationship. Yet Messiah is seen in the trials and questions of His life here below, walking but in piety towards Jehovah, and in dependence on Him. Nothing can show Christ more completely as a man than this. The Anointed is saved, that is, delivered, and heard. The whole heart of the godly is wrapped up in this. But the remnant see yet farther here, as Israel ought to have done; they see Him answered in His demand for life by a most glorious one forever in the immediate light of God's countenance, with which He is made glad, and after that, His right hand finding out all His enemies and destroying them. But, even in all this (as in John 17 where one sees at the same time that He must be one with the Father), Messiah receives all from Jehovah as a man, and is so viewed by the godly. And so was He presented by Peter. His privilege is the favor of Jehovah; His piety, confidence in Jehovah. This link is what occupies the godly, who are thus profoundly attached to Messiah, and this was in effect what characterized Christ— seeking His Father's glory, and in nothing His own. So Jehovah associates Himself entirely with Him as in Psalm 21:9, as the godly does on his side also. And as Messiah is exalted by Jehovah in spite of His enemies, so is Jehovah exalted in His glory in doing it; and so it is the remnant, equally interested, exalt and praise the power of Jehovah.

This linking up the interests of the godly, bound in heart to Messiah—Messiah and Jehovah, as characterizing the piety of the godly, is full of beauty and interest. Yet, in His life, Christ never took this title with His disciples. He would lead them farther. He was Son of man, and spoke of His Father as being Himself Son of God. “My Father,” said He to the Jews, “of whom ye say, that he is your God” (John 8:54). All the moral qualities of Messiah, Son of God, He had, but He was weaning His disciples from the earthly associations to higher and heavenly ones; and this shows us the need there is in all our use of the Psalms to make this difference. We see with the profoundest interest the sorrows and sufferings of Christ, but it is from a higher point of view; we look not at His official place and then humiliation, but the divine and perfect love in which He emptied Himself and came down and took the form of a servant, and was found in fashion as a man, and passed with a purpose of love across the trials and sorrows of this world of sorrow; and we see His glory in it. The truth is much more deeply taught in the New Testament. Still the way Christ is presented as a true dependent Man, and His piety in this dependence is most instructive to us who can add the deeper truth from the revelation of the Son of God. The word of life in it is seen.

In commenting on Psalm 22, our part here is not to unfold the blessed doctrine contained in it, in the introduction of grace on a wholly new footing (namely, redemption, and the death of Christ), which rose above and closed all mere human responsibilities in grace. We have rather to pursue the feelings and thoughts of Christ. For —the piety of this part of the Psalms is the piety of Christ Himself. Nor is anything more instructive or sanctifying. Nothing deepens our own piety so much. This then shall be our subject now. The Lord enable us to tread reverently here!

We find what called out the special cry of the Savior—a cry which, till that bitter cup had been fully drunk, could not be heard. There is progress and completeness in the utterance of these sorrows. Violence, unrestrained and full of rage, surrounded Him—bulls of Bashan, ravening and roaring lions. It was no haughty strength of man which met this. He must meet and feel it in the meekness of His nature, and know the weakness of human nature, though never the sin, save bearing it. He was poured out like water. All His bones are out of joint: His heart melted like wax in the midst of His bowels. His strength is dried up like a potsherd: His tongue cleaves to His jaws. But here there is no stopping, nor could He do so, at second causes. He is down in the dust of death; but Jehovah has brought Him there. The point here is His state, the dust of death: only He looks at the real source of all, at the thoughts and counsels of Jehovah. This is perfection in this respect: entire sensibility as to, and moral perception of, the character of the enemies, who are the instruments of our suffering; but looking, through it all, to the ways and wisdom and will of God, and God in faithful relationship to us, the true source of all. But, besides the violence which, instrumentally, had brought the gentle and unresisting Savior, dumb as a sheep before His shearers, to the dust of death— had violently dragged away and mocked Him whose simple presentation of Himself had made all fall to the ground—there was the manifestation of the character of men, when, through His own giving Himself up, He was in their power. Dogs encompassed Him—creatures without heart or conscience— without shame or feeling, whose pleasure was in the shame of another, and insults offered to Him who made no resistance, in outrages to the righteous. They were wicked as well as violent. They stared and looked upon Him. How must the Savior have felt their shameless and heartless insults—His exposure, naked to the hardened eye of those who rejoiced in iniquity and in His shame! They amuse themselves with appropriating His garments. The vesture of the

Innocent was an affair of dice or casting lots. No eye to pity, none to help. Trouble was there: He looks on Jehovah, entreating Him not to be far from Him, and, if He has no strength, Jehovah as His strength to be near.

And here we approach the deeper part of this solemn hour. In the utmost trials from man, when no eye was there to pity, no hand to help, He looks to Jehovah, the covenant God of Israel's and Messiah's faith. But here, O mystery of mysteries! there was no help either, but only infinite perfection (for infinite it now must be) in the Blessed One. He is still associated here with Israel as to His place in the psalm, whatever the efficacy of that work, in this great turning-point of divine history, this central definition and solution of the question of good and evil, that in which it was settled for eternity. The God of Israel was to leave Him, and destroy the enmity, and rend the veil which, in Israel, concealed God; that, in the full result of divine love by righteousness, grace might reign through righteousness unto eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord, for every believer, Jew or Gentile, and for the complete glory of God in heaven and earth. We still, remark, find the necessary difference of Christ in the Psalms and in the Gospels. There it is as Son (save in His forsaking) He speaks, saying, "Father, forgive them"; and afterward, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46). Here it is, "Be not Thou far from me, O Jehovah." He seeks help for Himself from the God of Israel, His God. And such is the result. It is the remnant gathered; and then all Israel, the millennial nations, and the people to be born—those who are the called and blessed fruit of this work. We do not rise up to heaven. Having made this remark, as important to the right use of the Psalms, which we find has its place even in what is said of the cross itself in the Psalm 1 turn to the character of faith and piety found here in the Blessed One, in His trust as come in the midst of Israel, in Jehovah. For of Israel, "as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever" (Rom. 9:5).

There is the deepest consciousness of His own outwardly abject state and desertion, and that in painful contrast with every faithful soul—a circumstance wonderfully calculated to produce in the human heart irritation and despondency, that is, a forgetfulness of what God was, if this had been possible with Jesus. "I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people." Nor was this all. The blessed Savior, He who had been cast upon Jehovah from the womb, whose hope Jehovah had been from His mother's breast, who had sought His will and glorified His name, had to declare before all, and in presence of the taunts and mockery of His adversaries, that God had forsaken Him. How deep this trial was morally, none but He could tell who passed through it. It was in the proportion of the love He enjoyed and lived in, and His faithfulness to it. We speak of trial and piety, not of expiation, here.

In all this, and through all this, the blessed Savior is perfect towards Jehovah. First, His trust is perfect. He says not Jehovah; for the relationship was not then in exercise as it was with His Father in Gethsemane; but He says, "My God, my God." Whatever the dreadful forsaking was, His perfect faith in God and devotedness to God, as the only One He owned, remains absolute and unshaken. His is perfect, absolutely perfect, as Man, subjectively.

But this is shown in another point. Whatever the sufferings of Christ—notwithstanding the fact that in His path there was no cause for His being forsaken—His testimony to God, His sense of the perfectness of His ways and nature, remains the same, yea, more elevated. "But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel." Let God abandon the righteous, the righteous One is

sure He is perfect in doing so. Nothing can express more completely the perfection of Christ as man, His position as such, how He had taken the place of “my goodness extendeth not to thee.” He is not here contemplating the counsels of God, and understanding their accomplishment, which He had Himself undertaken. It is the dependent man feeling the trial as it reached Himself as man, but perfect and faithful when, as regards His feelings, there was no answer of God in trials wherein He counted on it, and it alone was to be counted on.

We can answer the question, “Why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46). We shall answer it, who believe in Jesus, with everlasting adoration. But it is of the last importance for us, not only to know that Christ has by Himself purged our sins, having drunk the cup of wrath, but to know Christ as suffering personally under this forsaking of God—His own entrance as man into the sense as regards Himself of this forsaking—His own personal sorrow in it; because, though He were wholly alone in it, it leads us to that joy which He felt in entering, again and more than ever, into the full unclouded light of His Father’s countenance—consequent on, and according to, the value of redemption, and the full resting of the necessary delight of God in Him and His acceptance, as having perfectly glorified Him when sin had put all in confusion. So that all that God was, as brought out by sin (for sin brought out sovereign love, righteousness, truth, vindicated majesty), was perfectly revealed and glorified. His own sufferings, I say, lead us to that joy into which Christ entered with His God and Father as man; and which, as all this was accomplished in a work wrought for our sins, He communicates to us, introducing us into the full blessedness into which He is entered as Man. In the work He was alone; but it was for us, while for the divine glory; and He introduces us into the blessedness, as that which He enjoys in consequence of it.

This is the second part of the psalm, as to which I will only now refer to the sentiments of Christ. He has been heard from the horns of the unicorn, transpierced by the power of death, God’s judgment against sin being executed and passed.

I have remarked elsewhere the very instructive fact, that Christ never speaks in the gospels, during His life, of God as His God, but always as the Father. This was the impression of His own personal relationship, the name too that He revealed to His disciples. He never directly calls Himself the Christ in the Gospel history; not that He was not presented as such to Israel, for He was, but it is not the place and name He takes Himself with God and His Father, which is the way we have to know Him. When the Jews say to Him, “If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly,” He says, “I told you and ye believed not”; but as revealed to us, He is Emmanuel, the Prophet that should come, the Son of man, the Son of God. The word He uses with and of God, is ever Father and My Father; with His disciples, Son of man. In the psalm we are studying we read, My God, My God. He is man with whom God deals in judgment, but man, even if forsaken, perfect in His own relationship with God in faith; He says, My God.

Now He declares the name of God to His brethren, and employs both these titles—man gone to the extreme of trial with God, standing as regards all that God is in righteousness, truth, majesty, love. My God, all that God is in His own perfection and majesty and claim, He is necessarily and obligedly, though in the delight of His love, for us as in Christ, doubtless according to His own counsels, but righteously, and thus necessarily, and unalterably for us. What He is as God, He is as our God, for through Christ—Christ proved on the cross—He is for us, and that, sin being put away by Christ’s sacrifice of Himself. The cloudless perfection of God shines out on us in His own

proper blessedness, as on Christ, in virtue of His having glorified Him, in the perfection in which He thus shines out.

His name (that is, the true reality of His relationship) is declared to us. The gracious name and nature of God was declared on earth by Christ, who was the only begotten Son in the bosom of the Father. But with that sinful man, at enmity with God, could have no part or association. The light shines in darkness; the darkness comprehended it not. Yea, man saw and hated Him, and His Father. But Christ was made sin for us, stood as man responsible before God, with God in all these attributes in which He dealt with sin, but was perfect there; that love might righteously have its free course. Hence He says, “I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!” (Luke 12:50). For He was that love—God in Christ reconciling, till it could flow out according to the perfection of God in righteousness; but it could not flow out freely where sin was. This, through the cross, through Christ’s perfection, when He was made sin for us, it could; yea, love was exalted, and the very character of God made good in and by it, His name (the very name which was to be revealed) made good by it. Hence Christ could say, “therefore doth my Father love me” (John 10:17). But then Christ entered in a still more supreme degree into the joy of His Father’s love, and all this as man. He does so when heard. It was publicly made good and evident in resurrection. He was raised by the glory of the Father. Then He declares this name to His brethren. For now sin being man’s only place with God out of Christ, he who believed had in Christ Christ’s place as raised from the dead, in the relationship in which He stands with the Father; and, death having come in, no other. Go and tell my brethren, said the Lord, “I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God” (John 20:17). Now, He employs both titles, and applies them both to us, both because all that God is He is in righteousness for Him as Man in glory, and He is re-entered into the joy of His Father’s communion, and places us, in virtue of this work wrought for us, in the position in which He is, as His brethren, partakers through grace of the favor and heritage which is His.

I have entered more into the doctrine connected with the psalm than I intended, though it has been practically: for the feelings and affections of Christ are my object now. Remark that the first thought of Christ, when heard from the horns of the unicorn, is to declare the name of God and His Father to His brethren—now glorious, but not ashamed to call us brethren. Perfect in love, attached to these excellent of the earth, He turns (when once He is entered into the position of joy and blessing through a work which gave them the title to enter) to reveal to them what placed them in the same position with Himself. Thus He gathered them; and then, having awakened their voices to the same praise as that which He was to offer, He raises the blessed note as Man, and sings praise in the midst of the assembly. Oh, with what loud voices and ready hearts we ought to follow Him! And note, he who is not clear in acceptance and the joy of sonship with God, in virtue of redemption, cannot sing with Christ. He sings praises in the midst Of the assembly. Who sings with Him? He who has learned the song, which he has learned to sing as come out of judgment into the full light and joy of acceptance. Ephesians 1:3-4 shows us this place. Here we have the saints led by Jesus in praise according to His own joy. The grace of this position is perfect. The further results of the work I do not enter on here, save to remark that all is grace, no judgment (it is founded on it), and nothing goes beyond earth here.

Psalm 23 is so ordered by the Spirit as to apply to a dying Christ, or a saint who follows His footsteps, or the preserved remnant. It does not consider the sufferings of Christ from God, or from

man, nor those of the faithful, save as mere facts and occasions of Jehovah's care. Its subject is "Jehovah is my Shepherd"—the constant unfailing care exercised by Him. It is a life spent under His care and eye, come what will, the experience it affords, and the assurance that Jehovah's love gives to the end and forever. It is not what He gives which assures the heart, but Himself. "Jehovah is my Shepherd; I shall not want." Power, grace, goodness, interest in the faithful One, all assure; and assure in all circumstances and forever and always. He has undertaken and has charged Himself with the care of His faithful ones. These cannot want. We have not to think of what may come, or what means may be employed. The Shepherd's care is our assurance. The natural fruit of this care is fresh and green pastures in security, the peaceful enjoyment of the sure refreshings of goodness. But in fact man, specially the remnant, and Christ Himself, are in the midst of oppressing sorrow, and death, and in presence of mighty enemies. Is the soul troubled and bowed down? He restores it. Does it go through the valley of the shadow of death? does death cast its dark gloom over the spirit that must go down into its shade? He is there, greater than death, to guide and sustain. Are powerful and relentless enemies there to alarm and threaten? They are powerless before Him. He dresses a table for His beloved, where they sit down in safety, and secure. Divine unction is the seal of power when all is against us. Human weakness, death, and spiritual powers of wickedness, all are only the occasions to show most evidently that Jehovah, the Shepherd, is the infallible safeguard of His people.

Christ was not, of course, a sheep, but He trod the path the sheep have to tread, and trusted in Jehovah. He is the Jehovah—Shepherd of them that are His. He loves us, as Jehovah loved and cared for Him. It is then the sure care of Jehovah through all that besets human nature in its path through this world. The natural proper fruit of this care is green pastures in the security of peace; but, in man's ruined state and the path he has to tread in the midst of the powers of evil, an infallibly sustaining power. Hence the heart, as it trusts to the unchangeable Jehovah, reckons on the future. It is as certain and secure as the past. Goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and the house of Jehovah receives me forever. Confidence is in Jehovah Himself; and therefore all circumstances, and the whole power of evil, and difficulties of mortal man included in them, are but occasions of Jehovah's power, interested in infallible faithfulness, in carrying the faithful through.

It is interesting to see this care of divine power, holding its place in infallible certainty over all the special sufferings and trial and death of the Lord. This is the faithful man's blessing, when the earth is not Jehovah's, when the power of evil, and death, and mighty adversaries are before it. Jehovah is the secure dwelling place of faith.

When the earth is Jehovah's (Psa. 24), who shall ascend His hill, or stand in His holy place? Here, remark, the door has become open to all. Only Jacob has the place of acceptance and proximity to Jehovah; but blessing and acceptance in favor from God, who is their salvation, are the portion of every one that has purified himself to seek God who has placed His blessing in Jacob. The character of such is given, but the Gentiles who have it have access in Jehovah's holy hill. Christ Himself enters there in triumph as Jehovah.

Psalm 24 closes the whole series which speaks of the association of Christ with the excellent—the saints that are in the earth. We have in it, Christ in the path of life with the saints; Christ in the path of righteousness in the midst of an evil world; Christ suffering, the center of all Israel's history, and

the object of Jehovah's interest when identified with Israel; Christ suffering as witness to the truth, object of the remnant's thoughts and affections; Christ suffering as forsaken of God; Christ taking personally the path in which the sheep had to walk, and so unfolding to them the care of Jehovah, though Himself the true Shepherd (compare John 10); and Christ, when all own Jacob and the God of Jacob, entering into the temple as the triumphant Jehovah, the Lord of Hosts. Though the blessed One be largely a pattern for us in much of this, yet the true effect on the piety of the heart is wrought in seeing Himself truly man, treading the path before our eyes, and engaging every affection of the soul in the contemplation of it.

In what follows we have again the thoughts and feelings of the remnant in their sorrows, in connection with this place of Christ: but we shall find large instruction for our hearts in a path which is always one of sorrow, and essentially the same as long as evil reigns. In looking back to the psalms which we have studied, there is, I think, progress in their character. Thus, in the first psalms, from 3 to 7, we have the general principles and condition, showing that righteousness does not yet reign by judgment (this is founded on the great foundations of Psalm 1 and 2): the righteous man in the midst of the wicked; judgment yet to come; and the counsels of God as to Messiah announced, but not yet fulfilled, in Psalm 8; in Psalm 9 and 10 the circumstances of the land and the Jews in the last days; and then, Psalm 11-15, the relationships, judgment, and principles of the remnant looking towards Jehovah in this state of things. Psalm 16-24 having given the whole position of Christ in respect of Israel, introducing Him amongst them, and showing the result. We have now much more of the experimental exercises of the saints in that day. This we have now to consider. These could not but be founded on the intervention and sacrifice of Christ. It is not meant thereby that they are clear as to this, or that the expressions of the Psalms suppose it or suit a soul which is in liberty. But such exercises could not have place without His intervention and sacrifice; and the Holy Spirit, in the remnant, and in every soul, works in virtue of them, and with a view to their full recognition.

In Psalm 25 we have, for the first time, the definite confession of sin. This, with Psalm 26, the declaration and consciousness of integrity of heart, form the subjective basis of all their experiences; the two following the objective—Jehovah light and salvation, and present distress through the pressure of the wicked, still here with confidence of heart in Jehovah. But the more we study the Psalms, the more we shall see that they apply properly to the Jews, and that almost universally; referring to the godly righteous man of the remnant, animated according to his position, whose thoughts are furnished by the Spirit of Christ speaking in the prophet. Many parts of them can be applied to Christ Himself, when all cannot. But this shows what I have already remarked, that the possibility of referring passages to Christ does not make them exclusively prophecies of Him, nor prove that all the psalm applies to Him; and, further, the real danger of taking the Psalms as the expression of Christian piety. They are not so. Often they furnish blessed instruction on confidence in God; but he who would take the form of his piety from the Psalms as a whole would falsify Christianity. Having said this, I turn to details.

The soul is lifted up to Jehovah in its difficulties—the true secret of overcoming them, and of having peace in the midst of them. The true heart has no other refuge. Another distracts it from this. It says, my God in them—it can now through Christ, and trust in God; and looks not to be ashamed, nor its enemies to triumph over it. This in difficulties is the first desire of faith. But it cannot confine itself when real to self. It is linked up by grace with God's goodness, felt in this very

hope; but then with all those who wait on Jehovah. It desires that the wicked (causeless transgressors, that is, those who love iniquity, not who fall in it) may be ashamed. This, as a general principle, is no way un-Christian. The Christian cannot desire that an individual enemy come under judgment; but he does desire that evil be set aside, and that the adversaries of good be made ashamed. He loves and desires righteousness, and that the oppressor of righteousness, and of the lowly and meek and just be put down, and put to shame. In his own case he can desire it as to result, without wishing evil to the individual. His trust in Jehovah prevents his taking the smallest step for the injury of his enemy; but he refers his case to Jehovah, and leaves it in His hands, looking for His deliverance.

But there is another characteristic of the saint whose heart is turned towards Jehovah in repentance. He seeks Jehovah's ways, His paths—to be led in His truth and taught. Remark this very definite character of good in the upright soul. It is not simply a right way, but Jehovah's way he seeks. His spirit is returned to Jehovah, thinks of Him, estimates His character, is conscious of owing allegiance and service to Him, belonging to Him, and that all does, and delights in and seeks only His way. But this psalm presents a returning man (the Jew), not one first converted. Israel (and so the saint) does remember and recall, but looks to Jehovah's no more remembering his faults, and according to His mercy to remember himself, to remember him in that way; for he knew Jehovah to be merciful, and it was for the glory of His own name—he could ask it for His goodness' sake.

This shows, not known pardon, but the confiding of grace. This is not a purged conscience, yet it flows from the answer of God. But it is an acceptable way of approaching God. So the poor woman that was a sinner in the gospel. She came thus, she went away in peace. But there is a faithfulness of Jehovah to His own goodness—His own character, which is above evil, which (a ransom being found which maintains righteousness) makes Him act for the true blessing of the sinner thus looking to Him. As it is said even of Joseph, He was a just man, and not willing to make her a public example. No doubt other motives come in with man; still, as far as he has to act like God, this principle comes in. Good and upright is Jehovah. Good to us, He loves uprightness, loves to see it, and so will teach it in grace to those wandered from it. It is sweet to one that has wandered to count on this. Remark, it is not here His way. That was the expression of the state of the saint's heart; this is the revelation (or rather the confidence) of the saint in what was in Jehovah's. What "the way" was is not exactly the question—of course a good one; but He would teach them in it. His active love would be occupied with them for good. Yet the character of the way is not left out when the true character of the renewed saint is brought in. The meek will He guide in judgment, in the path which expresses God's mind. The meek will He teach His way.

But there is progress in other respects in this psalm. It divides itself into three parts, 1-7; 8-14; 15-22. In the first part the oppressed and tried soul, judging its past sins, but trusting God and looking to Him, pleads with God in respect of its wants and difficulties in presence of the power of evil. In the second part this reference to God has led the soul to speak about Him, dwelling on and declaring what He is in His ways. In the third the soul looks personally to Jehovah, as assured of His interest in it, and calls down the eye of God on itself and on its enemies and circumstances, looking for forgiveness in that, but confiding in conscious integrity, and finally applies its request to all Israel.

But there is also progress in detail, as to the condition of the soul in speaking of God. First, His goodness and uprightness lead Him to teach sinners uprightness in heart. They had wandered in their own ways; how terribly are God's ways forgotten! But the good and gracious Lord will not leave them unguided; their state draws out His compassion. He loves the right way, nor can He bless elsewhere. He teaches sinners in the way. But the effect of acknowledging sin and knowing the goodness of God is meekness, subduedness of spirit, and lowliness; the absence of haughtiness, of self, of what the heathens considered the spring of virtue. In this state God guides in judgment and teaches His way. Not only the way is taught to one who had wandered far from it; but, where there is lowliness and submission to God, He guides in the intelligence of His ways in their own spirit and mind. They are formed by His instructions to judge of what God's own way is. This is an internal and moral conformity which applies itself to discern and judge circumstances. And this moral conformity and discernment is very precious.

But verse 12 goes farther. We have one fearing God, walking in the consciousness of His presence, and responsibility to Him, referring in heart to Him as subject to Him. Here is not merely moral discernment but knowledge of the chosen way of God. The man who is guided in judgment will know what is right and do it, and avoid what is wrong, but the man of Issachar had understanding of the times. There was a way God chose in the midst of prevalent evil, and he who feared Jehovah should be taught in this way. He would find the path which issued in full blessing. This is a great privilege, and of which no surrounding darkness or confusion can deprive us. It is the way Jehovah chooses in the midst of it—a special covenant way for those who fear Him. So surely there is for the Christian in the confusion in which the church of God is. This is shown with additional evidence in the words which follow. The secret of Jehovah (for He has a secret for the ears of those who hear) is with them that fear Him—His friends to whom He makes known His mind. Is it wonderful that Mary knew more of it than Martha? She could anoint Him beforehand for His burial—had the Lord's mind in the scene which was before. His word is always a guard against false pretenses to this, but it remains ever true that the secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him. And, however, all seems to run against His sure promise, they see the result and progress towards it by faith, and will see it in full accomplishment farther on when His ways are accomplished. This is a great blessing and gives a tranquility, a calm, in the path, which nothing else does. One has the Lord's mind in it. This closes the second part.

In traversing the evil, the trust of the soul is in Jehovah, and His faithful love. "Mine eyes are ever toward Jehovah; for he shall pluck my feet out of the net." This is the secret of all— Jehovah. One looks out of all the evil and trusts in Him who is above it all. Knowledge of Jehovah's secret is not insensibility to present evil, even as it affects self; nor coldness as to Jehovah's interest in ourselves, not only in righteousness (though He be ever righteous), but in ourselves. The secret of Jehovah, through His fear tends to give this intimacy and confidence. "Turn thee unto me, and have mercy upon me; for I am desolate and afflicted." There is a truth of heart with Jehovah. But this supposes integrity, and such is found here; and such in Christ is found in the true of heart, though they confess themselves in themselves the chief of sinners, and in their flesh no good thing. The heart can present all the hostility of its enemies to God, and leave that also with Him. It looks to be not ashamed, for it has put its trust in Him. Christ only had to go through the contrary for us, the upright soul never will. But the heart, though having this intimacy with God, and confidence in Him, does not forget His people— Israel then; for us, the church. The heart is there

and, if it is intimate with God, must be.

I have entered somewhat into the detail of moral feelings exhibited in the psalm, but it must be held in mind that all are founded on the presence in the heart of a deep consciousness of what Jehovah was for it, that the thought of Jehovah predominated and is the source of all that is felt.

In Psalm 26 it is, as already remarked, the consciousness of integrity rather than the confession of sins, but here, also, all refers to Jehovah, and draws from what Jehovah is and the attachment of the soul to Him the principle of separation from evil-doers, and final joy in His congregation when there shall be full deliverance from them. The spirit of the psalm is that integrity which has kept the soul by its own affections, and its attachment to Jehovah, and trust in Jehovah in presence of the power of evil (and for the time, as between them and the saints, evil-doers are always the most powerful, because they can act according to their will without restraint or conscience), apart from evildoers; and the conscience in presence of Jehovah looks to God's (not gathering it with sinners), when He comes in in power, and on this it counts in faith. It is the expression of the path and desire of integrity in presence of evil.

Psalm 27 shows the heart confident in Jehovah, yet exercised before Him in the presence of the outward manifestations of evil. What would create fear more than distress of spirit? The connection of confidence in thinking of the enemies, and exercise of heart when looking to God, I think instructive, though at first sight it seems strange in this psalm. Confidence is not indifference or insensibility; but true exercises of heart with God, even when fear accompanies those exercises, show themselves in confidence and boldness in presence of the hostile action of evil. Man would have spoken of fear when in presence of the enemy and confidence when with God. Whereas grace, working in true exercises of heart with God, gives boldness with the enemy. There is a real power of evil. The rightly taught heart feels it in its inward sources and reality (more or less spiritually), but feels it with God, and then is at peace in the midst of, and as to, the conflict itself. So Christ sweat, as it were, great drops of blood in exercise of soul before God, and was of perfect calmness in the presence of His enemies, yea, they fell to the ground at the mention of His name. This is full of instruction as to the difficulties and pains of Christian life. Where the heart, conscious of the power of evil, is exercised with and before God as to it, the evil itself, whatever its power, is powerless when it comes, assuming the exercise to be complete. "This is your hour," said Christ, "and the power of darkness" (Luke 22:53). But He had felt all that with God, and took the cup, as to the fact, out of the Father's, not the enemy's hand, who had as to Christ no such power.

The psalm shows us the working of this in ordinary men according to His Spirit. Jehovah is the saints' light by faith, lightens up all around. There is no power of darkness for the spirit, when darkness is there in power. It rules in the enemies, but light is in the heart from the Lord, and it walks thus in the light. This is a great consolation. But the Lord is more than this—He is actual deliverance. This, till the cup was drunk, He could not be for Christ; but He is known to be so for the redeemed soul in the midst of the trial. The same revelation of Jehovah which gives light gives us in the light to be assured of the deliverance: I do not say necessarily to see the deliverance, for the how may be obscured, but to be assured of it. Because Jehovah is there in light, He will deliver; so the Father for us, and in His place of government, the Lord. But if it be God Himself, clearly there is nothing to fear. This is celebrated in thinking of the wicked, whom no conscience

restrains—of war, where will is unbridled, however violent and mighty; if the Lord is there, all is provided for. But an important principle, or state of soul, is associated with, and is the basis of, this confidence—entire singleness of eye and desire, the looking to Jehovah for, and seeking one thing, to be with Him, in His presence where He is, and can be adored; to behold His beauty, and learn there His will and mind. But this, on the other hand, is connected with confidence in His goodness. The soul, defenseless in itself, knows Jehovah will hide it in the time of trouble in His pavilion. Who shall hurt or disturb it there? And what love in the Lord, what interest He takes in those He loves! The soul dwells with Him, and dwells in safety. It is not apparent deliverance, but the secret of His tabernacle. And it is wonderful how Jehovah does when evil rages, and there seems no resource; the soul seeks none, it confides sweetly and quietly in Jehovah, sure of security in Him. Verse 6 counts on full deliverance and praise in His tabernacle, now not a hiding place, nor a secret, but the blessed place of open praise.

In the following verses we have the exercises of soul with Jehovah while waiting on Him for help. Jehovah had called to seek His face. He could not turn it away. The soul recognizes here the possibility of anger, and deprecates it, and counts on grace. This is important for the soul, for one might think it could trust in Jehovah if He had nothing against it. But not so; the heart may recognize that it ought to expect anger, yet trust grace. It has known a helping God, and looks not to be forsaken of One who is a Savior God. This confidence is complete; more than the nearest ties of nature can give, and so indeed it is for him who knows Jehovah. It takes up its own matters between itself and God, looks to be taught His way, and led in a plain path, because its enemies watched for its getting out of the way. The pressure of enemies was great, and there will be such for the saints. There is a will of evil—false witness, then cruelty.

The goodness of Jehovah—no human means—is the resource of the heart, the goodness of Jehovah in His government. The result is, wait on Jehovah. He strengthens the heart. “Wait, I say, on Jehovah.” This, indeed, is the secret of strength in the time of evil. There is, then, nothing to fear. We may have learned that it is a Father’s love in our path of children, and the care of Christ, that good Shepherd, but the principle of our confiding in the Lord is the same. It is remarkable how entirely absent is the thought of any other resource or help than that of Jehovah. And this it is maintains integrity, for Jehovah cannot help otherwise than in maintaining truth of heart. The wile of enemies is there. The soul knows nothing (no human means or strength, or wisdom, or plan), but seeking Jehovah’s face; with Him all is settled, and so in truth in the inward parts and integrity. The enemies are then Jehovah’s concern. This is the secret of our security and comfort in trial. Hence, grace being there, we can reckon on Jehovah at all times. If we have erred, bring it to Him. It is a true exercise of soul in His presence. He deals with it according to truth, between itself and Him; but grace and His secret place, and then deliverance, are its position.

Psalm 28 Though Jehovah be the great subject as of all these, as regards the faithful there is a special point—his cry to Jehovah, and the supplication addressed to Him. The heart connects itself with Jehovah in crying to Him. The cry implies Jehovah’s interest in us, and our having this for our starting-point; also our avowed dependence on Him. Hence, crying and prayer to the Lord are important, and an index to the state of soul. We may desire from Jehovah, have faith in His goodness in giving, but crying to Him identifies us avowedly with Him, even before others. Here the soul is spoken of as in extreme distress—the pit of sheol open before it. But the principle is ever true, even in interceding for others. Here faith is shown in crying, when all seemed to man’s

eye hopeless. This connection with Jehovah is distinctly marked here, in its being made the ground for not being drawn away with the wicked in judgment.

In Psalm 27 it was the integrity of the believer in his ways, which was laid as the ground for not being so drawn away: here it is this connection with Jehovah, shown in calling upon Him. And though the wickedness of evildoers be the ground on which their judgment is looked for, yet their disregard of Jehovah is declared to be the ground of their destruction. The righteous has trusted in Him and been helped. But here is more, and much more in Jehovah's deliverance of us than the fact of being delivered. He has delivered us. The heart was attached to Him, adored Him, looked up to Him, believed Him, and He has not failed us. Oh! how true this is! and how it attaches afresh the heart to Him. So here (vss. 6-7), "My heart trusted in him, and I am helped: therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth; and with my song will I praise him." This looking with confidence to Jehovah is a real entering into His character, and conformity to it, in the sense of estimating, delighting in, and honoring it, in counting it impossible to be otherwise. It appreciates Jehovah; and he who appreciates anything morally excellent is in a dependent way like it.

I have a friend of a noble, faithful self-devoting character. I am in circumstances where all is opposed to the probability or possibility of his coming in to help, but I am sure he will. I count with affection on what he is. It is evident that I hold fast in my appreciation of him. He is to my mind superior to all circumstances, governed by his own excellence; and this is what I appreciate and reckon on. Whatever circumstances may be, my heart goes with his in his conduct, though in the way of dependence, and his with mine. When he has acted, I rejoice in him, in my estimate of him. I say, I knew my appreciation was just; I knew him, and what he is. I rejoice in his excellence; I have reckoned on it as certain, and above all the circumstances. He has proved his interest in me in intervening. Thus, when God shall deliver the remnant, and when He delivers the Christian, they can say, "This is our God; we have waited for him" (Isa. 25:9).

This is what we can see in Job through all his culpable irritation. He reckons on God, and knows what he would be and do if he could find Him. The heart has trusted God's heart, and found it, and rejoices in it—has really honored God, though only in waiting in assured confidence for Him. It is satisfied in what its mighty Friend is, and in His love. It rejoices in deliverance, for it suffered and was oppressed in weakness, but rejoices in heart—delights in the Deliverer. It has a friend that has formed the heart after His own excellency, and formed it to confide in it. In the Christian this will be calmer, because he is more instructed in heavenly things, knows God better, and has less anxiety as to what is here below, does not look on the things that are seen; but the principle is the same.

Psalm 29 does not call for much remark connected with the way we are now viewing them. It is a summons to the mighty of the earth to own and give glory to Jehovah—the honor due to His name. The only point I would notice is the connection of worship with this, and here owning Him in His temple, where He has placed His name. His name has been revealed. Glory is due to Him as revealed, to His name; a name which, while it is the revelation of Himself, is that also of His relationship with His people. There He has placed His name, so as to form a center of association and a revealed place of worship. Thus, while His voice may proclaim the majesty of that name, they who know it are drawn together by it as a place of common worship. The glory of His name is made good by and revealed in what is declared in the last verses. Jehovah sitteth upon the floods,

is above, and rules to His own purposes all the tumultuous movings of the mass of peoples. He sits too King forever. As He is above the swellings of men, so He sits in sure unmoved government forever. But then there is the connection with His people. He gives them strength; He blesses them with peace. Verse 10 is the possession of power over all and in Himself; verse 11, what He is for the people. It is the invitation of the mighty to own Jehovah, and the sure blessing of Israel.

The great truth of Psalm 30 is the practically deeply interesting one, that the joy flowing from the deliverance the Lord (in this psalm Jehovah) affords is greater and deeper than the blessing of prosperity, even when acknowledged to come from God. It may be that the deliverance is from sorrow occasioned by faults. With the remnant of the Jews it will surely be so; but it is complete and full; and when the sin or evil is fully acknowledged, the restoration and blessing is absolute in communion with God. Forgiveness, or the thought of it, in an unhealed soul, may have regrets. When the soul is healed, it will learn judgment of the evil assuredly, and a sense of humbleness, if it be recurred to—always more tenderness of spirit, more grace; but if the healing be full, the soul wholly searched out, no regrets, because what God, as such, is for US, will possess the soul. The soul will abhor the flesh, and the principles which led to evil; but self will be taken out of the abhorrence when the evil is really hated, and peace will be there. I do not say the psalm pursues these thoughts to this depth. It is more occupied with the outward circumstances, with the hand of God upon it for evil, than with the evil for which His hand is upon it. But these are looked at as His anger. The effect is that circumstances are looked at as a matter of His anger and favor; and on this the soul rests. It had been in prosperity, had owned its coming from God, but saw in circumstances its ground of confidence for happiness, though looked at as given and established by God. But, in so doing, however much it owned God in giving and assuring the blessing, it rested on the blessing, and that blessing ministered to self, instead of taking out of it. “I shall never be moved. Jehovah, by thy favor thou hast made my mountain to stand strong.” Though piety might be there, it might degenerate into “the temple of Jehovah, the temple of Jehovah are these” (Jer. 7:4). The psalm however supposes true piety. Only that God’s favor has made the mountain—“my mountain”—to stand strong, instead of the favor itself being the blessing. Jehovah hides His face, and direct dependence is felt, direct blessing looked for. Chastening and exercises for faults come, and divine favor itself is felt to be the blessing needed. And what Jehovah is Himself is the source of joy. When His anger is on the people, this is felt; not merely the circumstances it is expressed in, but the hiding of Jehovah’s face for sin. The soul is brought into an immediate relationship, though it is by anguish and distress. It is brought to think of itself, not as a self to be caressed, a center of its own blessing, but as sinful, and God’s favor is needed. Thus, though painfully, a most useful and important work is done through grace, when this self-judgment is wrought in the soul, so that there is spiritual integrity. The favor of Jehovah shines in upon it, and is enjoyed, and is become itself the blessing, while positive deliverance accompanies it in God’s good time. The true nature of God in holy worship is entered into; He is not merely a God to serve man in blessing. The enemy does not rejoice over us, and the soul itself is healed. We see that if His anger be there, it is but a moment of discipline and instruction for the saints; and then they, being purified, enjoy Himself more fully. Here, literally, we see the remnant at the verge of the grave, and there delivered; but the true work is, even for them, with God.

I add these conditions of soul in which we may see saints now, of which this psalm gives an occasion to speak. First, what we may call in a comparative sense innocence, when a converted

soul has no acquaintance with corruption and no great inward conflict. Here the grace of forgiveness is enjoyed, and the soul is cheerfully happy in the known kindness and love of God its Savior. Such a soul, if walking close with God, may attain to the real judgment of self and deep acquaintance with God. Otherwise the soul is superficial, and the man of self little known, separation from flesh's sphere (the world on its amiable side) little realized. The next is where it has failed, and, gone through deeper exercises, has been brought thus to the knowledge of self in a humbling way. This is more the case of the psalm. Then forgiveness may be known, and there is the rest of this; but a certain shame of sin and want of open confidence with God, as naturally in enjoyment of Him, if there have been anything base or trifling with God. This is more difficult to attain; but self at any rate is not set aside. Thirdly, when the root that has produced the evil is really judged, the point of departure from God (not merely the evil itself), and self thus set aside practically, then divine favor is everything. The heart is so far whole with God, and, while humble, bold with men. It has its conscious link with God, His favor—God known to be with it in moral unison, and in positive sustainment and strength. The present is its place with Him, not the past.

Psalm 31 is the expression of entire confidence in Jehovah—God known in our relationship with Him, in the most terrible circumstances of trial and distress, and that where sin has brought it on; yet where faith is at work, the known name of God is counted on, and therefore His righteousness in making it good. It is not reckoning upon God with pride. It is Jehovah trusted in for what He is—His name, but with the fullest confession of failure, and that it is through sin that trouble has come upon him that cries to Him. It is not so much the confession of iniquity, but that the sorrow out of which the cry is sent up is due to iniquity; but the extremity of pressure casts the soul in confidence on God according to His revelation of Himself. The special character of the psalm is trust, and, from personal knowledge of Jehovah, the committing one's case to Him. This is a deep principle of true piety— such a knowledge of the Lord, such faith in what He is, that the soul can trust Him, and cast all on Him, when distress and hostility come to an extremity. And it is a principle of utter righteousness, because the soul cannot look thus to God but in righteousness. Jehovah is known as having considered the distressed one's trouble. He has known his soul in adversities. The sufferings were not God's forgetting the sufferer. God has known, recognized, followed; His heart owned the sufferer's soul, and thought of it in the midst of adversities; and the sufferer, as an owned soul (however faulty), looks through the suffering to Jehovah. It accepts the punishment of its iniquity, but in this righteous feeling trusts Jehovah; and in this spirit, in what is perfect in principle, commits itself entirely to Jehovah, and knows, and is content that it should be so, that all is in His hand (vs. 15). It looks hence for His face to shine on it; but that through His appearing for it, it should not be finally ashamed, nor will any that trust in Him. He has laid up goodness for them that fear Him and trust in Him before the sons of men. His presence is a sure unfailing sanctuary, which makes human malice vain in its attempts. He admits that, in the pressure of distress, he had for a moment spoken as cast out of God. Still faith was shown in the cry to Jehovah, and he was heard. Jehovah preserves the faithful, so that the saints may love Him, and be of good courage, whatever comes.

It is not every one that has to pass through such sorrows, as those referred to here; but, when it is the portion of the saint, it gives great intimacy and confidence. What a known God is is the ground of the psalm, and the cry founded on faith in it. I should not say that such is the brightest exercise of faith: this will be found, for example, more in the Epistle to the Philippians, the bright expression

of normal Christian experience. Nor is it the commonest; but God, in His rich mercy, has in His word met every need, and made provision in His word for every state. And the state of soul here is one of much exercised depth and intimacy of confidence in God, only learned through needed distress.

Psalm 32. But, in the midst of all the exercises of heart which belong to a renewed soul in the midst of its difficulties here below, there is one point which is the center of all, a need to which an answer is craved alike by the heart and conscience—its relationship to God when it thinks of its sin before Him. It has need of confidence for trials, of deliverance and help. It is cheered by promises, and bowed in heart and will as to the ways of God. But it needs reconciliation with Himself above all, the unclouded light of His countenance; as regards its own state, forgiveness, and the absence of guilt. The entire removal of all guilt before God, and His complete forgiveness, is beautifully connected here with purifying the heart and inner man, the taking out guile, and this in the confession of actual sins. But it begins, as it must, with God, and finds its satisfaction in His thoughts towards it. And this is right. Thus only can the heart be really purified, and sin have its true character, and God His right place, without which nothing is right. Yet it is the conscious state of its forgiveness which first affects the soul, after conviction and distress for sin have been wrought and the soul brought to confession. “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven.” He has sinned against God—transgressed. It is all perfectly forgiven. But it was sin before God and evil—a thing itself hateful in God’s sight, and now in the soul’s. It is expiated, covered; propitiation has been made. The present state is then put absolutely: Jehovah imputeth no iniquity to it; and now the whole heart is open before God. There is no guile in it; why should there be when all is open with God, all cleared, and sin gone out of His sight? And oh! what a blessing it is to have the perfect light of God on an unsullied soul, not an innocent one. This is a far less thing, and indeed the inshining of perfect light would be inapplicable then; but with a knowledge of good and evil, and knowing what light is (in contrast with darkness), and to have it shining upon one as white as snow is infinitely blessed. I do not deny that it is more personal relationship here, into which also I will enter; but for the Christian this is implied in forgiveness and covering and non-imputation of sin. As yet of course it is by faith, but not the less true for that. The ways of God in bringing the soul to it, and His ways after it, are also gone into in the psalm: no rest to the proud will which not confess (how gracious to pursue the soul thus!)—the most intimate guidance for the soul reconciled in communion, and care in the midst of trial.

The psalm, then, is the expression of conscious blessedness in the sense of being forgiven. And how sweet it is to be in the sunshine of God’s favor in the sense that His love has been active towards us! The undeservedness of the favor, though it is not the brightest joy, gives great deepness to it, because it is God Himself who forgives; for so it must be in forgiveness, when the soul is restored to Him. Then there is the consciousness of the sin being out of God’s sight. This is a very great blessing indeed, and the consciousness of it most sweet—the thought that not one sin appears in the sight of God. But there is the special sense, not that there was no sin, but that God imputes none, that He has • a determined fixed judgment—He does not impute it. The sin is not denied; that would be guile. In this part the feelings are not so much engaged, but there is the judicial certainty of non-imputation necessary for truth in the inward parts. This connects itself with confession.

But it is not only uprightness in word and confession, but in spirit. There was truth in the inward parts: no desire in the soul to hide, to conceal from itself the evil; it presents itself before forgiveness, before non-imputation: that is its connection with sin, not hiding it. He sees the sin truly, but sees, and because he sees, it is not imputed. But the phrase is absolute and general—"unto whom Jehovah imputeth not iniquity." It is an absolute condition of the individual; it is not his iniquity or particular fault forgiven, though doubtless this is so too, but absolute non-imputation of any. The man exists before God as having no sin, according to the judgment of God. Then my heart is open and free before God; I have the consciousness of this, and look up to God as owning no sin, with the consciousness that He sees none. Hence there is no cloud, nothing to hide. This is not so however when confession is not made. Absolute non-imputation, that is God's actual judgment of me and manner of looking at me. No sin is there, none between me and Him. But, in arriving at the consciousness of this blessed truth, there has been confession. Till then, the pressure of God's hand was upon the soul to force it to come to this. How gracious this is, God's watching over a soul, and a soul going wrong too, to bring it to Himself. But he was brought by grace to this point—acknowledging sin to God, no excuse, giving it its true character, real spiritual uprightness, however humbling it may be.

This was morally important, but is not all. "I will confess my transgressions"; the acts are brought up in memory. He resolved to take this course, and all was right. "Jehovah forgavest the iniquity." 1 John 1 opens this out christianly. There also we cannot say we have no sin, and we confess our sins. The connection of the absence of all sin on the conscience and no guile in the heart, because it is entirely open through conscious non-imputation, is very instructive. It can be in no other way, only man is brought to it in truth by confession, and to confession through confidence. Thus only is the heart opened to God through grace, thus only is truth in the inward parts, though forced to the humiliation as regards our will, by forgiveness being known by promise. "There is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared."

This revelation of God awakens the thought and feeling of all the upright and gracious-minded to look to God in the time when He reveals Himself as the forgiving God, when He can be found. So for Christ Himself, in Isaiah 49, it was the accepted time. When He had been perfect, when perfectly proved before God, then He was heard, for He had been made sin; and the apostle cites it thus, "Now is the accepted time, behold now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2). The revelation of forgiveness and the joy of such relationship with God awakens the desire after and delight in such a God in gracious souls, and they seek unto Him. Supposing they have not the sense of sin at the moment, they know they are sinners, and God is so revealed—has a character which is their delight, and their soul links itself with Him. They seek to Him, not simply for forgiveness. It is in their character of graciousness they are spoken of here, but it is such a God—a God of this character, and of these ways—who draws their heart; and note, God so acting, so revealed, makes the time the finding time. This connection of the graciousness of the heart with the graciousness of God, and the power of attraction it has, is very beautiful; and it is very deep in the gracious mind. There must be the sense of need, of dependence, and in us of the need of grace as such in the whole character of our relationship with God. But it is withal a deep realization in proportion to godliness, when the conscience is not bad, of the perfect and divine grace, of the loveliness yet the sovereign goodness of God's ways in this. Happy in goodness, we feel that this grace suits us and suits God; it draws us, as godly, to God. Hence we are there sheltered, come

what will.

If we think of the remnant, the principle will be plain. Israel, the Jews, have been deeply guilty in every way. God holds out, as in this psalm, and everywhere in Moses and the prophets, forgiveness. This is felt; God is so revealed; the godly remnant are touched by this. Sins, no doubt, are confessed, but the heart of the godly draws to God. When the flood of judgments break in, they are preserved. In every case, the soul thus acquainted with goodness can count upon God. God Himself, thus known, is its hiding-place. In the end, songs of deliverance will be its portion.

But then promises come. We have to go through a wilderness in which there is no way; and, in the midst of snares and dangers of false ways, God guides and teaches. The eye of God rests on us and guides us. It is not a way marked out and left; it is God Himself who watches over and guides us in a way that suits Him and is the fruit of His wisdom, a divine way for us. God Himself it is that is brought before us here: God's goodness, God's leading, God interested in us to forgive when needed, to lead with the undistracted eye of love. But then it supposes that the heart pays attention to the eye of God. It is attention to Him, and the following it with Understanding, that is the way; and thus the soul is inwardly taught in what is agreeable to Him, and is formed after Him in knowledge. This the New Testament largely unfolds (Phil. 1:9-11; Col. 1:9-10; Col. 3:10; Eph. 4:24). Even Moses says, "If I have found grace in thy sight, show me now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight" (Ex. 33:13).

It is the spiritual learning of God's way through His guidance, and communion with Him, founded on His favor. Hence they are warned not to be like an unintelligent beast, who must be outwardly held. God can guide us thus, does graciously sometimes by His providence; but there is no spiritual understanding, no moral assimilation to His nature, no growth of the delight of our new nature in Him, no increased capacity, by this means, for knowing God. The result is declared in the judicial ways of God in the last two verses; only that we have to remark, that it is in Jehovah Himself that the soul has to rejoice, not in the consequences, though they that trust in Him be compassed about with mercy. He Himself known by forgiveness, known by ever accessible kindness and goodness, as a hiding place for the soul, as one that guides with His own care, with His eye, was the one in whom the soul thus taught was taught to rejoice. So Paul: "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice" (Phil. 4:4). We joy in God through our Lord Jesus, by whom we have received the reconciliation. He fills the soul, and He is above all.

Psalm 33 I have only a few principles to note in speaking of this psalm. All the psalms, to the end of 39, unfold the moral state of the Jewish remnant in the last days. I say the moral state more than their condition under oppression; and the thought of forgiveness gives in general a brighter tint to the coloring of them, though the sense of their condition is found also as elsewhere. Psalm 33 follows on the last verse of Psalm 32, and, the thought of forgiveness having put a new song in his mouth, he can look out with clearer confidence on the principles on which men should act, looking to the word and works of God. The earth is viewed as under God's eye and direction—His government as applied to it. This, fully displayed at the end, has its application to the lower part of a Christian's life too. Compare Psalm 34:12-16; 1 Peter 3:10.

We get some general principles. The works of Jehovah are done in truth. I may perfectly reckon on His acting on the known principles of His holy will. Hence His word, which is essentially right, can judge me now. This is always an important principle. The Lord, though not visibly and publicly,

does govern all things. Hence I can act on His word, and be sure of the consequences. I may, no doubt, suffer for Christ: this is a still better blessing, but the result of acting on God's word will be blessing.

From verse 6 the power of the word is shown in creation. The earth should fear Him, "for he spake, and it was done"; again, He subverts the counsels of men, His stand fast. Another principle then comes in, the blessing of being the chosen people of God, His inheritance. This is Israel: still faith has to walk in the strength of it now. "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved" (Col. 3:12). We are not God's inheritance, but heirs of God; but the greater elevation of the position does not destroy, though it may give a deeper application to, the principle. We have to walk through the world as the elect of God; but this is a most blessed position. It is according to the foreknowledge of God the Father; but we walk in the consciousness of being the elect of God. He orders and fashions all hearts. What a thing to say, if I have to say to men! And He makes all things work together for good for me. Thus, while all human strength is naught, I can wait on the Lord with sure confidence. His eye too is never withdrawn from me. Compare Job 36:7.

But Psalm 34 goes farther. It takes up the case of sorrow and trial in the most beautiful way. Jehovah Himself, as ever, is the blessed burden of the psalm. In verses 1-4 it is the Spirit of Christ in an especial way which speaks, but as for the heart of every one so tried, and belongs to every one who has this faith, that every one may have it. The point of the psalm is "at all times." It is easy to praise Jehovah when He makes all flow softly for us; yet Jehovah is not as much praised really for what He is. In the midst of trouble the soul is seen humble and subdued in spirit. He has sought Jehovah and he found Him a ready friend. This made Jehovah intimate and precious to him. The saint's heart was tried, exercised; difficulty and wrong pressed upon it, and his will did not rise up in pride and anger, but he lays his matter with confidence on the kindness of Jehovah, and He interests Himself in him. It is not high and sovereign providence making things flow for outward blessing (no doubt we should be thankful for this) but the gracious interest of Jehovah in his tried heart. This is much nearer, the interest greater, the link more sweet and stronger. It was not pride of will in trial or in success, but an oppressed and humble heart finding Jehovah's ear and heart open to it. Thus consoled himself, he could console others with the comfort wherewith he himself was comforted of God. He was delivered from all his fears. Oh, how often this happens, even as to the removing not unreasonably expected evil entirely! This knowledge of Jehovah leads to the exercise of love in encouraging others, while the heart experiences it, and is filled with it. It is applied to the remnant by the Spirit in verse 5. They recall the case of Christ in verse 6. In verse 7 we have it as a general truth; in verses 8-10 his own blessed experience enables him who has trusted the Lord to assure others of the certainty of finding this help.

The experience of Jehovah's kindness is very precious. It is not only that one is assured of it for all trials, but Himself is known. He is blessed and praised. The heart dwells in Him, and finds its joy and rest in Him, and in the goodness of One who is alone, and none like Him in what He is. The blessedness is infinite and divine in its nature, as He who is the source of it, yet as intimate as what is in the heart can be— more intimate than any human being who is without it. We dwell in Him, and the Lord is our stay and the rest of our heart. There is nothing like it. None can be so intimately near us as God; for He is in us. Yet what an intimacy it is!

But there is another principle brought out here—what the walk is in which this blessing is found (vss. 7-10). We have fearing the Lord, trusting the Lord, and seeking the Lord. Verses 11-16 take up what the character of this fear of the Lord is, in a passage most of which is quoted by Peter only. The end of verse 16 is left out as inapplicable now, though the general fact of government for the Christian is not. It is important that we should remember this. Not only is it true that God is not mocked—that what a man sows he will reap— that God has governmentally attached certain consequences to certain conduct; but He also watches over and directly governs His children—may cause them to be sick, to die; may deliver them from it, on confession or intercession. “The eyes of Jehovah are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry.” Not only that, but “nigh unto them that are of broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.” Then there is a path marked out by God as the path of peace in a world like this; not simply in itself the path of spiritual power, but of quietness and peace in this world, going peaceably through it under God’s eye. And that is very precious for us. Grace is a means of doing it, as the heart is elsewhere than in idleness and passion. The feet are shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. “If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men” (Rom. 12:18). This is true even of unconverted men. Those who walk in this way in general see good days, because such is the consequence of the public government of God. It becomes the Christian so to do, but others may do it. This government of God is always true, as we see in Job; only the saint should understand it.

But there is yet a word which remains. This government is not such now as that the righteous should not suffer (compare 1 Peter 3:14-17), still more for the name of Christ. But Jehovah watches over him. Not a sparrow falls to the ground without our Father. It seems strange to us to hear, “Some of you shall they cause to be put to death ... but there shall not an hair of your head perish” (Luke 21:16,18).

But the government of God now is applied—not the public government to the suppression of all evil but—to the case of the righteous under and through the power of evil. When Christ appears, there will be this suppression of evil. In general they who live peaceably will live in peace; but in a world where Satan’s power is, the righteous will suffer—have many afflictions, but none without the watchful care of the Lord. And in some way deliverance will come. Who would have said that, in the seemingly unbridled rage of men, when all (Jew, priests, or Gentile) were united against Christ—when to appearance they had all their own way, this psalm should be literally fulfilled in Christ? Not a hair of our head but is counted.

I doubt that this verse 20 in the psalm is exactly a prophecy, though literally accomplished in Christ. I should rather suppose that the passage in John’s Gospel referred to Exodus 12:46. But Christ is a perfect example in any case of the declaration made in the psalm, as a great general principle, if the passage be not cited. God’s care never fails, and is shown in the smallest circumstances, and in spite of all man’s thoughts, though God may allow many afflictions to come upon those that trust Him. These too will surely be a blessing. The soul, thus learning the Lord’s ways and trusting Him, can bless Him at all times. Christianity indeed can teach us deeper fruits of spiritual life in this respect. But it is precious to know the Lord as one that watches thus over us in love— a Father’s tender care, in which we can confide, and in which we can walk peaceably in this world, seeking the good of those around us.

Psalm 35 is the direct demand for judgment of the Spirit of Christ in the remnant, so that I have not much to remark upon it. But Himself was the first to suffer what here will be judged, but, as we have seen, never personally looks for judgment. Still this psalm shows us the spirit in which judgment is demanded. It was after patience and unwearied grace, and when this grace was of no avail, when there was no self-avenging, but casting themselves on the Lord, that at the end the Lord is looked to for deliverance. This is important to remark, as regards the judgment looked for. (See verses 12-14.) And it was only when he would be swallowed up that he looks to the Lord Himself to interfere, and so He will. The poor will not always be forgotten, nor is it right that heartless, unjust, and cruel evil should always have the upper hand unhindered. It is right that the saints should be patient— bear all till the Lord Himself interferes; and such is the spirit of this psalm, and then it rejoices in the Lord's salvation. There is a righteous feeling that the Lord's recompensing the cruel wickedness is right, and so it is. Besides this, what we have is the character and way of the wicked, and the preceding entirely gracious walk of him who found the wicked too strong for him.

Verses 26, 27 have a special application to Christ, but the whole psalm, in the mouth of any one forward in faithfulness, was to bring the tide of evil on himself. I would refer to one or two passages to show the working of this spirit, and how far the Lord points to it as to the remnant. As to Himself, save to prophesy the fact, He did not ask for it. He never does. See 1 Samuel 24-26 for the spirit in which David was kept, though weak, yet still then the instrument specially fitted by grace to attune the mind of Christ in these psalms to the circumstances in which the remnant, cast out like him, will be; and rising up, when God pleased, to the prophetic declaration of what Christ Himself should pass through, and provide words, wonderful honor! in which Christ could express Himself (see particularly ch. 24:11-13, and the end of ch. 26), for so many of the psalms. So Abigail keeps him in this spirit through mercy, but there is no self-avenging but casting himself on the Lord.

The way in which the Lord directs His disciples in Matthew to marks the spirit, too, in which the remnant are to bear witness for His commission, and goes on to His return (vss. 13-15). Compare Psalm 35:13. It is important that the Christian should understand that while the Spirit of Christ in His own walk in the world was quite different, and so ought the Christian's to be, from the desire of judgment expressed in the psalms, yet that the desire is righteous and right in its place, and that that desire of judgment is not self-vengeance, but an appeal to a delivering and righteous God after the perfect patience of the heart under unrighteous oppression, as bowing to the will of God, and learning the lesson He had to teach. Compare Psalm 94:12, and following. Still the Christian is on quite different ground. In this point of view this psalm is an important one. It is one in which the spirit of the remnant is exercised before God by trial, and, inwardly subdued, is cast upon God to look for deliverance, according to the way in which it was promised to Israel and to the remnant under the divine government revealed in the law and the prophets.

Psalm 36, while spoken in connection with what is a very great trial, is yet, and indeed for that very reason, full of very deep comfort. The trial is this, that the ways of the wicked prove to the heart of the servant of God that there is no restraint of conscience, nothing to reckon on in them, no check to malice by the fear of God. Flattering himself in his own sight, he is devising mischief, he has no abhorrence of evil. How often does this, alas! come before the saint when in conflict with the power of the enemy. It is hard to believe this absence of conscience and planning mischief in malice reflected or advisedly; yet so it is. The heart knows it is true. The word points it out as

characteristic. But then the consolation is very great and blessed, while it casts the soul entirely on a faithful and all-gracious God, who is above all schemes of man, so that we can be perfectly peaceful. “Thy mercy, O Jehovah, is in the heavens.” What can malice do then? Its schemes cannot reach there, nor frustrate the plans or government which are established there, nor come between the soul and their effect. Mercy is out of the reach of the wicked’s devices.

But there is another quality in God—faithfulness. Mercy is the spring of and disposes His doings. That is a comfort. Upon His faithfulness I can count. It lifts its head above the machinations of the wicked. The immutable principle of God’s government in faithful love, His dealing in righteousness, is as firm and towering in strength as the mountains; His ways of judging and dealing as profound but as mighty as the great deep. Not fathomable beforehand by us as to how or why, He is working above the power of evil, but beyond the reach of puny man, so that He can bring about His purposes of blessing by the malice of men. He preserves man and beast. The moment we introduce the Lord so known, all the effect of malice of men, unrestrained though it be by the conscience of God in the wicked, is to make us trust God and not man. This is a real trial, but it is perfect peace; a breach with man, that is, of the saint with man as alienated from God, but a knitting of him to God in confiding cleaving of heart. And this has the highest moral effect.

This effect is unfolded in verses 7-8. “How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God.” It is not merely now a defense against unconscientious malice that is found, but the positive goodness of Him in whom it is found. The children of men put their trust under the shadow of God’s wings, because His lovingkindness is excellent. This is the right and fitting condition of the creature, yet it supposes evil and the need of this goodness, but this goodness as a resource. But this carries the saint yet further. The goodness which has sheltered and protected him becomes his portion. Such is the blessed effect of being entirely cast on God and driven away from man. Brought under the shadow of God’s wings, they enjoy the fatness of His dwelling place. “They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures.” There are joys and pleasures that belong to God’s house, yea, to God Himself. This is characteristic of the joy of the saints, and can only be when we are made partakers of the divine nature. This must have its joys where God has His; and this is the special proper blessedness of the saints. And God gives us this in the fullest way. He gives us His own presence, He gives us Christ.

How rich is this blessing, to receive a nature capable of enjoying divine joys, and these having the fullest divine objects in every way, for it is in every way to enjoy! Looking up, our calling is to be holy and without blame before Him in love, to enjoy God and be His delight according to the divine nature imparted to us, and in relationship to be adopted as sons to Himself; our place of inheritance God’s own house, our home, and, as heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ, all that is subject to Him. But this is the inferior part: but as it is redeemed and made perfectly happy under Christ, it is a divine joy. We have it, too, in fellowship one with another. All this the Christian enjoys in the highest way, because Christ is become his life, and that in the highest and nearest relationship with the Father. Hence—and that through the power of the Holy Spirit—we have fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. Our joy is full. I have referred to this on Christian ground. The principle is stated in the psalm; and, in principle, it is true of all saints, though not in the Christian degree, God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect. But in principle it is true.

The psalm continues, “With thee is the fountain of life; in thy light shall we see light.” Up to this it has spoken rather of what God is for us, looked at as shelter, and protection, and comfort—in a word, a resource; but having brought us into the fatness of His house and the rivers of His pleasures, it refers to what God is more intrinsically in Himself in blessing; still more as what He is for us than in us—that belongs by the Holy Spirit to Christians. What is in us is here seen in Him as its source. “With thee is,” says the psalm; “it, shall be in him,” says the Lord, of the Christian. God is that, however, and so revealed here and known. With Him is the fountain of life—a word of great import, though never fully revealed till Christ came. In Him was life. There was a tree of life of which man never ate, an instrumental ordinance of man’s life. In the patriarchal times life is not the subject, but what the Almighty is to His beloved and blessed ones. The law connects life as a promise with man’s doing, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It was to be one. Life is a living connection with the source of blessing, or at least a living enjoyment of His favor—not necessarily heaven. No law could give it or was it. God promised it to him who kept the law. God is the fountain of it, but the law given to a sinner on the principle of his responsibility could be no means of life, but a ministry of death and condemnation. It, spoke of life—was with life in view, as promise on obedience, but in fact was found to be unto death. The psalms are where, though heavenly things are spoken of, the connection of the heart of the remnant with God is brought out, and all its throbs and beating in its need, and what God is for it are felt; and that according to the working of the Spirit of Christ, though temporal deliverances are, as for the remnant, the main desire. Life and resurrection as the hope of faith necessarily come in, though it be but in the depth of their most intimate thoughts; and they will meet the need of those who may be slain. It is not life and incorruptibility brought to light by the gospel; life in a Man, the Son of God, a quickening Spirit; life in us by His becoming our life. Still as Christ’s Spirit speaks in the psalms, He who had life was sure of the path of it in this world; and, as it led through death in the purpose for which He came into this world, sure of the resurrection too, that His soul would not be left in hades nor His flesh see corruption, but here in dependence on God as being man.

So here, where the saint’s heart is separated from man, as wholly separated himself even from the fear of God, not only protection and lovingkindness are looked for, but the fountain of life is seen to be with God. We know death is overcome, its power rendered void; annulled. We know that the eternal life which was with the Father is come down from heaven. We know it is communicated to us, that Christ is our life, that having the Son we have life, that we are quickened and made alive according to the exceeding greatness of His power, according to the working of His mighty power, in which He raised Christ from the dead and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places; so that life for us and in us (for Christ is our life) is final triumph over death, and reaches into heavenly places. This has been brought to light by the gospel, John giving us life descending and manifested here in Christ and communicated to us; and Paul, life more fully completed in result up there according to the divine counsels in glory. All this of course is not here entered into, and could not be till Christ’s resurrection. There could have been even no righteousness in it. Who had a title to be in a heavenly place till Christ entered into it? In whom could it be displayed in glory till the Head so entered into it? Still the principle, source, root of it is seen and revealed here. The Psalms are not law, though law be yet owned: but the working of the Spirit of Christ and of life, in those who are under it or in Christ Himself, and in those too who have to confess themselves sinners under it, could not hope for life therefore by it, but whose eye is opened on mercy, forgiveness, and grace, if not on heaven; though this, so far as the sense of the joy of God’s presence

expresses it, is reached where life is most fully expressed, as in Psalm 16.

Hence the source of life is seen—a blessed thought—when all was condemnation and death under law. They could not say, The life has been manifested, and we have seen it; still less, our life is hid with Christ in God; but they could say, and are taught to say and know, With Thee is the fountain of life. Hence there is a drinking of the river of His pleasures. For where should this life be satisfied, or the cravings of the heart even unconsciously animated by it, if not at that river, the river that makes glad the city of God? We have in us who have drunk, come to Christ and drunk, we have drunk of the water He gives, a well of water in us, springing up into everlasting life: yea, through the Spirit, rivers flow out from us, and that from the inmost consciousness of blessing.

But all this is the power of life in the Spirit; but it is equally precious to know its nature is divine. I have remarked elsewhere, that what is spoken of as life and nature in Colossians is referred to the Holy Spirit in Ephesians. Here we have God as the fountain, a blessed expression; blessed to know that the fountain is God Himself. The Father hath life in Himself; this is true of Christ as Man; then we that have the Son have life. It shows, I think, that it is looked as something flowing forth. What our hearts have to rest on is God being the source of life, that we may feel and know what life is—how divine a joy it is, that, having a life which is divine in its nature, this is capable of rejoicing. It is its nature to rejoice in what is divine. It can, indeed, enjoy naught else, save, as the expression of it, in goodness or truth, but finds its joy in these rivers which flow' unexhausted from divine love, and in which we drink the blessedness which is in His nature—in a nature which, being spiritually the same, must and can enjoy it according to that nature itself in its own perfectness. We joy in God.

But there is another thing. “In thy light shall we see light.” God shines out, as well as He is a source. He has life in Himself, but with Him is the fountain of it. He is light, but He shines forth, gives light. So Christ; “in Him was life, and the life was the light of men” (John 1:4). And even we, Christ is our life, and we are light in the Lord. Here, no doubt, light is looked at more as comfort in the darkness of trial, when man, under Satan’s power, was in the fullest sense manifested darkness; but this, as we have seen, has led to the discovery of what God is Himself. In the abstract principle nothing indeed in the psalms leads us more to what was fulfilled in Christ. Only here it is seen in Jehovah as its source, and the one in whom it is displayed. But this gives it its divine perfectness. “For with Thee is the fountain of life: in Thy light shall we see light.” It is the confidence, in the midst of darkness and trial, that Jehovah in grace was a source of life, and that in His light they would see light. In Christ we get every way deeper truths; because, when the Life was the light of men, not for mere outward help, but shining in the moral darkness of this world, the darkness was darkness still—did not comprehend it. As long as He was in the world, He was the light of the world. Men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

The closing verses return to the present hopes of deliverance by the government of God, and the assurance of its accomplishment. What characterizes the righteous here is the knowledge of Jehovah and uprightness in heart: the enemies—pride and wickedness. He sees them, by faith, all fallen and unable to rise.

Psalm 37 is very distinctly in connection with the display of the direct government of God in this world, as it will be made good when the meek shall inherit the land and the wicked be cut off. We have already seen that the epistles of Peter especially furnish to us the application of this to the

Christian estate as far as it is so applicable. The beginning of Matthew 5 gives us also, only with a much fuller evangelical character, though not going farther than the kingdom of heaven, the application in the way of promise, as far as the temper pleasing to God goes. But there are some most interesting and instructive exhortations in the psalm as to the spirit in which the believer is to walk and the character of his confidence in God in the midst of the evil which surrounds him. For though the time of the direct display of God's government be not come, and no doubt the power of evil will be displayed more oppressively just before it is put down, still it is even now the time of patience, and the evil is there. Till Christ comes, it is in principle the evil day, and the patience and kingdom of Jesus Christ go together in the heart—not His own kingdom and glory. They are all founded on the certainty that after all Jehovah is above all the evil, loves judgment, does not forget the righteous and those who trust in Him, and that, in the end, His way would have the upper hand. Meanwhile faith is exercised and all that is in the heart judged, which would by self-will mar the spiritual character and hinder the confidence in the Lord which becomes the saint.

The first exhortation is to peacefulness of spirit, and it is general and applies to the state of the mind. "Fret not thyself." When self-will and the desire of present satisfaction mingles itself with the love of righteousness, when one desires righteousness (and partly sometimes, through fear of the power of evil), and is selfish through peace-loving interests, one is apt to fret oneself because evil has its way. All this is the same spirit of unbelief with other desires. But it is unbelief and self-will. The wrath of man does not work the righteousness of God. We are neither to fret, which is distrust, nor be envious, which is even worse and self-interest. Then comes the positive direction in what spirit we are to walk. What is the resource against the power of evil? "Trust in Jehovah, and do good." You will reap the fruit of it according to promise.

Next, delight thyself in Jehovah: He will give the desires of the heart. Holy desires, which have Himself for their object, will be satisfied. But opposition, shame, perhaps calumny, is there. "Commit thy way unto Jehovah." How true is this! He has always, as men speak, the last word if we have only faith to wait for it. He will bring the result the righteous heart desires and make evident its righteousness.

Next, patient waiting for Jehovah in heart and desire, the surest character of trust. Circumstances may thus be in turmoil around one—violence and efforts. The soul waits for Jehovah's coming in when He will. The wicked may prosper; Jehovah has His own time, a time which is always right and sets all right. He may chasten for good, have plans bringing to maturity, patience Himself with the wicked, His own glory to bring out, which is our everlasting joy. Hence, no anger, no wrath, no fretting, no uneasiness. It leads to doing evil, indulging our own will in evil to meet evil. This is not the patience and faith of the saints. Evil-doers shall be cut off; the saint must not be among the number. They that wait on Jehovah shall inherit the earth. So of the meek, so of such as are blessed of Jehovah. This is Jewish undoubtedly; but, as we have seen, the government of God is still exercised, though not in public manifestation; and, when the soul has waited on Him in patience, it has its blessing even here. The latter part of the psalm is a careful declaration of this sure government of the earth to be publicly manifested in connection with the Jews, more secretly carried on in the time of heavenly grace, still very true.

There are one or two points of blessing to note in it. The steps of a good man are ordered by Jehovah. This is a vast and precious blessing, to think that in this wilderness, where there is no

way in the midst of confusion and wickedness, our Father directs our steps. A young Christian may, in confiding zeal, not so much see the value of this; but through how many experiences will he pass? But when one has seen the world, its snares, what a pathless wilderness of evil it is, it is beyond all price that the Lord directs our steps. Also the humble young Christian is directed through grace, if he waits on the Lord, though he may not see the wisdom of it, nor the greatness of the privilege and mercy, till afterward. But this is not all. Being so directed, the path is a good, a divine, path. There is indeed no other, and the heart is directed in it. For the Christian is led by the Spirit of God. His heart is in the ways; as Moses says, Show me Thy way—not a way, but Thy—that I may know Thee. If I know a person's ways, I know him. God leads by His Spirit acting on and in the inner man, and the word sanctifies. Then God has delight in the saint's way. He delights in seeing a divine path trodden by a man in this world of evil. This Christ did perfectly, and God delighted in it. So far as we follow Him, the Lord delights in our way, has positive delight in it. It meets His heart.

Remark that there is no way but Christ. Adam did not need a way; he had to abide, enjoying God's goodness, where he was. In a sinful world there is no way; all is confusion and sin. But Christ was Himself, according to God, in the world, and in passing through it manifesting divine life and its path through the world when not of it. This was a wholly new thing, partially manifested in every saint in his walk of faith; but existing in itself and perfectly manifested in Christ. This is our path. We have to follow His steps and He is the way to the Father, and it is to Him we are going. It is an immense privilege to think our steps are ordered of the Lord, as a guarding from evil, and guidance; and then that the Lord delights in our way. What a path in a world like this! How fast should we hold it, and seek none else, and seek to keep it! Here the precepts, as in Colosians 3, or Ephesians 4 and 5, come in so preciously. There is another mercy—God watches over him. He may fall, that is, in trials, not carnally, but he is not utterly cast down (compare 2 Cor. 4:9 and following); the Lord upholds him by His hand. It may be a part of this government of God that he should be brought low, set aside; but the Lord's hand is in it, not he out of it, and that hand upholds him. The vessel may be broken or put to dishonor by men, the power is of God.

There is a moral reason for God's ways—He loves judgment; besides that, there is the assurance of sovereign love. He loves His saints. They are preserved forever: but, then, according to the ways of this judgment, we have besides some traits of the righteous. He speaks wisdom, that is, the mind of God; and talks of judgment, the uprightness of the divine ways in God's sight, how God judges of right and wrong; his heart is in the walking in God's known will; his steps will not slide. We have then to wait on the Lord, and to keep His way. The end of the perfect and of uprightness is peace. And so it is, practically, with a Christian; he may be chastened for particular faults, for God's ways are through mercy unbending and right; but when a man walks with upright purpose of heart in his life, that life closes—if it close this side of glory—in peace. The fear of God and walking in His presence is a great means of peace. I speak not of peace for a sinner's conscience through the precious blood of Christ, but the peace of God filling the heart when all comes before Him. Finally Jehovah is the strength of the righteous in the time of trouble. This cannot fail. He shall help and deliver them, saving them from their enemies because they trust in Him. This is always true.

Psalm 38 presents to us a special state of soul. The relationship of the heart with God is known and felt, and that even in confidence, as the soul pursues the expression of its feelings. "In thee, O

Jehovah, do I hope:Thou wilt hear, O Jehovah my God." Yet the soul is in the depth of sorrow and distress, and this looked at as the chastening of the Lord. It is under it, but deprecates it; that is, being in profound distress and sorrow, in loathsome disease, and friends abandoning, and enemies lively (as Job's state partially), Jehovah is looked to in it. The heart attributes it all to sin, but first of all looks to Jehovah and His hand. It is this that shows faith and a right mind.

The order of thought is thus remarkable: first, Jehovah judging, then sin as the cause, then personal misery, then abandonment of friends, then liveliness and ill-will of enemies, and the consciousness of all resulting in the heart confiding in Him that smote, turning to Him that smiteth it; and then comes out what at bottom was in the heart—hope in Jehovah, the consciousness of such belonging to Him as that the triumph of faith's enemies could not be, and that in the sense of the need of His intervention, because the poor sinning soul had no strength in self.

All this leads to the expression of unfeigned integrity of heart; acknowledgment of sin, not merely owning it to be the cause of judgment, but judging self for it before a trusted Jehovah, and thus able freely to look for help from Him. The soul, in disengaging sin from itself through grace, in judging it, can disengage, so to speak, its enemies from the pressing judgments of Jehovah; and, seeing them only in their own malice and hostility to the servant of Jehovah and to what was right, can now look for Jehovah's help against them. For the believer, though he had grievously sinned and been brought righteously low for it, yet really followed what was good. And though Jehovah used the malice of the wicked as a rod, it was not the evil which the wicked hated in the saints, but their connection with and owning the Lord. Yet the judgment was righteous. This will be the true history of the remnant when, under the terrible chastisement of Jehovah, they earnestly turn to what is right. But what an instruction also for us when under chastisement for what is wrong! Perhaps complicated chastisement for an extreme case is supposed here.

But what instruction for us when discipline comes upon us, where to look, where to begin! There may be the sense of God's chastening hand for sin and deserved wrath, but the reference of the heart to God's faithful love in relationship with us will lead to deprecate just wrath and His hot displeasure. There is a government of God according to His nature, and though the chastening hand of God does not destroy the faith and knowledge of our relationship (to us of Father), nor the reflective certainty that there can be no imputation to the believer, yet the soul does not quiet itself with this under the sense of the governmental hand of God in it. It is of immense consequence no doubt, and is at the basis of confidence—is a real sustaining, directing power to the soul, but it is not directly objectively thought of. God's holy nature, with whom we have communion, and what He is necessarily as regards sin, is before the soul. And the government of God is according to that nature; which indeed has been glorified by the work of redemption as to the imputation of sin. And though this last be true, the former point is what is rightly felt at the time: not a doubt of redemption, but a sense of the way God, in His very nature, and as Lord in His government, looks at sin with wrath; not reasoning about it, but because one has a nature that knows Him and an awakened conscience, one feels it, and feels it as to self, the goodness of God making self-judgment more terrible. It is not despair, it is not doubting justification; but it is not using this to screen the soul from the sense of the aspect sin has in the sight of God. It deprecates, because it knows the Lord, wrath and hot displeasure, which its sin had deserved, and, because it knows Him, looks to Him of whom it has deserved it. In the circumstances of the trial one looks to the hand and thoughts of Him who inflicts it, and interprets the ways of God because all comes from

His hand, and looks to His thoughts in it. And hence, the conscious relationship being present, the heart gets into the power of it as a purifying, more than a wrathful process. It can say, Lord, all my desire is before Thee, my groaning is not hid from Thee.

This introduction of the Lord into His own chastisements, according to the full love and the relationship in which He is to us, is very beautiful. He is, according to these, the key for the heart of His own ways. And the heart recovers its equilibrium, as we see in the end of the psalm, where there is the consciousness of God being for it, as its resource against what before pressed on it, and as to which, in the sense of the sin which had caused it, it was deprecating wrath and hot displeasure. This is the effect of looking straight to Him and confessing simply, and in true depth of soul, the evil as against Himself, setting it between the soul and God; then it settles matters between the heart and the enemies with God. The secret of all is his looking directly to God Himself as He is in relationship with us, and this is the true confession of sin, but looking to and casting all on Himself. Confidence in Jehovah is the spring of every thought in all these psalms.

The relationship of Father in which God stands to us, and which is realized by faith, modifies in a measure the kind of feeling which the heart has. We have more sense of tenderness and graciousness in His thoughts towards us when we look towards Him, more of compassion and love; but this does not hinder its being substantially the same, and God as a God of government, according to the holiness of His nature, being before the soul and conscience, though His love be trusted. It will be remarked that the soul with its desire before God, is entirely submissive, and silent as to the mischief and wrong of the enemy; and that because it referred to God and hoped in Him, trusted in Him as having carried the whole matter in the spirit of confession to Him, and looks at it as coming from His hand. It would not otherwise have put Him between itself and the enemies. Verse 13 and following.

Psalm 39 is more the nothingness of man in presence of all the evil, and the pretensions of power in which it showed itself, the heart referring itself to Jehovah. The heart kept a check on itself in the presence of the wicked, lest it should speak foolishly or rise up against it, as if it had strength too, whereas all in man was vanity. Then God’s hand is seen in what the heart was undergoing, and He is looked to for deliverance, and all the pretensions of the wicked disappear, so to speak. Jehovah was correcting for iniquity. The believer in this world is a stranger, sojourning with God—for how long He alone can say. It does not depend on, nor is it to be vexed by, the bustling pretensions and arrogance of the wicked in their success. This would be to make ourselves of this world with a claim to something in it. Is that true? Verse 12 takes the place of Abraham and David, and all the walkers by faith, but looking as the believing Jew would for present sparing, though of God and as from God; and this in chastening (see verses 9, 10), the soul can now do. As to the government and ways of God, it is a New Testament wish.

Psalm 40. In all these psalms we have had the failing saint (the remnant), looking to a God known in relationship and faithful grace, though in failure. In Psalm 40 we have Christ taking the place of patience without failure, and so furnishing a ground for confidence even for those who failed, by taking His place with them (who after all were the saints upon the earth, the excellent) in their sorrows, and the path of integrity on the earth. Nor does He fail in this to place Himself under the burden of evil and sins under which Israel had brought itself. We, though this be in every sense true for the redemption of Israel, know it in yet a deeper way—such a glorifying of God as gives a

heavenly place. This is not looked at here. But the way in which Christ identifies Himself with Israel, though in the integrity of the upright remnant, is profoundly instructive, and leads us into a wonderful apprehension of a special part of His sorrows. His death, and the sorrows of His death, are not viewed as atoning, or bearing of wrath, but as sorrows and suffering and grief. And so they were; though, besides that, atonement was in them, viewed as the drinking the cup of wrath. But there Christ does not bear sorrow with, but for His people; here God is viewed as helping Christ when in sorrow, in which He is, and in which He waits on Jehovah. It lay on the remnant, as in Israel's opposition, because of their faults and departure from God. Christ, who had been (as He states in this psalm) faithful to God in everything, enters into this sorrow in heavenly grace.

It is not His own relationship to God, but His entering into the remnant's as connected with Israel. His own had been perfect: theirs, though founded on Jehovah's faithfulness on one side, actually the fruit of sin. It is further at the close of His life. It is morally closed as to service. During that He had been doing God's will in the body prepared for Him, and faithfully declaring God's righteousness in the great congregation, that is, publicly in Israel. Now, and as regards man (and so it will be with the remnant—their trials will come on them from the proud, because of their faithfulness and testimony: only they will have deserved it, as themselves involved in the sins of the people), because of this faithful testimony, the evils come upon Him. So we know it was with Christ historically. His hour was come for it—the hour of His enemies and of the power of darkness. Here (as it is not the atoning character of His suffering and sorrow, but His association with the remnant—with, as I have said, not for), we have not, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" as in Psalm 22, where the foundation of righteous grace was to be laid.

It is Christ's perfect life, and sorrows at the close of it, in which He refers to the faithfulness and goodness of Jehovah, so as to lead His people to confide in it, instructing them in this in which His perfection was shown. "I waited patiently for Jehovah"; patience had its perfect work—an immense lesson for us. Flesh can wait long, but not till the Lord comes in, not in perfect submission; and confiding only in His strength and faithfulness so as to be perfect in obedience and in the will of God. Saul waited nearly seven days, but the confidence of the flesh was melting away—his army; the Philistines, the proud enemies were there. He did not wait on till the Lord came in with Samuel. Had he obeyed and felt he could do nothing, and had only to obey and wait, he would have said, I can do nothing, and I ought to do nothing, till the Lord comes by Samuel. Flesh trusted its own wisdom, and looked to its own force, though with pious forms. All was lost. It was flesh which was tried and failed. Christ was tried: He waited patiently for Jehovah. He was perfect and complete in all the will of God. And this is our path through grace.

This is the great personal instruction of this psalm, save that Christ's own perfectness is always the greatest of all. Here He gives Himself as the pattern. "I waited patiently for Jehovah"—that is, till. Jehovah Himself came in. His own will never moved, though fully put to the test. Hence it was perfectness. He would have no other deliverance but His. His heart was wholly right: He would not have a deliverance which was not Jehovah's. This is a very important point as to the state of the heart; it would not have another than Jehovah's. Besides, it knows that there is no other, and that Jehovah is perfectly right, when His moral will has been perfectly made good, and His righteousness vindicated when needed. There is the known perfectness of His will—His only title, and then perfectness of submission and the desire of only Him.

As this is a pattern for the saints, trial is looked at as such, and death is not spoken of save as it may be trial—a horrible pit, miry clay, images of distress, terror, and, humanly speaking, danger. The resource was a cry to Jehovah, and He was heard in that He feared. Here Christ speaks in His own Person, but in verse 3 deliverance enables Him to speak to the remnant —"a new song in my mouth"—even for deliverance from what had come upon them because of their sins. "Praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in Jehovah." This would let in Gentiles. God had come in to deliver out of the effect of evil, and set His feet upon a rock above it and all its effects. This sure faithfulness of grace—the deliverance of God manifested in One who had gone to the depths of trials—would be a resting-place for the faith of others, the rather as He had gone into it as the consequence of the state of the people in the sight of God. Hence it is applied to the condition of the remnant, though thus true of every saint in trial by others' wickedness and the power of evil, perhaps brought on himself. "Blessed is the man that maketh Jehovah his trust, and respecteth not the proud," the high pretensions of man, and apparently successful wickedness, "nor such as turn aside to lies," abandon God for other false refuges, and the falsehoods of infidelity. Then, as man, Christ begins to recite how this most excellent proof of God's faithfulness to His people came in, though owning them to all others. They were numberless towards His people, "to us-ward." He puts Himself with them.

In verse 6 the special and glorious One comes in view, He who could discourse with Jehovah in eternity. The Son and Word (who was with God and was God and in the beginning with God), according to what was written in the roll of the book, has the place of obedience prepared for Him, ears dug, a body prepared, and according to the divine counsels (and love for us) freely and willingly undertakes the same place, the place of obedience; His delight (when He has taken it, and is man—has taken the form of a servant) is to do God's will. God's law is within His heart. Such is Christ as man, obedient, who in free-will had come, taking the body prepared for Him, and entered into the willing servant's place, the place of willing and glad obedience.

Verse 6 presents the thought and counsels of God, verse 7 His willing coming to do God's will according to these counsels. But we must remember He speaks when man, and verses 6, 7 are the revelation of what passed in the everlasting world (wonderful thought!) telling us how He became a man. But, as in verse 5, so again in verse 8, Christ speaks again as actually in the place on earth. "I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, Thy law is within my heart"; that is His perfectness as Man.

In verses 9-10, we have the perfectness of His service. He has preached righteousness before the whole people of Israel; He has not shrunk from it, nor hid it within His heart: a lesson to all of us, though to be used with divine guidance. It was God's righteousness, His ways, nature, judgments, judgment of evil, what He was in judging it, His faithfulness too, and salvation—for Jehovah was this to Israel—His lovingkindness and truth. He had preached righteousness to man, and that perfectly; and he had fully declared what Jehovah was in all the perfectness of His nature and character towards Israel. All this was accomplished. He appeals to its full accomplishment. But now, He who had freely undertaken this service for God's glory towards Israel finds Himself in another position. It has brought the hatred of the nation upon Him, the wishers of evil against Him.

But this great controversy, and the need for the saints' deliverance, raised the question of the state in God's sight of those that were to be delivered. And without entering here on the ground of

atonement, the governmental expression of the view God took of Israel's sin, in which the remnant had been involved, comes pressing on the soul of Christ, as it will really on the remnant. The iniquities of Israel will take hold upon them as reaping what they have sown—not condemnation (the burden of that Christ indeed underwent for them in atonement), but trial, distress, and felt (or, rather, making them to feel) the displeasure of God, but in which true faith looks for the loving-kindness and truth proclaimed and trusted; for the righteousness proclaimed is felt as a witness against sin, through the distress flowing from it, as with Joseph's brothers before Joseph. Psalm 40 presented to us the blessed Lord coming to take the place of obedience in the body prepared for Him, to be the poor and needy one on the earth, and waiting patiently for the Lord.

Psalm 41 speaks of the blessedness of those who could discern this place of the poor. The Lord was in it above all, and understood it above all; but we know in the beatitudes how He pronounces blessed those who through grace are like Him poor in spirit. For in truth these beatitudes are nearly the whole of them just a description of what Christ was, though given as a character to which blessing belonged: poor in spirit, meek, pure in heart, who was such like the great Peacemaker? In Luke we have more directly to His disciples: Blessed are ye poor. But He entered into the sorrows and place of His disciples, and, when He put forth His own sheep, went before them.

Although a psalm taking up a general character, it is specially fulfilled in Christ, who used verse 9 as specially fulfilled in Himself. It is indeed this identification with the remnant which gives such a deep interest to the psalms. This poor man cried. What is looked for in the psalm is the understanding of this place. With this we have the sure confidence that Jehovah would uphold him in his integrity, and set him before His face forever. Blessed is he who enters into, and who has spiritual intelligence of, and interest in, this place of the poor man who waits, though in sorrow and lowliness, on Jehovah. If malice pursue him, he looks to Jehovah and His mercy in integrity of heart.

Chapter 2

Practical Reflections on the Psalms: Second Book

In the early part of this second book of the Psalms there is an element which gives a very distinct character to its spiritual as well as its prophetical import—the absence of the covenant-name of God (the transition to Jehovah is in Psalm 46). Whatever the distresses and sorrows of the first forty-one psalms, the heart of the psalmist always looked freely to Jehovah in them, was in fuller relationship with Him and the enjoyment of public services, in which His name was celebrated. Here he is cast out. He remembers these things. He is an outcast and can only, in the secret of his soul and in wilderness circumstances, look to the nature and essence of what God is. We have still to remember the difference of the nature of relationship of Jehovah and the Father, and the looking for outward deliverance and judgment in order to have that deliverance. Still this change will furnish deep religious instruction.

Psalm 22 furnishes us with the expression of this difference in the strongest way. There Christ Himself was out of the enjoyment of His own relationship with the Father, having been made sin for us. In human sorrows He for once does not find divine comfort. Now as to present wrath, no godly soul of course ever goes through this; but as to sorrow, God's face is hid from Israel, and when they are awakened they feel that it is because of sin, and this though faith is at work, which is just what these psalms describe. It is faith looking at God when all circumstances are against him who exercises it, and they are driven out from the present enjoyment of revealed communion and covenant relationship; it is the position God sets His people in when covenant relationship is broken— as it will be, and is—with Israel, or not known: and faith, acknowledging the justice of this, looks through all to God's own faithfulness as such. It is, so to speak, naked faith, without anything to sustain it of what God gives to His people as the witness of conferred favors. The result is a full trial of the soul.

The question for the soul here is not how far it is enjoying His gifts, but, how far its state can link itself with what God is in Himself, and count on that. This probes it to the bottom, because all flesh is completely judged; for it can have no connection with God at all. It is true that this is never understood but by a new nature—that nature which can understand what God is, and, through grace and the working of the Holy Spirit, cleave to promises. But the flesh is thereby fully judged, and the difference of that and the new man known and discerned, yet redemption is not known. Because of this new nature there is the consciousness of the desire to do good, and of God's favor, but no peace. It is a searching process that we may be cast in naked dependence on grace. It is practically as to principle Romans 7.

In speaking of Psalm 42, we can only take the great principle, unless in a very special case of Christian experience; because the psalm supposes the person's enjoyment of common blessings, he remembered them. The special case is this: when a soul has believed in forgiveness, owning, no doubt, its sinfulness, but not really searched out, or the entirely sinful nature of the flesh discovered, the first joy may be lost, and the soul only know enough of God to feel the dreadfulness of not having the light of His countenance; but this gives the earnest desire to enjoy

it. It may also happen when a soul has supposed itself Christian, but finds out, through the operation of God's Spirit, that it is not. In either case, the true blessed effect of the position in which we are placed by redemption is not known.

The psalm goes no farther than hope, but it is a hope much deepened and made more true by the trial. It expresses more the result of the trial than the process; and hence it is we have so blessed an expression of the state of the soul, however forlorn it is. It thirsts after God Himself—the difference of the Christian state is that, as in Romans 5, he joys in God. Still this state of thirsting is in certain respects deeper than the first joy, because the joy is partial in its realization: the want is complete, and God Himself, in Himself, the thing desired. No doubt the psalm refers to the circumstances, and it is the soul's loss of God, in happy circumstances which supported the soul more or less, which obliges it to lean on and look for God Himself more absolutely, and, as we shall see, draws its joy thence. And it is this the spiritual soul has to look to in this psalm. His soul is athirst for God. He had lost the joy of the multitude, but he now panted after God Himself, where there was none of this. The change was sensible; but what he felt the loss of for his heart was God Himself. This was what he panted after. People and happy circumstances disappear from the mind as from the scene, though they were enjoyed with God. The individual heart wants God for itself.

The divine nature in us craves after its delight in God, the objective fullness that satisfies it, because it is the divine nature. Its thirst is perfect after that—that one great blessed object, which fills all the desires and excludes every other. Previously the soul had enjoyed the blessings from God and God Himself in them.

Now God Himself becomes consciously and necessarily the whole blessing itself. The trial has judged all flesh as to the subjective state of the soul, all mediate enjoyment of God in circumstances; and the divine life, in order to its full blessing and consciousness of what that blessing is, has its perfect delight in God only and God Himself.

This is a wonderfully deepening process. It is not, that the soul will not have joy, but that the source of joy, pure moral blessing, has a much fuller place in the heart, and, as we shall see, henceforth characterizes it. Hence it is that we see persons who have been deeply tried by the loss of blessings, which in their place were given of God, far more calm, possessed of a deeper consciousness of God being their portion, and hence more withdrawn from the influence of circumstances to that blessed center of rest.

The enemy, though in a painful way—and so is it even in God's discipline—contributes to the furtherance of the soul in this path. They said, Where is thy God? They have driven them out from the public enjoyment of conferred—and in Israel covenant-blessing. (So Job.) And where was the sign of their having blessings from Him? But as they had ascribed it to God and proclaimed His faithfulness and power to secure, they taunt them with it now and say, What can you say now? Where is thy God? This, really, the unhappy Jews did to Christ. But this only casts the soul on Him. There was nothing for it, but what God was Himself. The enemy had driven them away from all else—from mercies which by abuse tended to shut God out. These the enemy succeeded in depriving the soul of, and left it only God. And the soul hoped in Him; but what was the consequence? Crying out for the blessing? No. Often the soul, by seeking joy, cannot get it, this would not purify and bless it: and to bless God must purify. When emptied of self and seeking God, we find joy. So here, while remembering the past joy, he says, I shall yet praise Him for the

help of His countenance.

But some other traits must be noticed here. Pride and stoical resistance to sorrow will not do. That does not draw the soul to God, but effectually and specially keeps it from Him—teaches it, or pretends to teach it, to do without Him, as the Stoics held in fact that the virtuous man was God's equal. Here the soul had felt the sorrow and was dependent, and now can be open with God, because of His goodness and faithfulness. Sorrow, when it is complete and helpless, gives intimacy with him who is willing and able to help, and this is now with God. He tells his sorrow to God (vs. 5). He reasoned with himself. How he says, "O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember thee."

But this leads to another point. The troubles themselves come from God. Inward self-judgment and looking to God bring Him and Him alone into everything. Enemies have disappeared, with blessings. "Thy waves and thy billows are gone over me." God began the matter with Job and told neither Satan nor Job what He was about, and uses Satan's blind malice to break Job's unsubdued, and of himself unsuspected, nature, and to bring about a blessing. Deep called to deep, but it was at the voice of God's waterspouts.

But this seeing God's hand in purpose leads to the consciousness of covenant relationship; to us of Father, here of Jehovah; and He is reckoned upon according to that for the future. "Jehovah will command his loving kindness in the daytime, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life." Confidence is thus acquired— boldness with a faithful God. "I will say unto God my rock, Why hast thou forgotten me?" He does not say "forsaken" here. That Christ alone was, and faith knows it never can be. But because of this confidence in the unfailing love of God, he asks Him who is his rock why He has left him in the power of the enemy. Note how, when once we see the hand of God in our sorrows, we can look for deliverance, because it is God, and His hand is on us in love.

And now the reproach of the enemies becomes a plea with God; for when they say, Where is thy God? the only answer is, God's manifesting Himself. Meanwhile the soul has been deepened in its desires after God Himself. All carelessness of heart removed, so that manifestation has infinitely more value. Here the assurances of blessing are enlarged, before the distressed soul has said that he was assured of the help of His countenance as the theme of his praises; but we have seen that his heart, purified and exercised, had been drawn up into confiding in the sure faithfulness of God in known relationship. The heart, though not yet outwardly freed, is fixed on God in desire and in confidence. Hence he says now, Who is the health of —my countenance—his countenance reflects in joy the outshining of God's in love—and my God. Distress and the deprivation of all given, even religious, blessings, had cast the heart upon God and drawn it to look to Him as the alone source of joy, and with the confidence which must spring up when the soul is near God, known in His own relationship by faith. It cannot be otherwise. There may be delay as to full peace of heart and enjoyment, if the Lord sees purifying and sifting still necessary; but there will be a confiding leaning on Him, and the soul then is brought to thirst evidently for Himself. "My soul thirsteth for God." It addresses itself to God, but it is the soul panting after Him. We do not get the answer here, but the state of the soul looking purely for God Himself, brought to do it, and assured of the shining of the light of His countenance and of the joy and health it would give. Remark as to the detail that it is when the soul has been broken down and its force of pride has given way, that it

then remembers God (vs. 6). So when God's hand is seen in his trials (vs. 7), he sees that Jehovah, God as known in relationship, will command His lovingkindness, and God is the God of his life and God his rock.

Psalm 43. In Psalm 42 we have seen the soul internally restored and animated to an earnest thirsting after God Himself, seeking all its joy in Himself. Being brought to that, in Psalm 43, it is looking out for a deliverance, which shall enable it to enjoy God freely and fully. God has become, for the heart, its exceeding joy; and it will be recalled, thus restored, to free worship of Him, to express its joy and thanksgiving fully. God is not here characterized as the living God, but as the God of his strength. Till the soul was fully fixed on God Himself as its delight, this cry for deliverance, though natural and not wrong, if subject to His will (yet it would rather desire purification than escape from affliction), was yet more a reference to comfort and ease; though from die hand of God this is not to be slighted. But now it is identified with the desire to praise and glorify God.

This change has to be noted: when under trial, righteously and graciously from God, perhaps unrighteously from man, the heart naturally desires freedom; but, as Elihu says to Job, if it is not as subject to God's gracious dealings, it is choosing iniquity rather than affliction—there is a want both of uprightness and submission. When once the heart is fully restored (and with an upright conscience we shall pretty well know this, and God will perfectly, that if there be subjection to Him, and the desire of perfectness of heart, the deliverance will be surely at the right time) the desire of deliverance has its fully right place. It is the desire to be manifestly with Him in peace, and to glorify and praise Him openly. Outward enemies had been reproaching in Psalm 42 but they were God's waves and billows. But "where is thy God?" was the terrible thing. His soul became athirst for Him. Now he desires judgment of his cause and deliverance. There was a nearer trial than outward oppression, though he was still under it, the direct wickedness of injustice with which he had to do. He looked for God's light and truth to come out and lead him and bring him to God's holy hill. It is not the consciousness that God was his secret delight to which he had been brought, but that He who was would, by His power, lead Him now to open praise and worship. The God of strength would bring him there; he would be present with Him who was his exceeding joy.

This hope encourages his heart and brings him back, too, to that which was the secret and fullness of his joy and which he possessed in hope, that God would be the health of his countenance. He was morally his exceeding joy. Now it would shine forth in glad worship, and be reflected in the gladness of the countenance of him who enjoyed it. The panting after God was the result in the last psalm, though looking out for blessing. Here this is wrought in the soul, and, though not restored yet to outward public blessings, God is his exceeding joy, and God his God; and the outward restoration is presently looked forward to.

Psalm 44. We have certainly in this book of the psalms moral exercises more deeply and fully developed. The soul has to do with God; but the application is not the easier to the Christian state, for this simple reason: the exercises flowing from relationship under trial are not the theme of this book, but exercises of soul with God, when the enjoyment of known relationship is lost.

Hence, while in the former part, in order to apply it to the Christian, it was only needed to apprehend the change of relationship from Jehovah to Father; having in Christianity a relationship founded on the destruction of all in flesh, one in that relationship has passed beyond the whole

position in this book. The state of the Christian reveals, and is known in, the exercise of a heavenly one. Hence the proper state of the Christian is found less here even than in the first book. But the relationship of an exercised soul with God, on the other hand, comes out into relief.

In this psalm the faithful one recognizes that through divine favor and power alone they had enjoyed the blessings of which they were now deprived, the signs of God's favor. The direct government of God is owned, "Thou art my king, O God," is the language of Israel, but always true, though the authority now, without being less absolute, is infinitely sweeter. He is our Lord by redemption. We do not deny the Lord that bought us. This was still the faithful one's trust. In Elohim he made his boast, and praised His name forever; but they were given up, and their enemies had the upper hand; yet they held fast, and did not forget God, nor were unfaithful to the covenant.

Two great principles, faithfulness to the will and authority of God, whatever disaster and seeming desertion there may be, and looking for no other help than God Himself, who seems to have deserted the faithful, are here in play. This puts integrity utterly to the test, and personal faith; and that is just what is needed for the soul to be in the state in which it can be restored to the full joy of positive blessing. The fact that God thus tests His people (and He does so now spiritually before peace be obtained) is one of deep import. It brings out what we have seen characterizes this book—absolute trust in God, in Himself; and it shows that uprightness with Him is before all comfort or ease for the heart: for, if nothing is got from it, they hold to Him for His own sake. He Himself is the object, and Himself, morally, and in His claim upon them. Hence the heart cannot turn to anything else, for it is not God, nor help which would relieve it from His ways.

This brings in another point which this psalm leads us to, that the trials which accompany this apparent desertion are attributed to God's own hand. "Thou makest us to turn our back.... Thou hast given us like sheep." There is another thought connected with this psalm besides the individual application. When God confounds and rebukes His people in their public conflicts with the power of evil, when, in the exercise of His government, He allows the power of evil to get the upper hand, and so orders it, this is a deep trial for His people, not only for their own sorrow in it, but because the name of God is dishonored. The• enemy triumphs in this; but surely the government of God is shown in it.

Here we learn the meditations of the upright soul in these circumstances. It had not forgotten God, nor behaved unfaithfully as regarded His covenant, though smitten down in the place of dragons. On the contrary; though it might be the needed public government of God, as regarded the profession of His name, and to separate out the faithful, who may be in the midst of His professed people; yet, as regards those faithful, it was for God's name they were suffering. This is still, I judge, somewhat different from Jehovah's name. Of course it was Jehovah, as with the Father, but here it is for what God is as such. Not only faithfulness in not denying the revealed name is there, but it was for what God is that they were suffering. There was no turning in heart to idols. They preferred suffering anything, or suffer what they might, for owning the true God; they would do it for His own sake, for the attachment of their heart to Him, for what He was when they got no blessing; because the God who was in covenant with His people was the true God, and they would be tried, not only for the covenant blessings, but for their heart-attachment to what He was in His nature: and so in principle with us. And this is joy; because the love of integrity, the partaking of the

divine nature, by which we delight in what is good, in what is of God, gives the consciousness of itself, the conscious delight there is in that nature in rejoicing in what is good and right.

It is not self-righteousness, but the conscious delight in good of the divine nature, proper divine joy in its nature; only in our case it must have an object, God Himself, and this is tested in us by suffering for God. Hence the true case is— for the enemy hated God—"For thy sake are we killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter." To test it fully, and make it real suffering for God, the blessings which belong to His power must not be there. Hence the upright are left for the time to the oppression of the enemy. This, while it searches the heart, if there be any false way, makes it here suffering for what God is; and on the cry for mercy, in due time, brings in the answer from Him; for He cannot leave what answers to His nature—integrity towards Him—needlessly in the power of evil. And so it ever is; though our joy may be in another world altogether, yet, as a rule, God as to His covenant, delivers in this.

As regards the earth, this cry brings in Messiah. There is progress, I think, in Psalm 44, as compared with the two preceding psalms. There was deprivation, and the light of God's countenance looked for; and all right. Here God Himself is held to in heart-integrity, in spite of everything. It is the same in principle, but more absolute. And in this is what is needed. This clinging to God Himself in spite of all is to be learned. And the heart is herein fully tested for God.

Psalm 45. The object is evidently the celebration of Messiah the King. The heart feels it is inditing a good matter. When Christ is before the soul, it is enlivened and roused; here, doubtless, as king, and in His victories, so that there is more of human triumph than in the Christian's estimate of Him. The power of evil will then be put down, and the heart exult in it. Now the joy is deeper and more divine. Collectively, we expect the Bridegroom; individually, the Savior, who is not ashamed to call us brethren. When we think of Him as a divine Person, we feel the depth of that divine work in which God met sin, and in which it has been put away for us—a work which none can fathom; and we dwell on that glory into which He is entered, and of which He is worthy, both in His Person and by His work. Still, we can understand the exultation of the delivered Jew, or, at least, one anticipating deliverance thus by Messiah.

But there is, besides this joy, a principle of deep importance contained in this psalm—the call to the daughter to forget her own people and her father's house: so shall the king desire her beauty. So, as to blessing, instead of fathers she shall have children. Association with Christ breaks off previous associations which nature has had, and forms wholly new ones. This is, of course and evidently, a principle which is of an absolute and decisive character. But this is put in the strongest way here: "so shall the king greatly desire thy beauty." For the Christian, then, that he may walk so that the Lord may have delight in him, there is an entire breaking with all that nature is linked up with. The doctrines on which this is founded are not laid down here: that would not suit the Psalms. It is the state of the soul. It was to forget all that had a claim on it according to nature. It is the coming in of Christ which calls for this. He has Himself done it—broken with the world by death, and entered on a new world in resurrection. His claim is absolute, and in contrast with all others. According to nature, there was no link, no association with the blessings He brings into. It was another order of relationships. These claimed the heart naturally in their place; but Christ takes to Himself, founds new ones, of which He is the center, and has a divine claim. The old ones are left, and the new ones entered on by redemption out of them. He must have the whole heart, as a

divine claimant, who, by giving Himself for and to us, brings us into a new scene of relationship with Himself. No counter claim can be allowed. It is now owning His. It is giving up our nature and place, and going back into the old things. Being His is all our being. As scripture expresses it, “Christ is all.” This is denied if concurrent claims are allowed.

This is true as to religious claims. The Jew, when Christ reigns, must give up his glorying in his fathers to glory in Christ. So we; whatever legal or fleshly religion may have been indulged in, it is all given up. All that was gain is loss. The past is gone—we are taken out of it. Christ, and the future He gives, are all. Christ may place in present duties connected with human relationships, and He does; but he who looks back is not fit for the kingdom of God. All was failure before: Christ is joy and gladness, and that stably and in power. See the full doctrinal and experimental statement of this as to the Christian in 2 Corinthians 5:16-17, “Though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more. Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”

Psalm 46 gives us one most simple truth, but a most solemn and weighty one—one much needed by Christians in the heavings of this world, and in the tendency to seek relief by human effort. “Be still, and know that I am God.” That is the exhortation. The encouragement is this: “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” But if GOD takes this character, the waters may rage and be troubled, and the mountains shake with their swelling; we can be still. For no matter what power or swelling there is, if God be there, our refuge. Only we must wait, and wait till He comes in: and here it is faith is tried. Hence, “and know that I am God.” This may be by the exercise of patience, or the resisting the tendency to human effort. But the truth sustained in the psalm is a most blessed and precious encouragement, which no one trouble can touch; for trouble is at the utmost from the creature, and God is God. But it implies that nothing else is a refuge, and this is perfect reliance, and implies that all else may be against us.

The great point is, that it is God as such who is our refuge and strength. He does not say, “The Lord” (Jehovah): further on in the psalm, where relationship is in question, he does. Here the point is, that it is God in His nature contrasted with man—indeed with every power; for if God be for us, who can be against us? Faith gets hold of this. He is a refuge, where we may resort for safety; and He is strength, so that no adverse power can reach or succeed against us. It supposes that trouble, yea, insolent swellings of power, are there; but He is a present help. This secures fully; but the help is not always a present apparent one. But God Himself is looked to; and the fact that we are left wholly to Him, and that no other resource is there, makes all the power of evil immaterial to us; for it is nothing against God. “What confidence is this?” said the king of Assyria to Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:19). Other help we might calculate and compare the value of. This only requires faith, “Ye believe in God” (John 14:1).

Against this help all effort is unavailing; only we must wait for it. Human efforts shut this help out. It is another kind of resource which is not faith. God may command activity, and faith acts confidently. But this is never man’s way; and when the matter is in God’s hands, when there is not a duty, then our part is to be still, and we shall soon know that He is God. Human effort only spoils all. No human planning is ever right. In His own time and way, God will come in. There are duties. When there are, do them: but when the power of evil against us is there, and there is not a duty, the path is to be still. Human efforts prove want of faith and restlessness, and planning is mere

flesh. Elsewhere we have seen that integrity is needed to trust God, because it is God's holy nature which is trusted. This absolute trust is called for when the power of evil is rampant, and endurance till deliverance is the path of the saint. There is another thought here. God (the Most High over all the earth) has a dwelling-place, where the rivers of His grace refresh: then the city of God, Zion and the temple; now the church. There the streams of refreshment run, and He will preserve her (not now as Zion, the city of God's solemnities, but in a better way), and there He enters into the proper character of His own relationship. And there He gives peace, having destroyed all the power of the enemy. Then will he who has waited know who is God—we in yet brighter and holier scenes.

Psalm 47. I have but few words to say on this psalm. It is the triumph of God's people when deliverance is come in, prophetically announced. That which will be useful to remark is, how entirely the government of the world is connected with Israel. God Most High is a great King over all the earth. Then the peoples and nations are subdued under Israel, and God chooses the inheritance for the remnant of His people—His beloved Jacob. But this issues in the praises of God Himself—awakens praise in His people. And whatever the blessings and glory of God's people, their great delight is in the glory of God Himself. First, the power of God is celebrated, and the peoples, those in relationship with Israel, are called upon to triumph in it, for it is their deliverance and blessing, and that, at least, Israel knows, and is the proclaimer of it to them. There Israel gets its place. But this makes God preeminent in Israel's thought. Thus it ever is when the soul truly knows blessing. It turns to the Blesser.

But this draws out, not merely thanksgiving, but the celebration of all that God is as known in blessing to those He blesses. But His own proper glory is their joy. I say, "known in blessing"; but not simply because of blessing, but in His own glory as so known. Thus verses 5-8 celebrate what God is, as thus displayed and known. So in Romans 5:11, it is not only the statement of salvation, but "we also joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have received the reconciliation." Further, praises with understanding are called for. The relationships of God are stated in verse 8. This, too, is a point neglected by the saints— the living and praising in and according to the relationships in which God stands with us. We have to say "The Father" and "Christ the Lord." Here, in the kingdom, it is He sits upon the throne of His holiness, and He reigns over the heathen—only now that which is power on the earth. The princes of the peoples are gathered in recognition of, and association with, one peculiar people—the people of original promise—the people of the God of Abraham. The shields of the earth belong to God: He is greatly exalted; for this must be the last and possessing thought of the saint. I will only add, that this takes up the reign of God in its great general principle and connected with divine exaltation, though in connection with Israel who celebrates it.

The following Psalm, 48, connects it more with local details, and the judgment by which His throne is established in Zion. What they had heard (Psa. 44) they have now seen. This closes the historical presentation of this period, beginning with the outcast remnant when evil was in power upon the throne, before the throne of righteousness was set up by judgment. The facts of the latter day are before the soul.

Psalm 49 is a full commentary upon all this, showing man's place in it. It gives a commentary, showing the emptiness of the world, connected with the judgment of God at the end, but which is

applicable in all times, though publicly proved then. Death proves the folly of all human wisdom and foresight, of all human grandeur—a common observation, little acted on, but always true. As it is said of wisdom, “destruction and death say, we have heard the fame thereof with their ears” (Job 28:22). They cannot give positive wisdom, but they can negatively show that only what does not belong to mortal man has any value. Man establishes his family, perpetuates his name, but he is gone: nothing stays the hand of death. Ransom from that is out of man’s power. There is a morning coming when the righteous will have the upper hand of those who seem wise as regards this world. Death feeds on these, or, as neglecters of God, they are subjected to the righteous, when His judgment comes. But the power of God, in whom the righteous trust, is above the power of death. He saves the remnant from death. So those who are alive when Christ comes for the church will not die at all; those who are dead will be raised. Such is the confidence of the believer: death does not alarm him, because he trusts in One, who is above it, who redeems frees from its power altogether, or raises.

But the Christian goes yet farther, though this be true of him. He can say, “That we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead” (2 Cor. 1:9). But he says more: “We had the sentence of death in ourselves.” He does not at all take, as the remnant, his portion this side of death; so that deliverance from it to live here is the object of his soul. Christ having died, his connection with this world has ceased, save as a pilgrim through it. He has the sentence of death in himself. He knows no man after the flesh, no, not even Christ. His associations with the world are closed, save as Christ’s servant in it. He reckons himself dead. He is crucified with Christ, yet lives; but it is Christ lives in him, and he lives the life he lives in the flesh by the faith of the Son of God, who loved him and gave Himself for him, so that he is delivered from this present world. This, while it puts the believer on the ground of this psalm, as far as it goes as to its great principle, yet sets him in a totally different position. There is not a question about escaping death (though outwardly he may, for we shall not all die), for death is a gain, and he reckons himself dead and his life hid with Christ in God, and Christ to be His life. Yet this only shows still more, what the psalm insists on, the folly of laying up and making oneself great, and counting on a future in a world where death reigns and in the things to which its power applies. Man being in honor abides not.

How difficult, even if happy and heavenly-minded in Christ as to one’s own joys, not to look upon the things that are seen, to think that the wisdom, and talents, and success, and approval of men is simply nothing, the food of death; and that all the moral question lies behind, save so far as these may have deceived men! The saint has to watch still, not to be afraid when success accompanies those who do not accept the cross. We await God’s judgment of things in power; we exercise it in conscience. There is no divine understanding in the man whose heart is in the glory of the world. Men will praise him. How well he has got on, settled his children, raised himself in his position! The fairest names will be given to it. He has no understanding. His heart is in what feeds death, and that death weighs it. All the motives of the world are weighed by death. After all, in them man is only as the beasts that perish, with more care.

Psalm 50. But if death tells this tale, divine judgment is executed; and this brings in other considerations too, the contrast of ceremonial religion which God may have ordered in His goodness to man, and that practical righteousness which God must have in order to own man. But this will be found in special relationship to God, and that in His own way.

Saints are gathered by sacrifice. Redeeming grace and the sense of its need must come in to be owned as such by God; but these are gathered to God. Judgment proceeds on the ground on which man stands; for abuse of privileges if he has them, but on the moral ground on which his conscience stands. So here, as to Israel, God does not complain of want of sacrifices. No ceremonial religion will be in question, but wickedness. Because God had kept silence in long patience, the world may fancy He is to be dealt with as man is, with outward forms, sacrifices, ceremonies, and no conscience, and that God sees no farther; but God sets before man what he has done. He who so knows God as to praise Him, who owns what He is, blesses Him for what He is, and orders his conversation aright, he will have the governmental blessing of God. He who makes offerings as though he would quiet God so, and goes on without taking heed to Him in his conscience, He will reprove, and set in order before him all he has done: if here, for salvation; if in judgment, there is none to deliver.

But where there is a work of God, it goes much deeper, and this we see in Psalm 51. God had announced judgment. Here mercy is looked for by the divinely-moved soul, that He who alone can do it should make us clean, as is suited to Himself; for the soul thus taught feels it has to do with God, and looks for cleansing suited for that. Compare John 13—a “part with me.” (He came from God and was going to God, and the Father had given all into His hand.) The sin too is confessed. Having to say to God Himself is what marks this psalm, and the feeling of him thus concerned; and, as I have said, it goes much deeper than what is spoken of in judgment. From verse 5 the inward principles are looked at, for it is a question of having to say to God, not merely of judgment of acts.

There is the sense of sin in the nature and in the origin of our being; and that God must have truth in the inward parts; but confidence in God that He will give divine wisdom to be known in the heart, that which the vulture’s eye hath not seen. This is precious to understand. The soul looks to humiliation with pleasure as against, and the breaking down of, an unholy will; for, as it hates it, so it desires it to be broken. The bitterness of humiliation is in this respect sweet. There is the blessed consciousness, that, when the Lord washes us, we are clean every whit, whiter than snow.

A blessed thought to be clean before His eyes: how little believed, because men do not believe in His washing!

Thus far it has been more the intrinsic preciousness of being clean, clean for God—what is necessary for God and what the heart delights in. Now, gladness is looked for, but from God; as all is seen, the humiliation and chastisement, as the rest, from God’s hand—joy, gladness, God’s face can be rightly looked for now, not before. That would have been selfish comfort, though natural enough; but God does not give it till the heart is right. The heart must be real, truly purified in accord with God, to enjoy here favor and joy. Nor, while looking to God to hide His face from its sins and blot out its iniquities, is this separate from the desire after cleanliness of heart; only now it is looked at, God’s goodness being in view, not as the requirement of His holiness, to which the heart assents, but the work of His grace, something from Him. “Create in me a clean heart, O God.” Give it me, and renew (not a right, but) a fixed, settled, spirit within me—one that calmly, settledly thinks on God, the heart’s only object, and peacefully counts and waits on Him. The soul thus taught cannot do without the presence of God. Its dread is to be cast out of it. It is not yet intelligent in grace and the sureness of God’s favor, but cannot do without His presence. To be

removed from it would be everlasting misery, as indeed it would, and felt the more, the more the eye is opened upon Him. It craves therefore this above all, not to be cast out from His presence; known in truth, desire, and the necessity of the soul; if not, no joy.

The action of the Holy Spirit is known as the power of joy; His indwelling is not. The soul pleads not to be deprived of the former. Here a difference must be noted with the case of a Christian, whether we consider his first conversion or his restoration to communion. Hitherto we have been able to weigh the great essential principles of the communion of the soul with God. In these verses the occasion comes in. An intelligent Christian could not say literally, Take not thy Holy Spirit from me; he views the effect of his sin in quite another way. He has grieved the Spirit, he has sinned against love. He does not believe that God will ever take His Holy Spirit from him. If the extreme of chastisement is on him, and the shield of faith is down, he doubts or disbelieves he has or perhaps ever had it, but does not ask that it should not be taken away. He all but despairs; he thinks himself a reprobate; and if he thinks he had it outwardly, as Heb. 6, thinks it impossible he can be renewed to repentance because he has lost it. But, save in this extreme case or the use of Hebrews 6 (common before real peace is obtained) to our own condemnation, there is no such thought in a Christian. A man may doubt whether he has the Holy Spirit, but an intelligent Christian does not think of God taking it away. It is quasi-despair, or grieving because he has grieved the Spirit which is in him. Its present action in Israel, inasmuch as God owned the nation, or the returning remnant hoped so, that remnant may plead for. Compare Haggai 2:5.

And David in the same way, having sinned, could so speak; but a Christian could not. The cry might come from an inexperienced Christian who had not found peace, nor knew that God does not take His Spirit from the Christian, but not from one who knew the truth. A Christian knowing the truth, but having failed in walk, and assaulted by the enemy, might deprecate the practical loss of that action of the Spirit which alone keeps us in communion, and the shield of faith up, and this would be all right. So could one who had thus lost it, say, Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, though in the extreme of such a case; neither is that the state of soul, but only where it is getting back. In the extreme case it is the thought of being lost, though after all, hope is never absolutely given up. But, on the returning of such a soul verses 11, 12 are, practically used, though never “take not thy Holy Spirit from me.” But there is a constant action of the Holy Spirit which keeps faith alive—may be, a source of great joy when we walk with God, but, when we have not joy, keeps the enemy from bringing doubt on our souls before God; keeps, as I said, faith alive. He is not between our souls and God, the power of darkness. This is practically what is desired here, and the sensible joy of God’s salvation to be restored, but without the knowledge of the indwelling Spirit founded on redemption.

What verse 12 looks for we may have to look for, the joy of salvation to be restored, and the having the heart established with God’s free Spirit, that liberty before God and in His service which is enjoyed through the ungrieved Spirit by the soul that knows redemption and the blessed light of God’s countenance. In David there was the uncertainty of repeated forgiveness (abiding acceptance being unknown) and of great sin. In Israel, in the latter days, the knowledge of long enjoyed relationships, all now in question, though God be trusted for them. But this is not the Christian’s state: if he knows that the Holy Spirit dwells in him, he knows it abides there.

The soul in which God's Spirit works, may, as to this, be in the following states. First, exercised, but ignorant, having a general idea of mercy, it may apply all these consequences of sin to itself vaguely but with terror. When forgiveness is known (and specially when it is known with little depth of conviction of sin), but the righteousness of God not, the soul, losing the sense of forgiveness through failure or carelessness, sees judgment before it, without having righteousness, and all previous joy becomes bitterness, and the sense of loss (Heb. 6); is applied, and all the passages which speak of continuing as a condition or of falling away. But the soul is not really set free here. It has known forgiveness, not righteousness. It has known the blood on the door-post, not the Red Sea. It is in the path of learning divine righteousness and abiding peace before God in Christ risen. There is yet the case, where, with the truth known, sin has been trifled with, and there the enemy gets power—a case I have already spoken of, where there is no power to apply the word or promises, and every bitter sentence is applied to oneself. Yet, God's justice seen to be right, Satan, so to speak, is the interpreter of the word, not God. Yet this, God uses as chastisement, to set the soul right; and the soul, through grace, clings to God in spite of all.

I have said rather more on these verses than might seem natural, because they are so often misused to put Christians on the ground of Old Testament knowledge, and deprive the Christian of the truth of the constantly indwelling Spirit. All this is a misapplication of it. I close with some remarks on the last verses of the psalm.

The soul is not yet restored in the psalm, nor free before God; it is looking for it. When restored, it can teach others freely. But while a clean heart is looked for, there is another character of sin which presses on the soul rejecting Christ, blood-guiltiness. We cannot of course kill Him, but the sin is the same. Thus there is not only uncleanness in sin, but the affections are wrong—there is hatred against God shown in enmity to saints, but above all to Christ. We can understand how Israel will have to look for this: they have called for His blood on them and on their children. But practically our hearts have rejected Him, and would none of Him. Yet the soul, brought near in grace, can look for cleansing from this also: more than this, in forgiveness of this, it sees that God is indeed the God of its salvation, not of judgment, but in the extremest of sin is a Saviour—saves in love. Then it sings aloud of God's righteousness. In its actual relationship with God there was only sin. The cross was God meeting sin, and sin meeting God in man. Man (that is, the sinner) had only sin. There he showed what he was in respect of God present in love—hatred and violent will. This was all he was; but there God became, not a restorer, but a Savior—a complete Savior, and showed His righteousness in respect of the work of Christ by setting Man, Him as Man, at His right hand. God's righteousness only now is known; and, as it has triumphed in salvation, the soul sings aloud of it. This is true freedom—the Holy Spirit, thus given, the power of it. The necessary consequence is, that sacrifices have no place. Where would they be? How would they own God? A broken spirit is what suits the cross — suits Christ's sufferings and forgiven sins. Nor does God despise this. It answers to His mind in the cross, to His grace towards the sinner. Then come peace, blessing, and service; here, according to Jewish millennial order, of course, but true in spirit in the Christian.

Psalm 52 requires few words. It looks to judgment in Israel, but there are some principles which directly concern the believer at any time, where he looks, in the prevalence of evil power—not to circumstances. Evil boasts itself in power, but faith sees another thing. The goodness of God, before whom men are as grasshoppers, endures, however evil prevails yet continually. There is no

moment where it is not fully in Him, no day when anything escapes Him or anything is out of His reach. It is not only the power of God, but His goodness. This is a great general truth; but we say, Our Father. Not a sparrow falls to the ground without your Father. Yet on the other hand there is something specially precious in the thought here. It is not the goodness of Jehovah in His relationship with Israel, but what is in the nature of God. The goodness of God, what a resource against evil! It cannot cease or be interrupted, if it be thus. The end of pride is ruin, but he who trusts in the Lord and His faithful love shall be green, when all else withers, and planted in the courts of God's house.

Psalm 53, as we know, convicts of entire sinfulness those who have the best advantages. But the secret of this course is old too, and on that a few words. All the path of the wicked comes from this. For him God is not. Faith does not exist, and God is not seen. This is the secret of all error in practice and in human reasoning. The more we examine the whole course of human action, the faults of us Christians, the various wanderings of philosophy, the more we shall find that no God is at the root of all. Here it is the case that the conscience takes no notice of God. The heart has no desire after Him, and the will works as if there were none. Man says so in his heart. Why should he say it? Because his conscience tells him there is one. His will would not have one; and, as God is not seen in His working, will sees only what it will. God is set aside, and the whole conduct is under the will's influence, as if no God existed. He takes pains to prove there is not if he thinks, because he cannot get on if there is; but he lifts himself up, and, deceiving himself, comes in practical condition to will there should be none—and not to think, but to act as if he thought, and that in purpose as well as act, as if there were none. In a certain sense, he even thinks so; for, being entirely occupied with present things, and blind through his alienation from God, his moral feelings dead, judging from present things, he can draw conclusions, not believe that there is one, and, living in his own thoughts thus formed, live in the thought there is none—says so in his heart. If conscience awakes, he knows well there is; but he lives in his will and the thoughts of his will, and for him there is no God.

But it is wonderful how habitually human reasoning goes on as if this were so. Man cannot look at all that is around him without feeling the mass of evil there is. If he does not accept the fall and salvation, what can he think when there are no immediate present interventions, as in Israel? Men leave God out, and account for all as if there were none. Men will not put all on the ground of truth. If not, they cannot bring God in it at all, and account for all without doing so. And this is called philosophy, and it leads on necessarily to the power of evil, for evil there is, and consequently the power of evil; and if God be not brought in, the power of evil must have the upper hand, for who is to hinder it having so? God does, till His time is come—the time when no more good is to be done by waiting. Evil then comes to a head, which is embodied in this psalm; and the result is, the judgment spoken of at the end. But the principles of the world are such at all times. Whenever I act as if God was not (that is, without reference to His will), I so far say in my heart, "There is no God."

If the fear spoken of in verse 5 be of the congregation of the just, as I suppose, there we see how needless the fear of the godly is in the day of the power of evil. The more it increases, the more the question becomes God's. At its height it is wholly so; consequently, the less reason there is to fear. It is when at their height that God despises them. The Psalmist, as a Jew, longs for this time—the time of the restoration of Israel. In a certain sense we desire it, for we desire the disappearing of evil and the rest of the earth; but it is not the highest good.

Psalm 54 gives one, but a most weighty, practical principle— God alone and His name; that is, the revelation of Himself is the resource of the soul. Strangers have not set God before them, the believer has; and all hangs from His name. Dependence is expressed, and God is sought according to His name. This, the name of God, holds the first place in the psalm. We must remark that God is not known here in subsisting covenant relationship. It is not Jehovah until the end of the psalm, but God, as such, in contrast with men and all else; and in Himself known in what He is—the source of mercy and good, on which we depend. But God has revealed Himself—made Himself known to men; His name, that which expresses what He is, is known, and the heart trusts in this. And how sweet it is to do it! In itself it is joy and rest; and what can man do when God is for us? I may not know what God will do, but He is trusted. God says, He is my helper. When delivered, or in the thought of deliverance, all that God is in relationship with His people comes into the soul for praise; but what God is as God is the resource of the soul.

Psalm 55 is the expression of intense distress of spirit. Outward enemies were there. This was the difficulty in which he stood; but it was only the occasion of what pressed upon his spirit. This was the hatred of those who stood in the closest relationship to him. This brought him into the presence of death, and divine judgment, because as special instruments of Satan they would bring the effect of guilt upon his soul between him and God. How completely the Lord Himself (though the psalm be not properly prophetic of Him) went through this, I need not say. They sought to bring the guilt upon Him and triumphed in His being forsaken of God, did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted. Directly it is the remnant in the last day; but, as we have seen, in all their affliction He was afflicted.

But this bringing iniquity on the soul by wicked men as instruments of Satan (which the Lord went through more deeply than any one could, because He took our iniquity) is a very solemn thing. It is not the wrath directly that Christ bore, and we never shall; but the bringing it on the soul by the power of Satan by wicked men. The Lord may see it needed, but it is only a special case with Christians. There is confidence in God, an expectation that His ear is open to the cry of the heart that trusts Him. But till the Lord is looked to, the power of wickedness, and the wickedness itself distress and bow down the soul. The existence and power of evil, of what is opposed to God, weighs on it. This is united with the deepest wounding of confidence in man, for it was not an open enemy, but a friend, who had done it. What in man was to be trusted when the nearest betrayed? It gives isolation of heart. Nothing can be trusted. Now the Lord went through this power of evil. We only feel it when flesh is not broken down and has to be broken down. It is there, but its power is broken by Him for faith. But, inasmuch as we are sinners, this kind of power of Satan brings the character of judgment with it. We may get above this by grace and confide. For this it was that Christ prayed for Peter; and he was kept, when falling under the power of Satan, from going on to doubt the Lord’s love, and to despair. The most terrible thing here is wickedness coming as the power of evil. But the spirit itself shrinks from the heartlessness of it and would flee; for a gracious spirit would rest in peace when evil is all around. The heart meanwhile is conscious that it has no association with it, and would only flee away and be alone in quiet, for the condition is that it has none to trust in. But this casts the mind on the Lord, for after all it has not the wings of a dove in this world.

The effect of this is to bring up the wickedness before the Lord, that is, in its full light. This necessarily brings in the aspect in which all is looked at in the Psalms, of patience under evil, and

righteousness which must view evil as evil; for (though Christ's sufferings under it even to wrath are brought in, and so grace in judgment passed, yet in general as to the government of God) this necessarily brings in the thought of judgment; for the judgment of evil and the deliverance of the oppressed are in the nature of God as governing and seeing all things. The heart groaning under oppression and suffering before, while thinking of evil sought to be charged on it (and so with horror and oppression of spirit), can now, as looking to the Lord, judge all the evil more calmly as to itself in its own character, and the judgment which must follow. And full confidence in Jehovah, a known covenant God, springs up. And then, free in spirit, one can, from verse 19, look calmly at it all and see the end. The full and blessed conclusion in the deepest sense of the most pressing evil is, "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved." Here end all the exercises giving the ground of our constant faith. And although the psalm looks for judgment, if we take the principle of this declaration, it is the blessed sustainment of faith in all trial. There are two points in this. "Cast thy burden upon the Lord." Whatever the trial or difficulty may be, cast it upon the Lord. It is not that the trial goes always—here it would not till judgment came; but "He shall sustain thee." It is better than the trials going. It is the direct coming in of God to ourselves, to our own souls, the sense of His interest in us, His favor, His nearness, that He comes to help us in our need. It is a divine condition of the soul, which is better than any absence of evil. God is a sure help to sustain us.

The second point is the infallible faithfulness of God. He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved. Tried they may be, but He cannot suffer evil in the world to prevail, nor will He. We may learn to trust by the evil, but in trusting we know the Lord will keep, and the extreme character of the evil only shows the rather that God must come in—makes His intervention necessary.

Psalm 56. The soul has got out of the depths of inward distress in which it was in Psalm 55 For, though the faithful one's enemies lie in wait for him, it is not the unfaithfulness and treachery of friend's. They are enemies who seek to wrong him. He is afraid, more than distressed, and looks through the difficulties to God. Faith is readily in activity. In the previous psalm his spirit was inwardly deeply depressed. Here he is only tried. Hence he soon can trust in God, and His word is the testimony of certain deliverance to him.

In Psalm 55 it was only at verse 19 and at the end he could bring God in. Here God is at once before his soul. In truth outward trials are little compared with inward breaches on the spirit. "The spirit [even] of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?" (Pro. 18:14). The saint's trust then is in God. But this trust in God is not without some revelation of God. Hence, when the soul can look at Him and trust, that by which He has revealed His mind, the testimony which in His love He has given to us, becomes at once the guide and confidence of the soul. It is a blessed thing to have it. God cannot but make it good. These two points are the hinges of thought in this psalm—God Himself and His word. "In God will I praise his word." His word gives us the sure witness of what He will be, what He is for us. But if it be God, what can flesh do? This is the conclusion that the soul comes to. It has enemies, perhaps mighty and strong ones, nor is it insensible to them. They hide themselves and plot against the faithful one; and he has no resource in flesh. All this is good for him. It makes him know the world he is in and weans him from flesh. But what can he do? He can do nothing. This casts him then on God, and this is as positively blessed as it is useful. In truth, if God be for us, what can flesh do? The worldly man may have fleshly resources against flesh. The saint cannot have recourse to these. It would take him away

from God just when God is leading him wholly to Him. He cannot say “confederacy” to all to whom the people weak in faith say confederacy. But he is not to fear their fear either, nor be afraid, but sanctify Jehovah of Hosts Himself; and He shall be for a sanctuary. It is out of the occasion of fear that the faithful one looks out to God here. Then what can flesh do? God disposes of everything and has His plans, which He will certainly bring to pass.

But there is another blessing accompanies this, and a deep one. The soul is in trial, the wicked plotting against it. But God is with it in the sorrow and takes account of it all. He tells the wanderings of the saint, for he is here looked at as deprived of outward privileges with God’s people and in His house; but God counts all this up, and the saint can look, as it is beautifully expressed, to His putting every tear into His bottle. Every sorrow of the saint is in His book. It is a blessed thought. So the heart confides in Him and knows that, when it cries to Him, all its enemies will be turned back. Then, as it praised His word in faith in the midst of its fears and sorrows, looking to it, sustained by it, counting on it—oh, that saints knew how to do it!—so now the soul will do it in counting on deliverance by His sure intervention.

Another principle is found in this psalm (in a Jewish form, of course) connected with these exercises of heart, and which are ever found in them, and indeed one great object of them as coming from God, the sense of belonging to, and being given up to, consecrated to, God: “Thy vows are upon me.” It will be in the sense of praise and rendered in praise when delivered; but the heart learns in these trials, what we are apt to forget, that we do not belong to ourselves. It is, in its lowest stage, connected with the want of deliverance; in the highest, with the joy that God owns us for His own, the foundation being the redemption which has made us wholly His in fact, as indeed Israel was externally as redeemed from Egypt. Hence praises are in the heart of the oppressed one already. He receives what he prays for, believing. But the soul uses mercies and deliverances to count for more. It has been delivered from death; hence it looks to be kept from falling. It was under the power and oppression of the enemy, of him that has the power of death, the devil: it is set free; but now it has to walk without stumbling and falling in the way, but it has learned its dependence in the trial and it looks to God for this. “Wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling?” But the soul has learned more in its distress, the comfort of walking before God in the light of His favor and the safety of His presence. It looks to this as the object of its being kept. It does look for its own peace and comfort, but it looks for it before God. The light of the living was the light of divine preserving favor for Israel. It is not the highest order of joy here, but it is the soul’s looking out of distress and oppression to that faithful goodness of God which shall make it walk before Him in safety and in peace.

In Psalm 57 there are the same trials, but more confidence. But his eye seeing more brightly God’s power and help, it sees more of the evil and wickedness of its enemies and less of its own oppression, and this is constantly true. We have to watch this, for our heart is treacherous. If it gets out of its own oppression and fear, it is apt to dwell too much on the wickedness of its enemies. Looking more at God, it must see this more. That is not the evil, but dwelling on it. It is dangerous to merge evil and go on comfortably, but it is injurious also to dwell on evil. It does not nourish the soul— how should it?—and a spirit contrary to the gospel grows up. We shall see it, if we are near God, but we shall soon be occupied with God and not with the evil. He is above it all.

Thus there is progress in these three psalms. Between Psalm 56 and 57 the first verse shows the difference: the former, “for man would swallow me up” (Psa. 56:1); the second, “for my soul trusteth in thee” (Psa. 56:1). There he was trusting God’s word, here he is looking for the accomplishment of it by the hand of God, and trusts under the shadow of His wings till the tyranny be overpast. Hence he is able to look out to God’s exalting Himself above the heavens and His glory above all the earth. It is not that the power of evil is not there as much as it was. It is, and the soul is bowed down through it, but the mind rests more on God. Remark too, that there is no thought of resisting the evil and getting rid of it by one’s own strength. It waits on God, and this it must do to have its own path perfect. And this Christ did.

The former psalm felt more God’s entering into the sorrow. This looks more to its own escape out of it, but by God’s sending from heaven and accomplishing deliverance. He sees too the evil taken in their own plannings. There is no thought of counter-planning. But, casting himself wholly on God, he sees their own plans to be their ruin, and this is a striking way of judgment and confirmation of faith. He gets through faith, so to speak, praise ready, and in the (Ammim and Leummim) peoples and nations: it is not specially among the heathen as adverse and opposed. His trials are within the people, the men he was associated with; and it is not triumph over adversaries, but deliverance where he could only bow down his heart. But the result was praise among men in a wider sphere than that he had been tried in; and so it ever is, for He who delivers is great. In fact he looks out to millennial glory, when all will be gathered together in one in Christ. But I use it now as seen here in God’s ways.

On Psalm 58 very few words will suffice. The force of the psalm is this: the wicked as such are hopeless as to amendment, but God will judge them; so that men will see that there is a reward for the righteous and a God that judgeth the earth. Is there upright, just judgment among men? is the question. There is wickedness in their hearts: they plan and plot in it. It is in their nature and will, and characterizes itself by falsehood. It is of the serpent, in its nature devilish; and they refuse any and every attracting power and influence, whatever it may be. God comes in and Jehovah judges: let their power and strength be as lions, they melt away to nothing when His hand comes in. Vengeance—and this explains the joy in it—does come in, vindicates the just man and shows him right, however he may have seemed helpless and been oppressed, and God righteous, and that there is a judge in spite of oppression.

Psalm 59 I have not much to say on this psalm in view of our present object in commenting on them. It refers directly to the desired judgment of the heathen. I may only note that absence of all conscience and all heart is to be expected from the world when the Lord and His saints are in question; a terrible judgment, but which these psalms, as well as experience, prove to be true. The simple refuge of the saint is in God. “God is my defense.” It is not counter-plotting, nor using human means to meet the power of the enemy. We may partially perhaps and for a time so succeed, but in using carnal weapons we have lost the dependence which calls God in, and the perfection of walk and testimony which waiting on Him gives. We have played into the hands of the enemy by acknowledging the power of the world as competent to settle the question of good and evil, a power which after all, till Christ comes, is in his hands, though under God’s sovereign rule. The heart of the saint has to say, “the God of my mercy.” He knows Him as such. His favor is what he cares for, and he trusts His faithfulness. He expects the wickedness, which has no fear of God at all. They will return heartless and impious, but the godly will sing of God’s power. And not that

only—mercy, tender consideration of the afflicted saint, of him who has need even of mercy through his failure, has been experienced at the hands of God. He will sing aloud of God's mercy, and that when brighter times come; for in the trouble that mercy has been shown. God is his strength too, and to Him he sings. The saint thus encouraged not only sings of God but to God. The wickedness of the wicked is viewed as pure wickedness here. As between God and the saint there may be occasion for discipline; but between the saint and the wicked, the former had given no occasion to the malice of his enemy. Still, towards God, in the sense of the power of this evil, he looks for mercy. His heart loves to turn there in the sense of weakness and nothingness. God for him is the God of his mercy.

Psalm 60 is one which we can only apply in principle to our outward conflicts with the power of evil. There God can leave us, as to His government, for the time, to defeat and scattering. And it is the deepest kind of chastening in these conflicts. For as we serve in God's cause, we see that it is defeated on earth through our fault or failure. No doubt in us pride may be mortified too, as we are in the conflict; still the feeling of grief and distress is a genuine feeling, a feeling which must fill the heart of the servant of God. It is a terrible thing to see those who stand in the place of God's people and witnesses put to the worse before their enemies, the cause of God for the moment defeated. God has given a banner to them that fear Him to be displayed because of the truth. He has set His ensign among them, and it is terrible if with this they are defeated and driven back; if when saying Jehovah-Nissi, the enemy has the upper hand. Jehovah had war with Amalek; but if Achan was in the camp, He did not go out. For if God contends, it is in and for the exercise of His people. But when thus cast down, faith does not lose its courage though drinking the wine of astonishment. It looks to God, judges the evil if it be there, looks to God, owning there must be some if it does not discover it. But God has spoken in His holiness. The very unchangeableness of His nature, which allows no evil, gives the certainty that He will make good His word in their favor. To this faith looks; on this it counts. And when it has to say, "Who hast cast us? and…will go out with our hosts?" it says, "Wilt not thou, O God, which hadst cast us off?" Then all is right. The One who had thus disciplined His people would be their sure and faithful deliverer and strength. Through Him, though at first scattered, the saints will do valiantly. For faith looks through everything to God, because He is faithful, and His favor better than life. This confidence is fully brought out in the psalm which follows.

Psalm 61. The soul is still removed from the enjoyment of present blessing. It is at the end of the earth, but looks to God. The heart is overwhelmed within itself. There is no resource within in the pressure of circumstances. Pride may stand up against difficulties and be haughty even in destruction, but this is not the path of the saint. Besides, the fortitude which maintains itself in adverse circumstances has always some result to hope for; but in the circumstances of the saint here before us, there were none. He is driven out and no ground to hope for human deliverance, and pride is far from him. He bows to God's hand; but he has a resource—God leads him to the rock that is higher than he. Faith gets to what is above circumstances, when nature is overwhelmed by them. And if God be for us, who can be against us? God takes an interest in us; we know it; He has shown it. The heart can look to Him with whom all circumstances are nothing. The heart trusts God and self disappears overwhelmed, as it may be. God is the securer and portion of the believer. All else is then simply nothing. It is the contrast between God and circumstances, instead of between ourselves and circumstances. God has heard the cry of

distressed faith, and, as it trusts now, so will it abide forever in the tabernacle of God. It is the secret of all peace in trial, the Rock higher than ourselves. The spies saw themselves grasshoppers. Was God so? The walls were up to heaven—what matter when they tumbled flat down?

Psalm 62. Waiting on God is the subject of this psalm. It implies dependence, confidence; and both in such sort that we abide God's time: dependence, because we cannot do anything without Him, and ought not, because what He does is what the soul alone desires, because action without Him, even in self-defense, is only the action of our own will, and so our being without God so far. Saul did not wait upon God. He waited nearly seven days; but if he had felt he was dependent, and nothing could be done without God, he would have done nothing till Samuel came. He did not; he acted for himself, and lost the kingdom. Deliverance from God is sweet; it is love; it is righteous, holy deliverance; it becomes the revelation of the favor and grace of God. It is perfect in time, way, place. So where the soul waits for it, will not being at work, it meets and enjoys the deliverance in this perfectness; and we are perfect and complete in the will of God. But it implies confidence too; for why should we wait if God would not come in? The soul is thus sustained meanwhile. And this confidence is such that we tarry the Lord's leisure. Patience has its —perfect work, so that we should be perfect and complete in all the will of God. There is too an active reckoning upon God. But this leaves the soul absolutely and exclusively waiting on Him. It is not active for itself; it waits only upon God. ("Truly" in verse 1 and "only" in verses 2, 4, 5 and 6 is the same word in Hebrew.)

The two points connected with it show the state of soul: "from him cometh my salvation"; "my expectation is from him." He only is the rock and salvation; so the confiding soul waits for Him, and seeks no other refuge—looks for deliverance only from Him. Hence, in principle (in fact, in Christ), the heart is perfect in its confidence, and meets in dependence the perfectness of God; it accepts nothing but that, because it is assured that God is perfect and will act perfectly in the right time. Faith corresponds thus to the perfection of God. On the other hand there is no working of self-will at all, no acceptance or saving of self by an intervention inferior in its nature to God Himself. This makes patient waiting on God a principle of immense moment. It characterizes faith in the Psalms, and so Christ Himself.

But there are a few points yet to remark. "Trust in him at all times." There is constancy in this confidence, and constancy in all circumstances. If I look morally to Him, He is always competent, always the same, He does not change. I cannot act without Him, if I believe that He only is perfect in His ways. But, note, this does not suppose there is not exercise and trial of heart; or indeed waiting upon God would not have to be called for. But if God is faithful, and awaits the time suited to the truth and His own character, so that His ways should be perfect, He is full of goodness and tender love to those who wait upon Him. He calls upon them to pour out their hearts before Him. How truly was this the case with Christ too! How in John 12, and above all in Gethsemane, He poured out His heart before God! God is always a refuge: He acts in the right time. He is always a refuge for the heart; and the heart realizes what He is when the deliverance is not come: and in some respects this is more precious than the deliverance itself. But it supposes integrity.

But yet another point. The effect of thus waiting on God's deliverance is to make us know that it will be perfect and complete when it does come. "I shall not be moved." He had to wait, indeed, till God came in in perfectness; but then His power secured from all. Man may think there is a

resource in man, or in what man possesses, or in man's strength of will; but power, faith knows, belongs to God. The last verse shows that the soul is looking to the perfect divine righteousness of God's ways, but in the sense of integrity. The final intervention of God, the judgment He executes, will be the deliverance of the righteous. He has identified himself with God's ways on earth in heart, and waited till God makes them good, perfectly good, in power. But this will be the end of evil, and mercy to those who have sought good, and waited for God to avenge them. It will be a righteous reward to the expecting righteous man: his waiting will be met, and the power of evil set aside. In this path we have to walk. God deals so now in government, though not in its final accomplishment: but we have thus to count and wait upon Him.

Psalm 63 supposes the full knowledge of the blessings of relationship with God, but not the full enjoyment of those blessings; on the contrary, that he who thus knows them is in a place entirely the contrary of all their blessedness. But then, the thing sought and desired is not the blessing, but God Himself, and the revelation of His glory where He dwells. The whole being thirsts after Himself. The effect of being in the world, in the dry and thirsty land, is not complaint, nor even looking for deliverance; but thirst is thirsting after God. This sense of nature which craves after Him gives us the consciousness also that He is our God. It is the perfect delight the divine nature in us has in Him which gives the sense of this relationship. They cannot be separated. To have any knowledge of God, and not know Him as ours, is despair, or near to it as may be. And God even so is not known as the spring of delight, so that we desire Him. "My God," and this thirst cannot be separated. It is not Jehovah and blessings, but the divine nature and God its delight; but with the dependent sense of appropriation expressed in "my God."

The soul which has the same desires in their nature as God Himself (hence desires after Himself), feels morally and really that He is its God. This was perfectly so in Christ only; and we never lose the sense of relationship and retain this. Still it is true in the nature of the delight, when that delight does not take the form of relationship, but of nature; when I do not say, Father, but "my God."

But then this very thirst and desire after God longs to see Him possessing His full power and glory, and must. We cannot love much One we look up to without desiring Him to enjoy all the fullness of the glory that belongs to Him, and to see Him in it. We owe our delight in Him, and feeling of indebtedness to Him; we must desire He should have all that is due to Him, and that we should see Him have it. And this feeling even Christ meets: "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 give Me: for thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24). But the main desire, the spring of all this, is the desire after God Himself, and known as our God, come what will. Not only the heart can appropriate it, as has been said, but would have it so, and none else. The nature which is of God would have none but Him, and would earnestly have Him. Where God is truly known thus, and the soul identified with Him in desire, the fact that it is where there is not one drop of what can refresh it, as is the case in this world, only renders this longing after Him more intense. But it is because He is known, known as He reveals Himself in the intimacy of His own nature, in the sanctuary where He displays Himself and makes Himself known. But with this there is another thought: that is, when God is thus known as He is in the sanctuary, His loving kindness, His grace, His favor, and goodness, are felt by the soul. The sense of them rests upon it. This is better than life, which means life here, the present enjoyment of it in this world; and, as to that, he had absolutely nothing of it: so Paul, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most

miserable” (1 Cor. 15:19). There indeed it was more outward pressure; here the inward necessary sense, from the life in which he speaks and feels here, that there was not the smallest thing in what was in the world which could meet and refresh that nature. So perfectly with Christ. Still, though connected with trial, this was remarkably unfolded in Paul. He rejoiced in the Lord alway, when nothing refreshed his spirit.

Hence, in the sense of this loving kindness, in a dry and thirsty land his lips praised his God. This is very sweet; and, note, it is perfect in its nature, because it is simply God; for in the land the saint is in, there is absolutely nothing. God, his God, is his desire; His loving kindness is the refreshing of his soul. Now this is perfect divine life in one having the divine nature, but in the place of dependence, known only to the soul born of God, or in its perfection. So Christ.

This gives then exclusively its color to life. “Thus will I bless thee while I live” (down here in the dry and thirsty land). This is all his soul lives in here. Hence in this life he blesses God, his God. His whole life in the dry land is in spirit out of it. Nothing attracts his soul in it at all. It finds its refreshings, because the land is altogether such to the new nature, wholly in God. Yet he is not in the present full enjoyment of God as present; he is still in the dry and thirsty land, but blesses while he lives, and owns and worships the God he thus knows. But there is perfect happiness and satisfaction of heart when separated from the turmoil of the world; and when nothing is there to engage the flesh’s attention, which is perfect misery to the flesh, but real deliverance to the renewed spirit, the soul can meditate upon God Himself. The soul finds in God Himself the fullest and richest food. The soul is satisfied, does not want anything else, when it can be thus alone with God, in whom is its delight, but is filled with it.

So in coming to Christ (only there negatively, which is what human nature in this world wanted, here positively, because it is the new nature’s delight in God), “he that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst” (John 6:35). There shall not be the unsatisfied cravings of men’s hearts in this world. But here there is the full satisfaction. The delights of the heart are created and satisfied with the revelation of God Himself. God is essentially delighted in and enjoyed. And as the soul is full, so it overflows in praise; the mouth praises with joyful lips. There is not the need here of weighing how far we are enabled, or entitled, to praise in the state we are in. It is the new nature finding its own proper delight in God, and thinking (as the new nature does) of nothing else; and, because thinking of Him simply, has not itself to think of, and praises because He is a source of praise. And this is true simplicity. When the eye is not single, the thought of God detects it, and comes as a claim, and forces us to think of ourselves; but when, as is here supposed, it is simply the new nature, its whole delight is simply in God, and the lips praise joyfully. This simplicity of heart is very blessed. Remark here, that while it speaks of this, the psalm supposes one exposed to the distractions of the world, and hence looks to the condition of the soul in loneliness, where, instead of feeling that, it is only delivered from distraction to delight in God.

Next, the psalm takes up not merely distractions, but adverse circumstances—the force of enemies. The soul sees God, its God, as its help, that is, as having been so. God was his joy; and his soul, in this wholly desert world, where no water is, was satisfied as with marrow and fatness. That was taking it in spirit out of the world, making it joy in God. But the Blessed One was what he needed for this world too, its conflicts and trials. And this is very gracious of God. We rejoice in the

Lord always as looking to the source of our joy. But if without are fightings, and even within fears, He comforts them that are cast down. “Because thou hast been my help.” But here is described as already experienced what Paul speaks of himself as experiencing. Hence it is the aspect of the soul towards God because of this. The soul would rejoice under the shadow of God’s wings. It was the known place of refuge and confidence. There is the comfort of feeling at all times the favor of God, and the security in which we thus dwell. I know not what may arise, but He will be there; nor this only, but the sense of His goodness and active interest in the soul is a source of sweet joy to it. The soul rejoices in having this divine favor its refuge, and actively interested in securing it. Thus the soul’s condition is this in its activities, it follows hard after God. It would follow Him, come to Him, enjoy His presence; and it had the sure certainty that His right hand upholds it.

The latter verses are the judgment on the enemies of the godly men, according to the government of God, and particularly the enemies of Christ. But our present object is the former part. Still, as we have often seen, God does govern, and we may reckon so far upon His interference as is needed for securing the blessing of His people who depended upon Him, though it may not be at the moment our nature could desire.

On the whole the psalm shows us simple faith, the soul making God Himself its joy, and rejoicing in the sure care of the Lord, whose favor protected it as a shield. If we compare this psalm with Psalm 84, which in many respects resembles it, it will be seen that there the present enjoyment of covenant blessings is in view, and the way up to them; here more what God Himself is as away from them in the dry thirsty land, and His protection and care in the difficulties and dangers we are in there. If we think of the remnant driven out, which is the character of the book prophetically, it makes this view easily intelligible.

Psalm 64 shows a peculiar course of things in the world, yet one with which every one exercised in the service of God in this world is familiar—that of the wicked, who hate righteousness, seeking to charge evil on the upright. This shows the universality and power of conscience, and another truth too— that the principles of those who trust God and confess His name are expected to produce what is purely good. This is really the strongest witness to the principles of faith on the one hand, and to the utter wickedness of the human heart on the other. The wicked recognize that faith ought to produce, and, as its own proper fruit, does produce, what is right and perfect, and expects it from him who walks by faith. But they show their hatred of that principle, and of those who cleave to the Lord by it, by searching out iniquity and inconsistency. This is a terrible proof of the wickedness of the world; and yet it is universal, not only found, yea, not so much found among the openly ungodly as in decent unbelievers. Here it is indeed in those who pursue iniquity willfully, not evident immorality but wickedness, who are pursuing it in their secret counsels. Yet it is the spirit of evil in man. Plotting is characteristic of evil, but its extreme character. But there is concurrence of feeling and acting with a like mind when it has not gone so far as plotting, because a like spirit animates them. Then their tongues are the instruments of attack and injury. The saint has no outward defense or remedy, but as to this, as with regard to violence, God is his refuge.

Remark, he speaks of the fear of the enemy. This malice tends to produce fear. The godly is no equal match for it, he can use no weapon against it. He leaves it to God in representing it to Him. God exercises His saints; but in result the wicked bring His judgment on their own heads, and even fear and see and own God’s work. For this the godly must wait, and then joy will be

complete, though their deliverance, being a divine one, must wait till the divine time of judgment arrive. So Abraham was kept a stranger and his descendants under oppression, “for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full” (Gen. 15:16). It may be that the trial is not complete for us, but in all events, when God intervenes, it will be the perfect time for us. But another thing than our deliverance results. The deliverance being in God’s time, and so according to His perfect judgments, His ways are displayed in it. And God’s judgments being in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness. This is the full accomplishment; but even in particular cases men glorify God in the day of visitation, and own that they who trusted God were right; that God, who seemed not to interfere, only awaited in His holy righteousness, and that He does care for the righteous, and thus His ways are perfect. And this is an immense gain. God is glorified.

Psalm 65 refers directly to the blessing of this creation, and the praise and joy which will spring forth when He sets aside the power of evil, but looks, as witnesses of it, to the present effect of His goodness. It looks, for the groaning creation waits, not only for Israel as here, but much more in order to its deliverance, for the manifestation of the sons of God, for the blessing of God’s people, that this universal blessing may take place; but the heart is ready, and this leads us to a general principle instructive to us at all times—the readiness of heart to praise in the midst of trial, and the almighty power which is looked to, whose nature is to give blessing. But this psalm again applies only to the circumstances of the believer. The Christian is never according to the Spirit, in a state of soul in which he cannot praise. His heart may have got away from God, so that the Spirit has to rebuke him and humble him, but then praise is not ready at all. Here the thought is that, though the heart be ready, circumstances do not furnish occasion to praise. Praise is silent, though there is the consciousness that praise belongs to God; the vow will be performed. This may be the Christian’s case. He may say in trying circumstances, I am sure I shall yet praise and thank Him for deliverance. And this is a right spirit. As to our highest praise, this is always the case. In the heavenly courts our praise is yet silent, and we wait and long for it. Verse 4 plainly shows that this is the Jewish form of it: it is the thought of the psalm. The general thought there is, we only await the blessing to be fulfilled for praise to break out. God’s faithfulness and power are celebrated as assuring this: here in judgment and for earthly blessings; but the Christian, whatever hindrance and adverse powers there may be, counts on this faithfulness and power of God to bring him into the heavenly city. Transgressions will not bar the way; through grace only we say, “Thou shalt purge them away.” He hears our prayer and helps us.

Further, it is a question of the necessary glory of the Lord, and even in the earthly part; but the principle is there. All flesh must come to Him. This the Jew looked to as a part of the glory. God’s purposes must be accomplished to His glory, but He has in grace identified them with us. As Paul expresses it, by the Spirit, All the promises of God are in Him (Christ), yea, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God by us. Hence faith, assured that God must be glorified, looks to our own glory and blessing in it. This marks faith, not merely believing that God is glorious, but connecting His glory with the blessing of His people. So Moses, “What wilt thou do unto thy great name?” “The Canaanites, and all the inhabitants of the land, shall hear of it” (Josh. 7:9); and so ever in his pleadings with God. What a source of security and ground for praise, that God should have thus identified His glory with our blessing and His promises to us in Christ!

Psalm 66. There is one point in this psalm as to its moral force which is of great interest to notice: the way in which, when deliverance comes, all is ascribed to God. And God is seen all through. It

goes back to original redemption, the unequivocal source of all (vs. 6), while the final blessing of God's people is the blessing of the world. Even when all seemed to have been darkness, it is now seen His power was above all. He rules by His power forever. His eyes behold the nations. Woe to him that exalts himself! But not only this: God is seen in the trouble itself, and as the author of it, though our failures may have been the occasion of it. This is the true test of the heart being right—what is called (as to Israel in Leviticus), accepting the punishment of our iniquity. Two things are seen in it: God brought them into the trouble; He held their soul in life through it. So with Job in both points. Nor did He suffer their feet to be moved out of the divine path of faith by the trial.

Verses 10-11, recognize this; and if instruments were employed, yet they were but instruments. The trial was, and they see and feel it, very great; but it was God's doing. Nor was this all. God has a positive purpose in this, a path, a place of love which He carries through, and of which the trial was a part to fit the soul for the place of so great blessing. "Thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place." God sends the trouble, preserves the soul in it, purges the soul by it as silver, brightens its hope which rests more entirely on Him, and looks with purer eye for what He has promised, and then brings out into a wealthy place.

But some other points come out as to the state of the soul meanwhile. The trouble had cast the soul on God. And though to us all such things as vows are wrong, yet the reference of the heart to Him, the turning of it to Him as the source of hope in a better way, though under chastisement, is just what hoping in Him produces. Have confidence in, and wait on, Him when tried, and chastened; till the will is broken, we cannot; when it is, we can, though conscious the sorrow is the fruit of our fault. This supposes integrity; it issues in thanksgiving. The heart can then too bear testimony for God to others; it has known what He has been for itself. It cried and He heard. This, says the apostle, is the confidence we have in Him. For what is here learned through sorrow should be the constant state of the soul without it. Still the governing feeling of the soul is its own thankfulness, and so it will be. It will turn back to that, that is, to God—to the secret of its own thankfulness to Him, which is the joy of the heart. The force of the psalm is recognizing all this after deliverance; but what it produces when received into the heart is answering faith when the trouble is there.

On Psalm 67 I have only a remark to make. The glory of God is the spring of the desire of the heart for blessings even on His people. Then blessings flow out and praise goes up to God. This psalm explains Romans 11:15.

On Psalm 68, striking and interesting as the psalm is, I have, for our present object, little to say. One or two remarks, by the bye, present themselves to me. It is specially God's character as regards the Jews in grace, but in His own sovereign grace; not in covenant relationship, but as establishing them, as once in Sinai, only now in grace and power. Jah is not the same as Jehovah, I am fully persuaded. It is the absolute existence of God, not His continuous existence, so as to reckon on His faithfulness, who was, and is, and is to come. He is here, lives forever and ever. He is only called Jehovah in the psalm when He speaks of His dwelling on the mountain of Zion and His abiding, because there He takes His covenant place and name. We have Jah (vss. 14-18); but the Lord, elsewhere in the psalm, is Adonai. It seems to me to connect Christ with the restoration of Israel, to give Him the place of Lord, but more associated with His being also Jehovah than Psalm He. Verse 18 is naturally the center of this, only where, as He is Jehovah in Zion according

to promise, here ascended on His rejection, He receives gifts as man. He is beyond all Jewish promises. Yet it applies to Jews, the rebellious. But there it is not Jehovah, but Jah Elohim. Christ's exaltation will being back God in sovereign grace into the midst of Israel.

Psalm 69 is so fully prophetical of Christ that I make no remark on it here. It is a full description of His sorrows in life and death. I have spoken of it fully elsewhere (in article titled, "Psalm 69").

Psalm 70 calls for only one remark. The willingness to be anything—poor, needy, despised—provided the people of God be happy and in a condition which draws forth their praise. Jehovah's blessing is not despised, but for it Jehovah is waited for. But the heart set on the happiness and blessing of God's people—this is the true spirit of faith in the saint.

Psalm 71 will not detain us either. It rests on two points. God's righteousness—the psalmist claims nothing on the ground of his own; but God will be consistent with Himself— not desert or abandon him. Hence he counts on His faithfulness.

Psalm 72 is Christ's glory as Solomon, so as not to call for our remarking anything here on its contents.

Chapter 3

Practical Reflections on the Psalms: Third Book

Although Psalm 73, which begins the third book of Psalms, refers directly to the temporal judgment of God in Israel, as satisfying the anxieties of heart among the faithful; yet, as these anxieties are of all times we shall find something to note here. We see the ungodly having their way, so that God seems to have forgotten, and the heart is envious. But it shows in our case too often that the heart would yet have its portion here—at least a portion here as well as one to come. The sorrow at the power of evil in the world is right, but it mingles itself in our minds with liking to have one's own way and judgment in setting it aside. When the will mixes itself up with the sense of the success of evil, it is either irritated or disheartened so as to give up perseverance in good. The ungodly prosper in the world. What a riddle! Where is God's government? What is the use of good? No doubt it was more directly trying where temporal blessings had been made a sign of divine favor. But Christians are seldom separated enough from this world not to feel the success of wickedness, and a desire to take vengeance on it. Mere indifference to it is utterly evil. Thus the path is narrow, and grace must work in the heart to lead us in it to feel the evil in itself, to feel God's glory cast in the dust by it; but to abide God's time and way, as Christ did when He suffered.

There is no place of learning but in the sanctuary. There the will is bowed: there God is known: there the eye is not obscured by the passions of the world, and an ignorance of how to do what God alone could do—make allowance for any good, have perfect patience with evil, so that judgment shall be simply on evil, and be true judgment on evil without excuse. Our impatience would be nothing of this, even where the evil as such is justly judged. But in the sanctuary will is silent and God is listened to. His ways are right, and we see things with His eye. The evil is worse, the compassion right, the patience adorable, yet the judgment sure; so that the sense of righteousness is not crossed in the heart, though the will of vengeance is; for the wrath of man does not work the righteousness of God. The judgment is righteous because patience is perfect—far more terrible because there is no passion in it. It refers to God. When we desire that fire may come down from heaven, self is in it. We do not know what manner of spirit we are of; yet, in one sense, they really deserved it. When God awaked in His own just time, they are as a dream. Their pride, pretensions, all is as a departed image. Faith has to believe this, and leave them there.

But another blessed truth comes out here. He had been foolish, ignorant—"as a beast," so he says, "before Thee God"; yet there had been integrity and conscience. If he had let his thoughts loose when half disposed to say godliness was no use, he would have offended against the generation of God's children. This checked him. How beautiful to see in the waywardness of man's will these holy affections, this conscience of putting a stumbling-block in the path of the weakest of God's children, check the heart, and show where the affections really are, and that fear of God which shows He is lovingly known—that the new nature is there! It is a great mark of good that God is owned. But what he knows of himself is that he was as a beast in his heart's reasoning as it did. But, then, mark what is seen. He comes to see that, in spite of all this, while owning his folly, he was continually with God. O how the full knowledge of self, when we know as we are known,

will show the patient unvarying grace of God waiting on us all the way in adorable love and interest in us! Through all his foolishness he was continually with God, and God had holden him by his right hand. Blessed grace! God loves us, cares for us, watches over us, is interested in us; because of His sovereign love, we are necessary to His satisfaction. He withdraweth not His eyes from the righteous. This is a wondrous thought of constant grace. But He is God, and not man. And so the heart here counts on Him.

Up to this, through all his shortcomings in faith, he could say, “Thou hast holden”: now he says, as in communion, “Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel.” This is not merely holding up unconsciously; it is the mind and will of God guiding us in communion. Hence it is seen when he has judged himself and is in communion; it is not that God does not guide us—make us go according to His own counsels, when we are not in communion, holding our mouths with bit and bridle; for He does. But the soul does not understand it, then cannot speak, as here, in the knowledge of His doing it by His counsel. This He does. Here we meet, in the full force of the passage, the plain distinction of the Jewish position. “After the glory, thou wilt receive me.” It has been altered to make more of it for Christian ideas, and the true meaning is lost. Compare Zechariah 2:8.

After the glory, when this is set up, Israel will be received; but in that glory we shall come with Christ. The heart is now set right by this visit to the sanctuary: “Whom have I in heaven but thee?” We, indeed, may have our thought expanded by the knowledge of the Father and the Son; still the truth abides, only better known. Who in heaven but God, the center and source and all of blessing? On earth, where with such as us not thus fixed on God, there might be distracting desires, there is no source of delight with Him; that is, He is the only one. Singleness of eye is complete. As we are in the world, it does make us feel alone, but alone with God. So the blessed Savior. “All ye shall be offended because of me this night” (Mark 14:27). “And shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me” (John 16:32). In one sense the heart accepts the dominancy of evil and is blessedly abstracted from all to God. See thus the blessing of this seeming evil. Were all peaceful and good, prosperous in the present and imperfect state of things, the heart would sink into that imperfect state and be really worldly; but the prevalence of evil, though pressing on the spirit (the will checked by the feeling that one cannot dissociate oneself from God’s people), drives to the sanctuary of God. The heart is weaned from this world, and, in a world where evil does prevail, looks up to God, has Himself for its portion alone in heaven, and so nothing along with Him on the earth. He holds the one sovereign place in the heart. Nothing competes with Him at all. As in the New Testament, “Christ is all.”

But this brings in another blessing. This endures. Heart and flesh fail; surely they do. God is the strength of my heart. He stays with divine strength and goodness and sustains the heart, and is not only a present stay, but an everlasting portion, our portion forever. This leads to a sweet and earnest conclusion. It is good for me to draw near to God. There we learn truth; there we find comfort. He has put his trust in the Lord Jehovah, in One sovereign in power, abiding and faithful in promise. He who does will surely have to declare all His wondrous works. He will be in the place to see and experience them, have the heart to notice and understand them, the joy of testifying the faithfulness of One the heart has trusted. In verse 20 we have only sovereign power; in the last verse, covenant faithfulness also.

As to Psalm 74, for our present purpose I have only one remark to make. We find in it confidence in the faithfulness of God (when as to outward circumstances, the power of the enemy seemed to make all hopeless) and on the ground of confidence in Himself; but then what He is for His people. Redemption has proved His deep and profound interest in them. They are His own. He has, though taking them up in sovereign grace, now bound Himself up (though in grace) with them. And the heart says, “Arise, O God, plead thine own cause.” This is very blessed. So Moses continually. “Thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt” (Ex. 3:12). Hence if the people be brought utterly low and the tumult of enemies rise higher and higher, this is only an additional motive, because it is grace, and faithful grace; and power over all things is with Him. The heart calls on God to remember the attacks and reproaches of the enemy instead of being alarmed by them, for the reproach is on His name. And this is true. For the world’s enmity is really against the Lord in being against His people. Were they not His people, they would not trouble their heads much about them. God’s people have to remember the same thing, and in their own weakness to remember what is in question.

Psalm 75 is the certainty and righteous government of Christ’s kingdom. Only remark, faith gives thanks before it is set up, warning the presumptuous wicked, for God is the judge. Human pretension is no use against Him. Remark too that, when Christ takes the kingdom, all is confusion, the earth and its inhabitants are dissolved. Our hearts should even say God’s name (for us the Father) is near; that is, all in which He reveals Himself is close to us. So that we can ever trust and not be afraid. The ways and dealings of God are according to His name. We believe in His name of Almighty and Most High, and that He will avenge the persecuted church on Babylon and its power; but it is not God’s name directly with us. This, as I have said, is Father. Hence, save of His children, it is not government. Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father. All the power that is in that name so displayed, or all the grace and faithfulness of it for those who are risen with Him and loved as He is, that which is ever near to us; and that wondrous work of Christ’s resurrection declares it, were death itself upon us.

Psalm 76. The general subject is still judgment executed in connection with Israel. But there is a general principle we may notice. First, that the seat of God’s blessing and throne, or its manifestation on earth, low as it may fall, is more excellent than all the might and violence of man. At God’s rebuke these fall, and man has no strength. When God arises, what can man do? But God’s execution of judgment on the earth has an immediate effect and purpose—the deliverance of the meek. He saves all the meek of the earth. His love and faithful goodness are even here in exercise. Then comes another principle, applicable at all times by faith, and an encouraging and consoling principle. God makes the wrath of man to praise Him. He turns everything to His own glory and purpose, and then stops all the rest. Where faith is in exercise, it counts on God through all, sure that God will have the last and final word in the matter.

In Psalm 77 we have some instructive points to notice. The complaint goes farther, perhaps, than that of any Christian ought to go. The seventh verse for us would be simple unbelief; whereas for the Jew, whose people are cast off as regards all their privileges, the question justly arises, as in Romans 11, “I say then, hath God cast away his people?” But if we keep this in mind, there is much to instruct us as regards the time of deep trouble, as when the pressure of very adverse circumstances or even our own fault may have brought the soul into deep distress as to that which surrounds it. The subject of this psalm is that he actually and actively sought the Lord. It was a

direct appeal of the heart, not merely a wish nor submission. He went with his voice to God about it. This is more important than we are apt to suppose.

I do not think it altogether just, that “prayer is the soul’s sincere desire, uttered or unexpressed.” I surely admit that there may be a sigh or a groan where the Holy Spirit’s intercession is, and that the lifting up of the heart to God will never find repulse or coldness there. All that I admit; but there is an actual carrying a known want or trouble to God, the expression of the need we are in. The heart expresses itself in a distinct application. Thus it brings itself before God, and this is very important in our relationship with God. There is truth in the inward parts, and true confiding dependence. Up to this there was gnawing trouble, the working of the heart on the trouble, the soul refusing to be comforted. The will was at work, and could not get what it wanted. The soul thinks of God, but no comfort was there. There was but its own thoughts of Him; there was complaint, not prayer, and the spirit overwhelmed. So, when awake, he cannot be occupied naturally with ordinary matters, he is silent through trouble. It is a strong picture of a thoroughly distressed soul; only fully realized when a soul, through the chastening hand of God, has lost the sense of divine favor, or does not yet know peace, but which in a certain degree of not looking to Him may be the case with any one. But the soul turns to God. It has enjoyed mercy and songs in the night. Would the Lord cast off forever? For the Christian this question has no place; but when the shield of faith is down, and the fiery darts of the wicked have reached the heart, a terrible and sore chastisement. The only thing like it is when a soul has lightly received the gospel in its mercy (without, however, being insincere), and the work of conscience goes on afterward. When, instead of communing with self and reasoning with its own misery, it looks to God, the heart sees all this in itself, not in God. This is the turning-point.

But the Christian does not go back to former mercies (as the Jew would, and rightly would), because he always stands in present favor, even if Satan have got hold of his mind for a time, and he returns into the sunshine of it, when the cloud that arose out of his own heart is passed. The Jews had early sovereign blessings, and are right to remember it when they have been cast off, though it be not forever. The Christian is never cast off. Hence he has not to remember but enters again into the enjoyment of divine favor which has never ceased. In the rest of the psalm the Christian learns God’s way is in the sanctuary. Let His favor be ever so unchangeable, His way is always according to His own holiness, though for the very same reason according to His own faithful love. Whenever Israel turns back, it is to sovereign grace and redemption. God’s way is in the sea—untraceable and in power. All the movements and power of what seems ungovernable and not to be got through are in His hand. On the whole, the psalm is the contrast between the working of the soul in restless anxiety in thus indulging its own thoughts, and turning, when it has recollected God, to cry to Himself. If the Christian apply it to interrupted favor, he is all wrong. But he may learn, in respect to overwhelming sorrow when the will is at work, that there is no rest till the soul remembers God and cries to Him.

Although Psalm 78 be evidently a recapitulation of the history of Israel, convicting them of their disobedience and unbelief, the uselessness as to their hearts of all God’s dealings with them, and then, so magnificently, His turning to His own sovereign grace to bless, yet there are some of the marks of unbelief, and warnings as to it, which it will be profitable to us to note. The great principle of the psalm which I have noticed is itself of the highest interest. Sovereign, grace is the only resource of God, if He is to bless man. All dealings, however gracious, fail of their object. He loves

His people, but He has no resource for blessing them but His own grace. If He acted on the effect of His dealings, He gives them up; they only turned aside like a deceitful bow. So ever. But when all was at the worst, He wakes in His love to His people, because of their misery and His love to them. Then He accomplishes the purpose of His own grace in His own way. He “chose the tribe of Judah, the Mount Zion, which he loved.... he chose David also his servant.”

Such is the general instruction of the psalm. But there are the characters of unbelief which are instructive. The past mercy and faithfulness of God will not give courage for a present difficulty. God must be known by a present faith. No reasoning from former mercies will give us confidence. “Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?... he smote the rock... can he give bread also?” Experience of goodness and power will not make man trust it, when some new need is there, or lust is at work. Nor was it better, though He commanded the clouds from above, and opened the doors of heaven, and rained down manna upon them. Nor did the correction of their lusts in the matter of the quails stop their unbelieving will. When under His hand, man remembers Him. A little ease brings forgetfulness and self-will. But He was full of compassion, and stayed His hand in judgment. “They turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel”—mistrust of God’s power to effectuate all His grace, to do what is needed in any case for His people, and to carry out His purposes for them. The moment I suppose anything cannot be for blessing, I limit God. This is a great sin—doubly, when we think of all He has done for us. The Holy Spirit ever reasons from God’s revealed infinite love to all its consequences. He reconciled; surely He will save to the end. He did not spare His Son; how should He not give all things? This, however, is goodness infinite; but doubt of power is doubting He is God. It hinders setting our hope in God. Experience ought to strengthen faith; but there must be present faith to use experience. The gracious Lord keep us from limiting God in His power, and so in His power to bless, and lead us not to remember Him only when His hand is upon us but for His own sake, and in the midst of present blessing, because the heart is set on Him! Then, in trials, we shall be able to count upon His goodness and have no disposition to limit His power.

Psalm 79 looks for judgment on the heathen. This I leave aside here. The only point I have to notice is the way, when brought very low, the heart turns to God. It does not even here avenge itself, but (the extreme of evil being come upon it) turns to God, and thus remembers its own sins. Nor has it any plea but God’s own name. “Remember not against us former iniquities: let thy tender mercies speedily prevent us.... Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of thy name: and deliver us, and purge away our sins, for thy name’s sake.” Such is the effect of chastisement. It supposes that we know God. It produces lowliness of heart, true confession, no pretension to any title to deliverance but God’s own goodness and name—what He is. Yet the soul rests on that. There is compassion—that God attends to the sighing of His prisoners; and (however strong the hand that holds those appointed to die) will act in the greatness of His power to preserve. The enemy had reproached the Lord in injuring His people. “Where is their God?”—their confidence. And the Lord showed Himself; and this is looked for, and His people praise Him.

This too shows another point we may often notice in scripture—not that God simply is glorious, and must maintain His glory; but that He, having taken a people in the earth, has identified His glory with that people. Faith feels this, with deep sense of it and thankful entering into it, and reckons on deliverance and grace. God delivers and secures His own glory. But for the very same reason God allows no evil, because His name is connected with His people, as we see in Israel:

“You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for your iniquities” (Amos 3:2). Here the punishment was on them, and the name reproached. So, humbling themselves, and looking for mercy and purging, they look for deliverance, because God’s people were brought low.

Psalm 80 is bold in its appeals. It passes from Egyptian deliverance to the knowledge, not of Christ, but of the Son of man. Still it looks at Him as the branch which God has made strong for Himself. It is not “I am the true vine…ye are the branches” (John 15:1,5), which makes the introduction of John is clear. Still it goes now far in owning the man of God’s power, the Son of man, whom He made strong for Himself. But if, in this confidence in God, and looking to the Son of man, it speaks boldly and refers all to grace, it is thoroughly Jewish. It refers to the order of the tribes in the wilderness. It knows God as sitting between the cherubim. Israel was His own vine; but it takes the fullest Jewish light—the Son of man. But it has no hope but God’s turning them again. It is this expression, which characterizes the cry of the psalm, which we must examine a little. It is found in verses 3, 7, 19. We may find it again in the same use in Jeremiah 31:18-19, and in Lamentations 5:21 a similar cry. This gives it much interest.

Mere discipline in itself does not turn to God. It may break the will, humble where God is working, and so do a preparatory work; but it does not turn to God. So they are brought here—and, in the desolations of Ephraim and Judah, when they are down to the lowest, because nothing less would do—to say, “Turn thou me” (Jer. 31:18), “Turn us again.” It is not simply godly sorrow and the consciousness of sin. Nor is this exactly the thought or feeling here. There is the sense of belonging to God, being God’s people, and the rebuke of God being upon them—”they perish at the rebuke of thy countenance.” It is the dealing of God with His people, or a saint in his testimony as now, when God deals with him in it. There is the sense of being His; but God’s work, which is repassed when it was carried out in blessing by God, is seen foiled and a witness of the enemy’s power; but this power is not what faith rests on, but the rebuke of God. Faith turns to Him, to Him as the original source of blessing and power that wrought it; as the One whose work it is who is always interested in His people. It rests on the beauty and delight of God’s work to Himself, as He had planted it, and now it was rooted up; and hence draws the conclusion of His present intervention in grace. But it looks for this first as a turning of themselves.

The state they are in is connected with the ruin, though not the main thought; they cannot separate their own state from God’s interposition. They needed it, but His first act must be restoring them, turning them. Blessing is their thought, but God’s blessing them as He blesses; hence beginning with them and turning them. But with this God’s face would shine on them, and they would be saved. How well that we can look to God when our face is set wrong, that He may turn us, and His face so shine on us as to bring blessing and present deliverance on His people. It looks to God; remark, too, returning and visiting the vine, but it does not look for the restoration of the original state of things (that is not God’s way), but to the setting up the branch God had made so strong for Himself. And so we now; we look to Christ’s being exalted even in details. If we have failed, it does not become us to look to God’s setting it right as before, as if nothing had happened—this could not be for His glory—but to the coming in of Himself to show His goodness in that which manifests His own grace, and hearing the cry of His people. “Let thy hand,” says the faith of Israel, “be upon the man of thy right hand.” Here they see their strength and safety—their being kept right. “So will not we go back from thee.” So it will be fully with Israel in the last day, and so with us practically.

His presence is what keeps us. There is another thing that faith seeks. Dullness and death are in turning away from God, and going their own way. They need, in being thus turned to be quickened, the reviving life-giving power which calls the heart back to God. It then, with increased seriousness and new confidence, calls upon Him. In Israel it is really life from the dead. It is more than the prayer which cries in trial. It is the heart confidingly calling on God, as turned again to Him. The prophetic scene is clearly the restoration of Israel. God does not hide His face from His saints now—He has from Israel: but in their work, and service, and state, as a body, they may find these ways in government.

But I would turn for a moment to the connection of this with personal turning and repentance in the similar passages to which I have alluded. In Jeremiah we have first, “Turn thou me, and I shall be turned” (Jer. 31:18). First then we have the action of God in grace turning the sinner round, converting him. He was looking away from God, had turned his back on God, and now in heart and will turns round towards Him. Repentance comes after this: “surely after that I was turned, I repented.” I set about, and as brought into the light, my heart towards God, I judged all my ways in my departure, my state of heart, and all. Instructed then in true blessing, having the mind of God as to good, one is confounded that one could have thought of such vanity and evil with desire.

But another thing is brought before us in the Epistle to the Corinthians. The turning of God brings into sorrow; 2 Corinthians 7. The apostle’s first epistle came with the power of the Spirit to their souls. It was not yet a full judgment of their state in the light, but the will being divinely arrested, there was grief in the sense of having gone wrong: conscience, not will, began to be at work; self may have partially mixed itself with it. Still it was godly sorrow, a broken will, brokenness of heart; the feeling—I have been following my own will, I have forgotten God. The illusion of a perverse will is gone, and the effect of having to say to God, the working of God’s nature in us begins. It is not with fear where rightly felt; no thought that God will impute, condemn, but sorrow and grief of heart at the perverseness and delusion of self-will having been followed. This works a far more active deliberate judgment of evil, called repentance here. Godly sorrow worketh repentance which we shall never regret. The soul by being turned, having by the operation of God’s grace been brought to grieve at having listened to will, now re-enters (or enters at first) into the natural effect and working of the new man at liberty. It judges with spiritual energy the whole evil as God judges it in principle. The sense of fault is not gone, but what characterizes the state is judgment of the fault—of self as far as self is in it. The heart is clear of the evil when it judges it as God judges it, and separates it from itself as a thing external to itself as God does. And this is holiness, often deeper from better knowledge of self than before.

We see an example of this in Peter’s address in Acts 2. Their sin was set before the people. They were pricked to the heart, and said unto Peter, What shall we do? The boisterous will was gone: no more “Crucify him, crucify him” (John 19:6). Sin has done its act, and can no more undo it. The folly of it comes home with distress to the heart. “What shall we do?” They are turned, have come to distress and godly sorrow. What are Peter’s words? “Repent, and be baptized every one of you…for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). Turned they were, grieved at heart at their folly in sinning, they had yet to repent. It is a larger, deeper, fuller thing of a soul brought into the light, and the new man exercising its judgment on what self had been. Not now as pressed on by God, and bowing in sorrow of heart to the effect of His grace and presence in the sense of the evil, but in our own spiritual rejection, with God, of the evil as such from the standing ground of the new man with

God. This is accompanied with brokenness and lowliness of heart, but the soul has re-entered into its own liberty with God. True repentance is there when self is proved clear in the matter, when the new standing has possession of the judgment and will, and judges freely, as a rejected thing, all that the flesh delighted in and had been misled by.

From Psalm 81 I have only a few brief principles to state as to the government of God. On the restoration of blessing, the precious ways of God are considered. Had there been faithfulness, there would not only have been peace instead of trouble, but rich present blessing. Whereas the effect of not hearkening to God was, that God gave them up to their hearts' lusts, and they walked in their own counsels and soon came under the power of their enemies, ever stronger than the people of God on their own ground. God has delivered us. We have been delivered from the bondage and burden of sin. Answered by divine power when in trouble and distress under it (a power which, while manifest in its effects, had its source of operation in the secret of the divine counsels), we are, as regards present dispensed blessings, put under responsibility, yet in the place of fullest ministered blessing. "If thou wilt hearken"—truth of heart to God is that which is looked for; not merely avoidance of actual evil, but no idol in the heart. This tests the heart—truth in the inward parts with God. But God calls to this as being already our God—now we say Father—who has delivered and saved us; and calls us in the path, no doubt, of obedience, to open our mouth wide that He may fill it. It is to this we are called, to enlarge our hearts to receive blessing. God has largely and richly for us, and calls us to open our mouth wide. All His mind is to fill it from His own riches, those of blessings of grace from His own hand. The unsearchable riches of Christ are ours, and dispensed to our souls. But alas! very often we are like Israel, "My people would not hearken to my voice."

There is then, as chastisement, a giving up of the saint to eat the fruit of his own ways: a terrible judgment—sometimes to be humbled and feel the bitterness of the power of the enemy, sometimes, what is worse, to think one is finally given up. This is seldom the case when the soul has really been already emptied of self and subtle self-righteousness. Still the flaming darts of the wicked are terrible to the soul. It is not at all the same thing as the legal doubts of an exercised soul, but the dread of God as now against the soul; not the uncertainty whether He will be for it, whether it can escape. This last is legal doubt; the former, despairing doubt from Satan. If the saint walks faithfully, he has surely enemies, Satan and his machinations, to contend against; but the Lord really subdues them. It is, after the patience of faith, the encouraging proof that the Lord is with the believer in his way. Our adversaries are the Lord's: the consciousness of this is an immense force. Those that oppose us in the Lord's path are, at any rate in that respect, the haters of the Lord. They are found liars, and empty in their pretensions. And at peace through the Lord's power, the saint would walk in a constant path. "He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (1 John 2:17): he is fed with the finest of the wheat, with the most precious knowledge of Christ; and the sweetness of divine grace refreshing and satisfying the desire of the spirit.

On Psalm 82 and 83 I have no remark to make in connection with our present object in commenting on the Psalms. In Psalm 82 the reader will observe that God judges the judges, especially those who in Israel had the divine law to guide them. They fall thus, from wielding God's authority in the earth, into the place of responsible man, and God arising judges the earth. Here iniquity towards man, the separation of judgment entrusted to man from righteousness, is dealt with by God. In Psalm 83 it is the way in which man is guilty of active enmity against God, in his

hatred against God's people using craft, conspiracy, and violence to destroy their remembrance off the earth, the result being that Jehovah alone (the God of Israel) is the most high over all the earth; for such is the effect of man's efforts. Oppression downwards in those who represented God in the earth, rebellion upwards against God shown in hatred against God's earthly people: such are the characters of man, and the object of God's judgment on the earth.

Psalm 84. Though God be necessarily the center of all our desires, the desires of the new man, yet it is not in this psalm the desire after God as such, which is spoken of as in Psalm 63 Jehovah is owned as the living God, but He is owned as a manifested God in relationship with His people. It is not "my soul is thirsteth for Thee"; but "how amiable are thy tabernacles, O Jehovah of hosts." They would not have been so, if He had not been there, if they had not been His. Still it is the enjoyed public relationship with Him, dwelling in the midst of His people, which is delighted in, not abstract delight in Himself. The tabernacles of God are a resting place for the heart, as the swallow had a nest from God where she might lay her young. And this is just. The root and essence of personal piety is the soul's own desire after God. The secret of God is there, and the soul is kept in the holiness of His presence, and exercised in it before Him. But where God displays His glory, where He is worshipped, is the just resort of the pious soul. In His temple shall every one speak of His honor. There praise is drawn out.

It is not exercise, but the soul in its piety, as in the new man alone, goes forth in praise and worship where all do, where there is naught else, and with others of the same spirit also. For the altar of God is the center of the heart's desire and outgoings. There God displays Himself, and there the heart is at home from exercises and trials. Hence it is known to the heart, that there they will be still praising God. They that dwell there have naught else to do. Such is the full accomplished blessing.

But there is another thing (verses 5 to 7) in which blessing is known—on the way thither, the way through this world, the valley of tears. The strength of him who passes with an undisturbed heart towards God's rest and dwelling-place is in the Lord. Hence he too is blessed. If the dwelling-place of God, where His glory is manifested and fills the place, is the object of the heart, where its desires tend, the way that leads there will be in the heart too. It may be a rough one, a valley of tears, a valley where the cross is found, but it is the way there, and the heart is in it. Besides, the heart trusts God—has His love as the key to all. Hence it says "by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit" (Isa. 38:16). They turn the valley of tears into a well, and find in the sorrow the refreshments of grace. For we need the will broken, the movement of will in the desires of the heart judged, that grace, that God Himself (that well of joy and blessing), may have His full place. And this the trials and exercises of the wilderness do. It is not called the valley of trial, but the valley of tears; that is, it is not merely the facts which form the well, but the exercises of heart which flow from them. No doubt the character of the valley was the source of this; but Christ perfect in His way was a man of sorrows, therein manifesting and exercising His love. We need humiliation and breaking down that we might get into this state, but this is what makes it a well to us. By these things men live, and in all these things is the life of the spirit. He had meat to eat in His sorrow as cast out by the well of Sychar which His disciples knew not of. But this is not all. There is direct supply and ministration of grace from above. God sends a gracious rain on His inheritance, refreshing it when it is weary. The rain fills the pools. The communication of the Spirit of God, the revelation of Christ to the soul, the Father's love, all refresh and gladden the heart, and

fill it with that which makes the world a nothing, turning the heart elsewhere. The new man is in its joys, and goes cheerfully thinking of that through the valley. It goes from strength to strength. It is not accumulated strength, though strength is increased, but never in any sense so as to diminish dependence on God, but on the contrary to increase the sense of it.

Self is better known and more thoroughly distrusted; we are more simple, and have a more simple consciousness that power belongs to God. As Peter, “when thou art converted [brought back], strengthen thy brethren”—an extreme case, as to the means, but showing how self-judgment and the lesson of dependence is the way of having strength, because strength is really in Christ. “My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Thus the strength we have and feel at a point where we are brought to realize the grace and presence of Christ sets us forward on our journey across the wilderness; we use it (I do not say lose it) in travel, but it is not the conscious enjoyment of deriving blessing from Him, but employing that strength in the way.

This leads us to a further apprehension of our need of Christ, increased knowledge of self by what we pass through, but which is discovered not always in a judgment we form of ourselves, but in such emptying of self, and the decline of its deceptive power in our heart, as casts us more simply on Christ. We go to a further place of strength thus; Christ is more all. If there be failure, it will be in the positive judgment of self and restoring the soul. The result is our appearing before God, where no self will be at all, and in the place where He has set His blessing, and where all go up to worship and glorify Him. Even now there is a partial realization of this, but its accomplishment will be surely in glory—in the heavenly Jerusalem and the Father’s house. But all this turns to supplication—supplication in the sense of divine majesty, but supplication in the consciousness of blessed relationship. He is Jehovah of hosts, but He is the God of Jacob.

But it goes yet further. Till we are actually in the courts of God, we depend on this majesty and covenant faithfulness —for us the Father’s name in union with Christ—but also on God’s looking on Christ; but this secures us till then—indeed in one sense forever. We are assured, are confident, and pray because God looks on Christ. But this confidence on the way through Baca is connected with the desire to be in the courts. “Look upon the face of thine anointed. For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand.” Better be at the threshold there, than enjoy all that the tents of the wicked can afford, with the right to abide there. God enlightens with His glorious majesty, and protects. He will give in perfect unhindered grace all we need in the trial of the way, and in our weakness, when it is sweet to count on His help. And He will in the end, when brought home capable of enjoying it, give glory with Himself. We can count on Him for everything. He is good; nothing good will He withhold from those who walk before Him. The soul closes in the conscious feeling, “Blessed is the man that trusteth in thee.” And how true it is! Nothing can disturb, nothing is beyond His power—nothing of which His love cannot take charge for us—nothing which His wisdom does not know how to deal with for blessing. And the heart knows His love to count on it, and that blessed is the man that puts his trust in Him.

Psalm 85 brings out a principle of great practical importance, the difference between the forgiveness of what belongs to our former state, and the blessedness into which the believer is introduced in the enjoyment of relationship with God. Here, of course, it is in the restoration of Israel to blessing in the land in accomplishment of the promises of Jehovah. I shall now speak only of the principle as regards ourselves.

Forgiveness is known as the fruit of Jehovah's goodness, and His sure goodness to His people, and hence full blessing is expected. But the two are distinct. So with us, forgiveness applies to all that we have done, looked at as in the old man and his deeds. We are brought back, and all the fruit of the old man is put away forever by the sacrifice of Christ. We have thus full forgiveness. Wrath is gone as to it. All our sin is covered; but the distance from God and from the enjoyment of communion with Him is not removed. Fear of judgment and the Judge is gone; but the enjoyment of present blessing with God, His favor as upon those with whom is no question, and the going forth of divine favor in natural though righteous relationship, this is not entered into. Joy there has been, great joy there is, in finding oneself forgiven; but it applies to what we are in flesh, and is not communion with God in a nature capable of enjoying Him and none else, because coming from Him. Though forgiven, this distance, this want of enjoyment of God in the new and divine nature, is felt to be in its nature anger. It is not being brought to God. Nor can we rest without the enjoyment of His favor.

For this the appeal in the psalm is made. The captivity of Jacob was brought back, but he looked for more, to be turned to God, and that all anger might cease. This is a large word; yet knowing love and communion at least in hope, we cannot rest without it. We may have desired it, that is, the sense of favor, but we cannot get it by progress or victory; we must get it by forgiveness and deliverance, for we are sinners. But when we have found there is redemption and pardon, there is then not merely the need of the conscience by which we must come in, but the spiritual desires of the new man. "Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?" The soul is revived by the presence of the Spirit of God, and rejoices in God Himself.

In Romans 5 we have peace with God: not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have received the reconciliation. "Show us thy mercy, O Jehovah [for it is mercy, but mercy from God known in relationship with His own—for us the Father known in Christ], and grant us thy salvation." But the soul has learned grace and listens for the answer, because it looks for grace. It is not legal agony, but desired knowledge of God in favor. "He will speak peace." "His salvation is nigh them that fear him."

Now this is all-important for the soul, not to rest in forgiveness (its first urgent necessity that applies to what it is as a sinner), but to understand that it is called to the enjoyment of God, in the cloudless communion of a new nature, which being, morally speaking, the divine nature, has necessary and full delight in God, though a dependent and growing delight— we joy in God. No doubt it is and must be founded on righteousness—divine righteousness, as we shall see. It would not be God, were it not so; but it is not the settling that point with a God who is calling it in question, but enjoying God's presence, communion with Him, according to the perfectness in which we have been placed before Him, enjoying Him in the divine nature of which we are partakers. This is thus spoken of in regard to Israel: "Mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other."

It is mercy, for it is granted to sinners in pure and sovereign mercy; but it is truth, for it accomplishes all God promises to Israel. To us far beyond promise, for there was none of the church; but it is a stronger case. It is being in Christ and as Christ, and so before God according to the favor in which He is before Him as risen. Righteousness seemed against the sinner and was; but through the divine righteousness it associates itself with peace to the sinner. They kiss each

other. Peace answers to mercy, righteousness to truth. They have—we have—peace through mercy; but righteousness by the faith of Jesus Christ brings us into the full enjoyment of the place He is in, or it would not be righteousness. Truth springs out of the earth; that is, for Israel all promised is accomplished there. With us, of course, it is sitting in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. It is not, “glory may dwell in our land,” but we are in title and place in the glory of God on high. But in all cases righteousness looks down from heaven. It is not for Israel or for us, righteousness looking up from earth to claim blessing from heaven. He has established righteousness in the very heavens. Christ is there. He is there by the righteousness of God. The righteousness was a divine heavenly righteousness; He, having glorified God, is glorified with God, and in Him, and this is divine righteousness. Our heavenly and Israel’s earthly blessing both flow from it. Then comes conferred blessing too, and so surely it is all the produce of that heavenly country; its joys and privileges are made ours to enjoy.

The last verse properly applies to earth. But there is a truth yet connected with this I have not noticed. The present government of God applies to this walking in divine enjoyment, not to forgiveness and peace. We enjoy this blessed communion, dwelling in God and God in us by the Holy Spirit given to us. If we grieve Him, we are made sorry, humbled, perhaps chastened. It is always our place; but its realization and enjoyment depend on the revelations and action of the Holy Spirit in us, and these depend on our walk and state and obedience.

So in John 14 and 15 the enjoyment of divine favor and blessedness is made to depend on the walk of the saint. It must, if it is by the Holy Spirit dwelling in us; for how should we be enjoying communion in love in the midst of evil or idle thoughts? The presence of the Holy Spirit depends on righteousness—Christ’s presence on high. The Spirit sheds God’s love abroad in our hearts. We dwell in Him and He in us. But if evil is there, the flesh is at work, the Holy Spirit is grieved, communion is interrupted. It is not a question of title (that is settled: Christ is in heaven), but of enjoying the blessedness I am brought into, enjoying God. Here all our walk with God is in question, though it is by grace I do so walk aright. What I urge here is the soul’s getting clear hold of the difference between forgiveness—grace applied through Christ’s work to sin and all the fruits of the old man—and our introduction in Him in righteousness into the presence and communion of God where no cloud or question of sin ever comes. We may get out of this (not out of the title to it, but its enjoyment in spirit—not that peace is destroyed with God, but communion),. but in it no cloud of sin can come. We are loved as Christ is loved. All depends on His work. But one is the forgiveness of that out of which we have been brought, the application of Christ’s work to our responsibility as children of Adam in flesh. In the other we are not in flesh, but in Christ, in the enjoyment of that into which He is entered—our life forever.

Psalm 86. This psalm, though it be simple enough in its expression, yet is full of important practical principles, as connecting the feebleness of a soul drawn to God with His full glory and power. It finds its center, not in embracing first the extent of the glory in its feeble state, but in being centered in God, and so praising and looking for strength and final deliverance into glory.

The ground it rests on, as looking to God to bow down His ear, is fourfold. It is poor and lowly, not of the proud of the earth; it is holy, really set apart to God; Jehovah’s servant (with us the Father’s name must come in here, as we have ever seen, and Christ as Lord), it trusts in Jehovah, and cries daily to the Lord. This is the state of the soul—poor and holy, set apart to the Lord; a servant,

one that trusts, and the trust is not idle, it cries in the sense of need and dependence. This last is dwelt on in confidence of goodness, and a sense of the majesty of the Lord above all pretenders to power. He alone is God, is great, and does what to us is wondrous. It looks, then, to be taught God's way, has no thought to walk in its own. The truth and word of God guide it.

But here there is another need—the tendency of the heart to be distracted to a thousand objects, and wandering thoughts, and it prays the Lord to unite it. How we need this—to have the heart concentrated on the Lord! Here is power; here that presence of divine things which puts the mind in what is heavenly, and in direct connection with divine sources of strength. When other thoughts come in, one is outside, in another world, from which we have to be delivered; not in the divine and heavenly one, so as to be witnesses of it.

The majesty and glory of God's name had been seen (vs. 9), but this does not make the soul pass into the glory as if it was at home there. In a sense it is too great for one, and this is felt. How little we are! how we know in part! But it leads the soul to seek further concentration of all its affections, poor and lowly as it is, on God. And this is right, satisfies the soul, suits it. It is an affection and adoring thankfulness at the center, through grace, of all this glory. Hence it continues" I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart." It is united here, and it can praise as it is called to praise, and as it sees, in result, will praise. We are called on to comprehend with all saints the length and breadth and depth and height; but we must first be thus brought to the center—Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith and we rooted and grounded in love. Hence, knowing Him, we glorify His name for evermore. Our littleness has found, in His greatness, our place and strength. We are, as I said, at the center of glory.

This turns to the view the great deliverance God has wrought. It is seen that supreme grace is the source of it all. It is not merely owning His grace according to nature, where all is in order, but grace, sovereign grace—the activity of God's love— which has come down and—delivered us from the lowest estate. This gives a special character to our knowledge of God. All dependent on pure goodness, yet intimate in the character of our love to Him, because by our very wretchedness we know we are the objects of His love, thus known to be infinitely great. The soul thus confiding in God and occupied for itself with Him, its first affair, sees the enmity of proud men, who fear Him not, rising up against it. It looks for God's interference. This is a great mark of faith, but, confiding in His accepting love, it looks for more. It delights in the manifestation that God is for it. This is not only deliverance but satisfies the heart. It is all it asks—that God should show Himself for it. It is this, the sure portion of every one who trusts God, walking with Him, which the Lord looked for (Psa. 22), and had not, lower than the lowest for our sakes but therein perfect in love and glorifying His Father, and so higher than the highest. Therefore His Father loved Him, and He is glorified as man in a far higher way. Helped and comforted in the trial, at that supreme moment, He was not; but there He stood alone. We trust and are delivered; He perfect above all, alone in this perfection. The Lord give us at least to have our hearts united, undistracted to His name and in the Father's love. There is our center. We need not fear enemies there (Phil. 1:27-28).

Psalm 87. It is God's foundation which makes all assured. It is not that her foundation is in the holy mountain that calls out the interest, or assures the heart of faith, but that the city of God rests on God's foundation—so we. The sure foundation of God abides; and in the latter case it was when the church was going on so very badly that the saint had to judge its state and purge himself from

many in it. But God's foundation abides sure. So we say, His calling and His inheritance in the saints. But the psalm brings out another point, hard for the activity of flesh. Faith attaches more importance to God's city than to all that man has built. The sentiment of the psalm is essentially Jewish. In writing up the people, the saints and Messiah Himself are reckoned to Zion. These are his grounds for glorifying in Zion—God's view of the city. For us, no doubt, the thing comes in a different shape, as to the church: Christ is of it as its Head, not as born in it. God's fresh springs are there. But, practically, when the church of God is despised, when it is formed of people who are of no account in this world, do we make our boast of it because they are precious in the sight of God, rich in faith? or do the grandeurs of the Egypts and Babylons, which God judges, eclipse it in our sight? Do we judge after God's mind, or after man's? Is the appearance and vain show of this world of weight with us? or does the faith of the Lord of glory lead us to estimate highly what God esteems, what is glorious? He has people whom He counts up. Is it the spirit of the world or the Spirit of God which forms our estimate of what is vile and what is valuable? Weigh the language of James's epistle. But may our souls especially feel the value of what in those heavenly places will be counted excellent by God!

On Psalm 88 I have not much to say. God is known and looked to according to His revealed name as the only Savior, and it is just to this point that the soul is brought by the exercises spoken of in the psalm; cast by the pressure of all around to find it comes from God's hand, and, more yet, from God's judgment so as to be therein a pure and sovereign salvation from Him. "Jehovah, God of my salvation," governs the psalm. The state was this: affliction was present, nature could not find its account there, acquaintance put far from him. But this was but the negative and outward part, because nature found no relief, as it could from nature's sorrows more or less. The great point that pressed on the spirit was death, and death bearing the witness of God's wrath upon it. To this the knowledge that the revealed God of promise was the only Savior turns the heart; his life drew nigh to the grave. God's wrath lay hard upon him. Still God was appealed to. It was nature without its sustainments, nature with death pressed on it, that is, its destruction and end. And God being brought in, and faith in Him, so far there as to own that all depended on Him, His wrath was felt in it all. And this is true. This is death when seen in its truth. So Christ saw it in Gethsemane, though He would not have said all that is in this psalm. So the convinced soul sees it, whose eye in its Adam state is opened upon God.

The psalm, however, does not look beyond this life. In this it ends in nature—simple Judaism. But the faith in the revelation of God which has made it so feel what death is, as wrath from God, makes it look to Him who has inflicted it as a Savior. And this is the value of such experience. It shows us our true state, our true relationship to God in nature. Nor is there a way of escape, for it is our state by judgment before God. Hence self is done with if we are delivered. This makes deliverance known as sovereign grace, as God's deliverance, and the soul rests on revelation. And until the deliverance the soul cries to God. And when deliverance is obtained, the flesh, all that it is, remains as a judged thing under wrath. There is no deception so far as to trust it really, though we may forget its evil for a moment, and even have to watch and contend with it. But its status before God is ever counted as a condemned and evil thing. The psalm is the description of the process which brings the soul to this. Sometimes the soul only reaches this on its death-bed. This ought not to be, but it explains what surprises many in godly persons. When it is not gone through really, the soul is not free. It stands, if free, on the ground of God's salvation; in spirit, not

in flesh.

It is not seeing this that has led many to live on experience, not on Christ. They speak of the Holy Spirit's work, and knowing the evil of the flesh, and the killing power of the law, which only means that they have not learned it. If they did, they would be dead to it. They are in this psalm. But they have not learned salvation and the gospel. They do not know that they are dead and risen with Christ. They are feeling death press upon them as wrath from God, according to this psalm—all well; but they have not received the sentence of death in themselves, through Christ's having died in grace for them, so as to reckon themselves dead, crucified with Christ, to be nevertheless alive, yet not they, but Christ living in them, who had died and put away all this for them. They are under the pressure of wrath for what they are in nature— all true in its place—but have not learned Christ, and through Him, that they are not in the flesh but in Christ, in that He has borne and passed through this for them; and that now, through Him, they are free in the new man as risen in Him.

Psalm 89 has one remarkable character which it behooves us to notice here—reliance on the faithfulness of God according to His original word of promise, when externally all is contrary to it, but the expectation of fulfillment founded on mercy, in fact on Christ, in whom all promised mercies concentrate themselves. "I have said, Mercy shall be built up for ever: thy faithfulness shalt thou establish in the very heavens." The accomplishment of God's promises on earth shall be a source of praise for the inhabitants of heaven. Yet we see at the end that it was as if God had made all men in vain—a sad thought—the power of evil ruling, men its willing instruments, and the good having no place but reproach and sorrow. But God is called on to remember His saints' weakness and their reproach. Still there is confidence; and, whatever the state of things may be, He has wrought redemption, broken the power of the enemy; and has He not in a far better way than for Israel? His arm is mighty, His right hand high, whatever state they are in. Heaven and earth are His, though till Christ comes we cannot say Possessor of heaven and earth. Justice and judgment are the constant attributes of His throne. Mercy and truth announce Him when He goes forth. This form of expression is beautiful. God has a throne. There everything must be brought into consistency with it.

But in His active going forth tender mercy and goodness announce Him, and faithful truth will tell His people He is there when He comes forth. His activities are mercy and faithfulness, because His will is at work and His nature is love. Yet His throne still maintains justice and judgment. How truly this has been shown in Christ!—will doubtless be so in the last days in Israel—but signally so in Christ, and even then because of Him. This apprehension of God gives the sense of blessedness in the midst of sorrow. "Blessed is the people who know the joyful sound: They shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance. In thy name shall they rejoice all the day: and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted. For thou art the glory of their strength: and in thy favour our horn shall be exalted." All this is realized in the heart in the midst of sorrows, so that it can be as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing. This gives sweet blessing to the heart of the saint. Trouble does but increase it, because it makes him feel the preciousness of the faithfulness and favor of God, and that nothing separates him from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. The inward revelation of divine favor makes the path of sorrow full of sweetness. So Christ Himself was a man of sorrows. Yet He could say that they might have "my joy fulfilled in themselves" (John 17:13).

The sureness of the promises in Christ are then insisted on. Read “of thy holy One” (vs. 19), and remark that “holy” here is the same word as “mercies” in verse 1, not as “holy” in verse 18. Mercy, then, faithfulness, the character of the divine throne and of the divine actings, past accomplishment of redemption, what the title of God is, and the power in which He has broken the hostile power of evil, all to us known as the Father’s love through the Son by the Spirit, brings the spirit in the midst of all trial into the enjoyment by faith, but the true enjoyment of the heart, of the light of God’s countenance according to all the favor He bears us in Christ. In the psalm of course this is expressed as on Jewish ground. But Christ manifests Himself to us as He does not to the world. The Father and the Son come and make their abode with us. Joy is possessed: full, final deliverance counted on.

Chapter 4

Practical Reflections on the Psalms: Fourth Book

Psalm 90 is in a special manner Israel's cry for mercy and restoration in the last days after their long affliction. But we will apply its principles as usual. It contemplates two things in the government of God; discipline, properly speaking, and satisfying mercy. But both are founded on another point: that God is the one unchangeable God—the same before the world, with which discipline is connected, was created, as now, and now as then (time being as nothing to Him, which to us may seem so long); and that He is the dwelling-place of His people, where is their rest and home and secure abode, whatever wanderings they may have. As to man in time, He sets man aside with a word, and restores him. They are like grass growing up and then withering. But though this be true, if we compare God and man, yet faith gets hold both of the ways and purposes of God in dealing with His people. For Israel it is felt as wrath, because they do not yet know reconciliation. We know it is love, but the truth of the dealing is the same, and we can apply it.

And first as to ways: "to Thy fear, so is Thy wrath." It is not arbitrary, but according to His own nature and character. Fear is knowing Him in truth, so that what He is is applied to the holy judgment of all that is in the soul, so that nothing should displease Him or hinder communion. Now wrath as discipline—governmental displeasure—is the expression of this as regards the state of the soul, where it has been unheeded, or the will has been in it. It makes good God's character as regards that which is opposed to it in us. Faith, divine teaching, shows us that His wrath is as His fear. But when the will bows, our very feebleness becomes, not terror, but a motive in our appeal to God. And He owns it. He considers whereof we are made, and remembers we are but dust. But when once we feel our nothingness, and apply our hearts to wisdom, the beginning of which is the fear of Jehovah, instead of God's having to enforce it by subduing our will, and correcting our carelessness, the heart gets courage, gets bold. It is not reasoning, but by grace confidence is restored, and the heart says, "Return; O Lord, how long?"

Now this, we have often seen, is the expression of faith. God purposes to bless, and in result will bless His people; and hence, when under pressure, faith can say, How long? Self is not faith, and the fear of God must be produced; but where faith is, it springs up again into the sense of known mercy and says, How long? And, note, there is known mercy. It is not "come," but "return"; not as if God had left them (though, as to His ways, it is true as to Israel—He hides His face from the house of Jacob), but we look to His returning in the sense of known present mercies and enjoyment of favor. Then it brightens up into full confidence. Faith knows His purpose is to bless, to give delight and joy to His people, and that by His own favor. It knows He delights in them; it counts on this: "Satisfy us early." What a bold word with God! But it is confidence now; the soul is morally restored in His love which He delights in. This is looked at as constant too. "Rejoice and be glad all our days," it says. Why should it not expect it from the God of goodness? It may be more outwardly with Israel, still the spirit of it is right. It looks for a refraining God; one who takes account of the sorrow of His people, though He has been bound to inflict it. See how beautifully and blessedly this is put, Isaiah 40 (just what is sought here), Speak to the heart of Jerusalem; tell her, her time of trouble is accomplished, "for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins." his heart

counted it twice, the chastisement needed, compared with her sins; for the answer to faith is ever more than the request. (See the prayers and answers in Psalm 132.)

But faith, looking on the thoughts and purposes of God in blessing, goes beyond returning and refraining mercies. God has purposes in His love and works in its accomplishment; hence they say, Not—only satisfy us with thy mercy, but “Let thy work appear unto thy servants.” God’s own work will make good blessing, and so how good it will be! And it will be manifested to their honor and delight. So we, even for our souls; we seek not only restoring mercy, but thereon the positive work of God in producing blessing, in bringing us yet nearer to Himself. It is never then merely restoration; it is a soul better able to appreciate God, and God more fully revealed to it. Yet still awaiting, knowing as we are known, the result in the full display of glory (I speak here of children, because it is literally for Israel in the millennium); but we do look for the complete work of God in raising and glorifying us, and then entering into glory to abide.

But another sweet thought is added to this: “Let the beauty of Jehovah our God be upon us.” Their thoughts would hardly go beyond the manifest endowment of blessing from His own hand marking them His. With us how fully is it so! Shall not we be in the glory of Christ Himself? like Him arrayed in this blessed likeness before God our Father, a place of perfect delight! Nor do I exclude present blessing, how we may be as thus under grace as the lign—aloes which the Lord had planted; and that was when Israel were abiding in their tents. So the church should be a spectacle of grace, to the angels, of order and beauty, and the life of Jesus as manifested in the individual believer. In this case too the works of our hands under divine favor are established for us.

Psalm 91. On this beautiful psalm, of the structure of which I have spoken elsewhere, I have not much to say, because it defines the names of God which are available, and the specific effects of faith going on even to what is directly applicable to Christ; so that the general principle is less justly deducible from or connected with it. It would be reducing what is purposely specific to what is vague. It takes Jehovah, as such, as God; and so he who owns that name, comes under the care of El-shaddai for a specific performance of earthly promises in the ways of God. This is not our place: one who acted on it would deceive himself. Yet a general faith, and trust of heart founded on it, would surely be blessed. It does not take up a Father’s chastenings with which the government of God connects itself.

Here, in trusting Jehovah, no evil comes nigh the dwelling of him who does so. This was what made it strange to Asaph till he went into the sanctuary of God. He saw the wicked prospering, himself plagued every moment. This is the certain result of owning Jehovah, when the government of God does come in.

Still we may learn some of the characters of trust. It is not merely the knowledge that there is an Almighty God, who is above all things: the secret place of His true revelation of Himself must be known. This, true faith has, and confers with God there according to it. His name is revealed to faith. To us it is Christ as Lord, and the Father. Faith thus, in its confession of His name, makes its refuge and strong tower, and moreover trusts in it: a great thing, for no power of evil, no cause of distress can be anything to upset the mind, if the Lord be looked to and trusted in. It has here the promise of ever watchful and protecting care. This is true whatever outward evil may come.

As we see in Luke 21:16-18, the Lord says some of them should be put to death, but not a hair of their head should perish—they were all counted. Providential power is all at God's disposal. Faith is identified with the interests of God's people (vs. 9); but the Lord's own name is what has governed the heart, and the true name of God is known to it: that is, as I have said, the true revelation of God Himself known by divine teaching. To us it is Christ Himself, and the Father in Him. Faith calls. It is not merely passive trust, right as this is in its place, but it communicates with God about its needs, because it trusts Him. God's presence is there for faith and the exercise of its power; and this is as true now, in its just application, as then, as hereafter. The way is different, because the object is different, that is, to bring in a heavenly state. It brings present blessing though with persecution, and is assured of eternal and heavenly salvation.

Psalm 92 is really praise for the final deliverance of Israel, and Jehovah's millennial name is the key to it, as of the last; as the following psalms are the bringing in again of the only begotten. There is one principle to note in it—the elevation of the wicked is finally for their destruction. The man untaught of God does not see this; but faith discerns in its adversaries and the power of evil which arises up and presses on it, darkening its horizon, the enemies of the Lord. Hence, though tried more than another, for the power of evil is very painful to it, it has confidence. For though it would be foreign to the Christian to wish personally for vengeance (and we have to watch against this), is it so to the Christian to rejoice in the earth being delivered from the power of the wicked? On the contrary, "Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets" (Rev. 18:20). Faith gives a keen sense of the evil, because it is such and hostile to God and goodness and truth, and rejoices in the righteous judgment. But it is as the Lord's work, as the work of His hands, it rejoices in it; and that is perfect. Judgment displays too the uprightness of the Lord, but faith must wait in patience. The following psalms discuss and celebrate the coming in of this judgment.

Psalm 93. In this psalm we shall find some very important principles. Though power be now exercised for the triumph of good, it is no new power. The Lord's throne is of old, Himself from everlasting. No inroad of evil has touched or weakened that. This inroad had taken place. The passion and will of man had risen up as the angry and tumultuous waves—in vain. The Lord on high is mightier. Rebellious man is allowed to do this, but the power of the Ancient of Days is concealed from unbelief in the days of patience, so that man thought all was in his hand. When evil rises up so as to reach God and call out His action, an instant suffices to bring about the counsels of God in power by their destruction.

But this is not quite all. Faith has that on which it rests— the Lord's testimonies: they are very sure. God's word may be counted on as Himself, not only for final deliverance but for guidance along the path of difficulty. Nor is this all. There is a character which is a safeguard against delusion and a means of judging and discerning the right path: "Holiness becometh thine house." Oh! how these two principles do cheer and enlighten us in our path. How they strengthen us in the consciousness that it is of God's very nature, and cannot but be! Thus God's testimonies and God's holiness secure and fix the heart as to that which is of God. If the water-floods rise up, the Lord's power will settle all in His own judgment.

On Psalm 93-101, though they are very striking ones, I have very little to say with my present object, because they treat not of the exercises of the heart in the time of trial, but of the coming in of power to put an end to that time. They are characterized by the title "Jehovah reigneth, the

world also shall be established." I have therefore only a few remarks to make: first, that the result of all this patience of government in God is, that man rises up as the water-floods against Him: but God is mightier. The termination of it is by power.

But two great truths accompany this. God's testimonies are very sure; we can count upon His word through all.

It reveals His nature, His purpose, His character. It gives that according to which He will act—no peace to the wicked, but infallible certainty of purpose and power. Man may be as the grass, evil rise up like the water-floods: the word of Jehovah abides forever, and he that does His will. Hence in all times we can go by it as a rule, dark as all may seem, mighty as evil may be. Israel or the church, apostasy or hollow profession, persecution or seductive prosperity, His word is true and a sure guide, according to His own nature and character—He to whom power after all belongs. And if the time when He to whom power belonged was counted as a malefactor, He was guided by that word, bowed to it, and fulfilled it; and judgment after all will return to righteousness. Thus far of all present government and future display of public power, the kingdom and patience, or kingdom and glory, of the Lord.

But there is another thing—Jehovah has a house, a dwelling. Take it as His heavenly dwelling, His temple where all speak of His glory, or in its place as the church, His habitation by the Spirit: it is always essentially characterized by one thing, because it is His habitation—holiness becomes His house forever, separation to Him according to His nature.

These two points guide the saint through all circumstances till power comes in to sustain him, because he counts on God, through all the risings up of the power of evil: the word of God and the holiness of His nature. God has graciously communicated His mind to men, has spoken. His word remains sure, come what will. That is inherent to His nature, depends on His power as God. His speaking obliges Himself, so to speak, by His nature. I cannot believe He is God at all if, when He has spoken, it is not made good. He would not be God. "Hath he said and shall he not do it? hath he spoken and shall it not come to pass?" If He be God, truth to make it good cannot fail, nor power, or He is not God. It would be ignorance, or some one else would have power to hinder Him. His testimonies are sure. In the midst of evil this is an immense, a perfect, consolation and stay.

But the other test is of importance, the other claim on conscience, holiness, if He be God, is in every sense necessary. No elevation of truth, no certainty of word to be reckoned on, can alter this. It puts man subjectively in his place. He might boast of truth, may exult in sure promises, as if God had bound Himself. But God must be consistent with Himself; what is not holy is in no case of Him. He is supreme, and all must refer to Him, all be consecrated to Him in His presence, and, so far as He is revealed, suited to what He is. Thus a counter—check on man is furnished, and the true knowledge of God. It is not holiness apart from the word, nor knowledge or certainty apart from holiness. The Spirit of truth is the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit the Spirit of truth.

Note further, they are testimonies coming from God, the positive declaration of His mind and will (not a boasted knowledge of God by man's will, and his pretension to know what God must be, though there be a certain apprehension of conscience connected with, often perverted by, traditionary knowledge; but) the positive testimonies of God, so that man is subject to them, though sustained by them. It is not man's reasoning, or man's conscience, but the testimonies of

God, His own active revelation of Himself, the utterance of His word. They are simply received by faith, the soul is subject to them as such. This characterizes the soul that owns God. Power will come in due time; this will make all publicly right. Till then faith rests in the testimonies, the soul-subjecting, soul-sustaining revelation of God.

God, moreover, has a house, a dwelling. This, as noticed elsewhere, is an immense fruit of redemption. Neither with innocence, nor with the faithful did God dwell; Adam before his fall nor Abraham had God dwelling with them; innocence marked one, faith the blessed path of the other. A frustrated or a gracious visit told of God's condescension and goodness to either. But in Israel's redemption we find that Jehovah had brought them out of the land of Egypt, that He might dwell among them (Ex. 29:45-46). Innocence does not become God's house, but absolute consecration to Him according to His nature when good and evil are known; so it is in heaven— this character and nature. But there testimonies are not needed. Knowledge of good and evil man has, but separated from God and in sin. But where God has redeemed man to Himself, purified him, and delivered him, then He dwells with him, in him—in Israel according to His then partial revelation of Himself, in the saint now by His Spirit, and in the assembly; and so eternally, for now it is according to what He is in Himself, fully revealed in Christ, and by His death. Hence it is founded on testimony. For God must reveal Himself, and His redemption, and His ways, and what He is. Thus the Holy Spirit is given consequent on Christ's exaltation on the accomplishment of redemption, and in fact on the reception of the testimony of God by faith. When God is known (not merely truth), then there is the consciousness of what suits Him, there is the delight in His name according to His nature: and this becomes the test not only of truth being known, but truth and so God Himself—for Christ is the truth, and the Spirit is truth. Hence, as soon as Israel is redeemed, the holiness of God is spoken of, not before, because He was going to dwell in them, having brought them to Himself. The world will be established by power; but this is consecration to God by testimony of His own presence through redemption. It is not the pomp and order of His house here (that we have in Psalm 101), but a dwelling-place of delight and nature. Compare Psalm 132:13, 14.

In Psalm 94 judgment is looked for and vengeance to set the world right. But we find the discipline and comforts of the Lord sustaining the soul meanwhile, which must occupy us for a moment. The triumph of the wicked is, for him who believes in God, a painful and oppressive thought, the power of evil is evident; this is what just affects the mind of the saint, not in a prophetic but in a moral way. But the blindness of the haughtiness of man away from God presses on him who sees, from knowing God, the day of the wicked approaching. There is also the distinct consciousness of being God's people whose weakness and sorrow are but an occasion of oppression. Both are clear motives of judgment that this cannot go on forever. He that formed the eye surely sees it all. Man's thoughts are vanity. These two things then are the foundation of the saint's thought. God's interest in His people, and His goodness which will not overlook the poor when oppressed; yea, the very fact of the pride of the wicked.

But another element is introduced: God does judge evil, but He begins at His own house. God's hand is in the dealings which make His people suffer, as well as man's. It is to this the heart of the saint turns. "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Jehovah." We have the interpreter here, one among a thousand. God with the chastening teaches out of the law. God, by all this process of evil having the upper hand, breaks the will, teaches dependence, separates not only the heart but

the spirit from the world where this evil reigns. How could there be union with a world in which this power of evil is seen and morally shrunk from! Man thinks he can go on amiably in the world without its evil; but when the world itself is evil and felt to be so, what then? Thus wickedness and its rising up, discarding God, is its own remedy in the heart of him who owns God, exercises it, purifies it, removes it from the sphere in which its own will works, when it, if not in intention, at any rate practically, sought an outlet for nature. Divine life having given it thoughts of God, it is met by a world which will none of Him, and rises up against Him: all this is God's hand.

But there is more, there is, with the discipline of His hand, direct inward teaching by His word, which reveals Himself. Thus, when the haughty evil drives back the heart, there is also subduedness, the heart has tasted that the Lord is gracious, and it drives it to God, known in grace and the revelation of Himself, His ways, His purposes; and grace effectuates itself in the heart. The renewed heart gets into its own sphere, and learns not merely the necessary character of God, as hating evil and loving good, but His own ways, the development of His grace and truth, His holiness in the sphere in which He reveals what He is for those who know Him. This is a rest of heart for the saint, a repose of the spirit which seeks and delights in good. If it sought to meet the evil (though activity in service there will be according to God's will), but to meet the evil in the world, largely as the heart desires it and looks for God's bringing it in, there would be weariness and heartbreaking; but when the power of evil is rife, the soul is driven up into its own place, into the direct revelation of God and His ways, and there near God's altar (for it draws out worship), it finds rest-till. It still looks for the setting evil right and deliverance of the poor and needy, but it abides in patience, learning God's mind, and finds rest therein, rest in what is eternal. The activity of good it will engage in, where the open door is, but its rest is in that which is properly of God. The establishment of that by power will come, and that is certain. God is sure in His ways. He will not cast off His people. He will not have evil in power forever.

Here it is, of course, the intervention of judgment on earth, judgment returning to righteousness—power and good going together, not power and evil. We have better things, a heavenly revelation for sons, a heavenly place, our Father's house before us; but the principle is the same. The judgment, once in the chief priests and Pilate, while righteousness and truth were in the blessed Jesus, will come to His hands who was once Himself the poor and oppressed; judgment will return to righteousness. And if we, taking up our cross, are glad to suffer and so shall reign with Him, yet the thoughts and ways and counsels and faithfulness of God will be fulfilled. Heavenly grace and heavenly glory may be added in our present rest of spirit, and the rest that remains to us; still righteousness will have dominion if it be heavenly, and eternal blessing for us who have a part with Him who suffered. The appeal to the impossibility of evil going on in power, if the Lord is to show Himself at all, is strikingly put forward in verse 20.

The power of evil, note (vss. 16-17), was deeply felt. Be it so; it may show our weakness sometimes, but it is well it should, if faith be there. The heart ought not to get accustomed to the power of evil, will not if it be with God; will be sensible to it, astonished at it, and dependent on divine restoration to meet it in thought. This was true of Christ, only in perfection, and no fault in His thoughts. He was astonished at their unbelief; He looked round upon them with anger, being grieved at the hardness of their hearts; He could say, How long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? But then, no less ready in heart in the activity of good where there was a want. He could say, Now is My soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save Me from this hour; but then

perfect in submission and obedience, and the one desire to glorify His Father, that His Father should glorify Himself— perfect in all things. We alas! if not helped sometimes, ready to dwell in silence, should soon, so to speak, give up, where Christ, the blessed One, felt all infinitely more, and was perfect in it. But when we turn, in the consciousness of tendency to fail, or being actually in present danger, to God, His help is there. This is great mercy. Teaching then is for the rest of the spirit, but there is holding up and help in our ways. David encouraged himself in God; who can fail then? He who is mightier than all, He whose force is accomplished in weakness, is there to help, there in a tried one, witness of goodness, that if we never failed we were in danger.

Another scene opens too, for God thinks of all things for us. What questions, if our minds work, present themselves to us, in the confusion and labyrinths of the mixture of good and evil! The mind enjoying God's goodness may abstain from it. It does well, but the root and spring of all these questions are in men's hearts, and the power of evil around us awakens them. It is not only selfishness, though self is always the center, the center of the questionings; but when evil affects the spirit, a multitude of thoughts are there. I do not say it is right—it is not. It is the fruit of our departure from God, and the consequent letting in of evil into God's world, a being within it in fact; but when heart and mind go out beyond it, having the knowledge of good and evil, revelation here, when the mind works, increases the difficulty and the multitude of thoughts, for the mind sees good clearer. Why and whence this evil? It sees another world of God's power. Why then this? It looks into a world beyond it, and brings back its thoughts into this where they are not realized. It sees goodness and power, and dwells in the midst of sorrow and evil. This may be in a selfish shape—often is. It is then a low principle, but it has always man for its center, and (save as it was in perfect love and holiness in Christ who perfectly brought another world into this, I mean in His own mind and person) is always evil, is but the "multitude of my thoughts." Yet God has compassion. I retreat into God by faith. This comforts, delights, my soul. Our thoughts speculating, as knowing good and evil, either by personal sorrow, or by working of mind, which is worse, launch out into the endlessness, not really infinitude, of speculation as to what ought to be, or into complaint against God as to what God is. It may be sometimes in a more submissive way of wonder and acknowledgment of its being too hard for us; but it is a finite mind, a mind in the sphere of this world, out of which it has no natural powers, let, in thought and speculation, into its relationship with the infinite, with good and with evil. It has a multitude of thoughts, but no possible rest. In its state it does not belong to the sphere it has got into.

Hence, let me add in passing, the form infidelity has largely taken in these days—what is called positivism or realism, saying, I know what I see and experience, with perhaps some small conclusions from it, and pretending to stop there. It does not, for it pretends to deny all beyond it. This is false upon the face of it, for if it only knows what is knowable to man from himself, it can deny nothing beyond it, any more than it can affirm. It is a low thought. But it is false on another ground. The mind has no certainty; but it has a multitude of thoughts beyond the sphere of the natural human powers which can decide on what is within these powers. There are a multitude of thoughts within us. We are incompetent to come to a conclusion, but there are thoughts and something or other to suggest them, but the heart has no answer. Where there is no infidelity, but merely the natural working of the human heart, this is the case. There is no further answer till judgment comes, till judgment returns to righteousness.

In the psalm this exercise of soul refers naturally more entirely to the government of this world; Christianity, the revelation of another world, has with the former brought in a thousand others, where men's minds work. But there is a refuge and a resource, not in the explanation of everything to the mind, so as to maintain it in the mad and wicked pretensions to judge God, but in the introduction of the positive good which is in God into the soul, so that it knows it has got blessedness and truth, whatever of its multitude of thoughts it may be unable to solve. Conscience is upright when it is acted on and judges self. But when by our enfeebled and beclouded knowledge of good and evil we pretend, calling it conscience, to judge God, the pretension is to make our ignorance and moral state, as it is, the measure of what is perfect, when all is imperfectly known and God not at all. For in that state men are forming a judgment—what they are to acknowledge as such.

It is, on the face of it, judging of a whole system of things when only an obscure end of it is before us. Reasoning from that state of things full of evil, I can judge nothing. God has not yet set things right, nor am I competent to judge even how to do it; but He has introduced good, perfect good, Himself into the midst of the evil. He has made me discover my own evil—judge myself: an immense moral gain. Those only who have done so are, as to soul-matters, upright. That is true honest conscience, and gives me a resource in grace, a perfect knowledge of His love (in Israel a relative knowledge by His ways); and, in the details of exercises which follow for self-knowledge and purifying the soul, I have known perfect love to have recourse to, and what it has revealed and imparted to me—grace and truth; and that not only in the outward revelation of it, however authoritative, but in my soul by the Holy Spirit, "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself" (1 John 5:10). "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit" (1 Cor. 2:9-10); and again, "We also joy in God" (Rom 5:11). Besides, God acts directly by His Spirit. His love is shed abroad in our hearts, His faithfulness in that love can be counted on; but direct communion with Himself raises us up to a kind and source of joy which the trouble and sorrow do not touch; nothing separates from His love. We are more than conquerors in this world; we have the joys of another, divine comforts through the sorrows we have to bear, in presence of the evil which besets us: the power of it drives us into our retreat, our joy in Him who is always the same, and whom we learn to know better. Judgment will close the scene in which I have to be troubled.

The psalms that follow I do not dwell upon, because they are the actual coming in of the Lord to judgment, not the exercises of the heart in awaiting it. Psalm 95 calls the Jews to be ready to meet Him; Psalm 96 the Gentiles. In Psalm 97, He is actually coming in clouds; in Psalm 98, He has wrought the deliverance; in Psalm 99, He has taken His seat in Jerusalem between the cherubim. Psalm 100 calls the Gentiles up to partake in Israel's joy and worship; Psalm 101 gives us the principles on which the government of the earth will be carried on by Jehovah's king.

Psalm 102 is one of the most profoundly interesting in the whole book of Psalms. It applies especially to the Lord Jesus Himself, whatever occasion circumstances of individual sorrow may have furnished to its composition.

The citation of it in Hebrews 1 leaves no doubt as to this, and gives to the psalm a depth of interest in which scarce another equals it. It shows how the divine eternal nature of the Lord meets the

difficulty of His having been cut off when Zion is to be restored hereafter. But this gives to the poignancy of His sorrows a depth and character of its own. It is not a glorious result and blessing, the consequence of a work alone in its nature and value, nor the judgment which follows the rejection of Messiah, but the eternal truth of the Lord's divine nature meeting the reality of His sorrows even unto death. Hence it is especially His Person which is the peculiar object of this psalm, and gives it its especial interest. But, though the security of the children of His servants, it does not afford us instruction so much on the government of God, though the foundation of it all is in grace. Nor do the following psalms very largely either (Psalm 103-106), which close this book. The Spirit views what God always is for faith, but in connection with the deliverance coming in by the coming of the Lord.

Still the power of good manifested in setting all things right, which faith looks at as coming in, is realized by that faith as belonging to Him whom it knows already, so that it rests in it, as God's character, in Him as bearing that character, though its results are not yet produced, and clothes present things with that knowledge of God, though evil be still here. It looks at this world as the display of power and wisdom under a government of goodness, God being known, though the evil is not finally set aside, nor the result of goodness produced. But He who governs is good. And this is known by those who have sinned against Him, known for themselves and in themselves; and it is this knowledge of God which enables the soul to see wisdom and goodness in all things, though the effects of sin are still present.

This is a very important principle: the perception of God and goodness in the midst of the scene of evil in which we live. True, a godly Jew, who had not seen Jesus rejected, who did not know the cross, could not know evil as we do; still he knew it; and the faith which looked to a final deliverance not yet come introduced God thus known into the scene through which faith had to pass. God, who, in the midst of evil, has let nothing out of His hand, has ordered all things sovereignly in the midst of the evil, though the evil be not His; in judgment He has remembered mercy. And when the bondage of corruption came in, He who made all things very good has held the reins and ordered all things wisely, whatever witness of evil remains, and sorrow and death. We are in bondage to it till divinely freed, but God never has been, never will be, and He would have us know that all things groan, but that there comes deliverance when He shall rule—but that the Creator, who made all things good, overrules and orders all things now. His mercy is over all His works. Now faith pierces through the felt evil, does not wish to be insensible to it, but by faith gets at Him who is above it, and can bring in His goodness even into this present scene, sees His part in it, and even His part as superior to all the evil. It is not natural enjoyment of creation, which, though as creatures all are good and lovely, may be utter self-deception and blindness to evil, but faith getting to goodness above the evil, and bringing this into its own enjoyment of God in the creature.

I repeat, Israel could not know the evil as we do; but then, on the other hand, he could not have known the redemption wrought and reconciliation to be wrought as we do, so that we can bring in God more fully yet. This is the general character of Psalm 103; 104; 105. They contemplate the full deliverance of Israel, but by faith; and look at creation not in its abstract perfection, but God in it; and Israel's history, too, as a series of failures, but God's mercy and goodness rising above it.

Thus Psalm 103 recognizes forgiveness and healing, looks on by faith to the deliverance and grace in store for Israel, but knows God according to that, seeing His patience and goodness meanwhile, and this applied to His government. He is slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. We know on what a perfect basis, as regards sin, all is founded: but here the effect is celebrated in the government of Israel; but God is known for all times according to this knowledge of Him. Hence it is not vague goodness, deceiving oneself, but evil owned, yet God known in goodness. This ought to characterize our ways and thoughts. Not that we shall not have to deal with evil, and, if we go below the surface, meet it everywhere; but I ought to have so gone to God about it, as to bring Him back with me according to what I have found Him to be above it all. My feet should be shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.

Psalm 104 takes up creation in the same way. The last verse shows the judgment which clears the world of evil, and His sovereign power is owned. But the Spirit is able to bring in the goodness into the midst of all it sees. But it does not go beyond a fallen creation.

Psalm 105 reviews the special dealings with Israel in past times. The present deliverance by judgment is also found here, but it is looked at as His faithfulness to His promise and grace. Here what is present manifestation of goodness awakes the memory of all God’s past ways. That is what He is, what He always was.

Psalm 106 takes the other side of the picture, and shows man’s ways—that, in all the interventions of God in goodness, man, after the first gladness at being delivered, turned back to his own evil and unfaithful ways. Still God’s ear was ever open, He remembered His promise, repented according to the multitude of His mercies, so as to bring, finally, praise and thanksgiving to His name. The former gave what God was in His own ways, this His being finally above the evil in accomplishing mercy and promise when men had shown what they were. God good in Himself, God good in the midst of evil, but not as allowing the evil, but as making Himself known by His own ways of mercy. And He being thus known by the heart, the heart passes through present circumstances according to this knowledge of Him. But to do this consistently and constantly, supposes the heart not only to know but to be with Him. This closes the fourth book.

Chapter 5

Practical Reflections on the Psalms: Fifth Book

Psalm 107. In the last book of psalms we find, besides many songs of praise, all the moral circumstances of Israel on their return to blessing. The first psalm in it stamps this character on it. It looks at them as gathered back, but traces the various scenes through which they might have passed, and that after their entry into the land too, and God's ways with them in it. It is a description of toils and trials, in which the Lord was looked to, and answered and interfered in behalf of the tossed and tried soul, and men are exhorted to own and praise Him. It carried this blessed truth in the forefront: His mercy endures forever. God's unchanging love and goodness, celebrated from the first fully proved failure of Israel onward. Man fails, God's mercy to His people does not. It is His redeemed and gathered ones who are the people that have to bear witness to this. Strangers and pilgrims where there was no resting-place, no home, hungry and thirsty, their soul fainting in them, they cried to the Lord and were led in a right way to where their foot and heart found rest.

Two characters are given to the soul in this condition. It is a longing soul and a hungry soul. We have craving and want, but these brought before the Lord. This is mercy. It is not the case of holy desires here, but God meeting wants. The wearied and fainting soul wants, but this want turns into a cry to the Lord. Mercy is surely there. But this might be even where their affliction and distress was chastisement, and the fruit of rebellion. But here where the heart turned to the Lord, mercy met it, and there was deliverance. The gates of brass and iron which shut them in are broken, where iniquity and the folly of departure from the Lord had brought it all on. He sent His word that they might be healed, and so delivered. When men were venturesome and braved dangers and found themselves at their wits' end through the storm of the sea which gives no footing to them, the Lord comes in and gives peace and leads them to the haven of their desire. In the very place of the habitation of His people, in the place of promises, there His direct government comes in. Rivers are a wilderness, a fruitful land barren, through judgment: turning the wilderness into pools of water, judging wickedness and showing mercy to the needy soul, satisfying the hungry who lean on Him. Careless and lifted up even there, they are brought down. He pours contempt on princes, but the poor and needy He sets on high. It is not the order of a world blessed of God where evil is not, but the government of God where evil is, where God overrules the evil to the purposes of His own government, to hide pride from man, and comfort and encourage the poor in spirit who look to Him, who trust not in pride and human strength and will rest in the Lord. In all the ways too where their will has brought them, where their sins even have brought them, if He be looked to, His mercy and goodness are found.

Thus God deals with the heart—turns the state of things and the ways of men into the means of their hearts knowing Him. The righteous rejoice, and oh how true that is! how much truer it will be when the fruit of the Lord's goodness to the humble waiting soul which has put its trust in Him is seen! In the end evil will be put down, but in the way the Lord meets, comforts, and justifies in result the path of the humble soul; and the wise and observant soul will see (however busy, however pretending, however seemingly successful Man's will may be) the loving kindness of the

Lord will be made good before him to his joy and gladness of heart. The Lord teach us to walk softly before Him, and leave the results in His own gracious hand. It is sometimes difficult, but always wise. Painful no doubt to see the wicked and wickedness prosper, it is a world of evil, but God works in it, and His ways will work out blessing, and the fruit of His goodness and righteous power.

One or two brief remarks on Psalm 108, but on a point of great beauty. There is great confidence here, and, as ever, mercy to the soul which knows itself and comes before God in truth. But then, for its own deliverance and blessing, it looks to the exalting of God. This shows it must be a holy; righteous exalting. “Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens: and thy glory above all the earth; that thy beloved may be delivered.” It is a blessed thought, and this is what faith has to lay hold of now, even in the time of trial, that our blessing and God’s glory are one, only we must put His glory first. This is the very principle of uprightness—“He that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true,” says Christ, “and no unrighteousness is in him”—and the highest blessing. So Jesus Himself, “What shall I say? Father, save me from this hour... Father, glorify thy name.” Then comes, “I, if I be lifted up…will draw all men unto me.” So in trial and even in evil, faith identifies the glory of God and His people. “The Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear of it....What wilt thou do unto thy great name?” (Josh. 7:9).

For the same reason there is no sparing evil when we are in the midst of the people, and evil calls this principle out, God being publicly dishonored, “Slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbor” (Ex. 32:27). In a word, faith identifies God’s glory and exaltation and His people, but puts God first. Here it is in blessing, and we have the remarkable answer of God: “I will rejoice.” His own joy and delight is in the blessing of His people; He exults in doing them good, in delivering His beloved, in the employment of His might to set aside the evil which oppressed them, and put them in possession of what, by His gift, belonged to them. And whatever the strength of their adversaries, He will accomplish their blessing: the strong city cannot stand before Him. And even when through their fault they had been refused His help (in Israel’s case, as we know, long cast off), still, when the just time of the blessing of the humble comes, He will put forth the needed strength that all may be fulfilled. He gives strength to His people, His own power delivers them. They have learned that His strength only is of any worth or avail.

Psalm 109 is the judgment of Judah and the anti-Christian Jews at the end. It affords us little experimental teaching, while most solemn in its testimony. First, the motive of help: “Do Thou for Me….for Thy name’s sake.” The nature and glory of God is at the root of all His ways; and when the heart has caught at this, this answer of help is seen: God cannot be inconsistent with Himself. But for this the heart must be brought into the state coordinate with that name, lowliness, the judgment of evil in self, and so uprightness, dependence; and God may exercise us fully to manifest brokenness of will and produce it, and the heart’s leaving all submissively to Him. In Christ’s place all these exercises only brought out His perfectness; in us they work uprightness and dependence. In Him all this sorrow was purely God’s hand: that is, there was no reason for it in Himself. And this is accorded to us in grace, even if we have given occasion to it by our self-will or evil, still God has taken it in hand in discipline, and, when He has wrought His work, sets His saints up in blessing to the confusion of the adversary, forced to own His hand, where they triumphed in evil and thought only to triumph over the just. But they have met God, for these were His ways with His people; and this government can go on with us because redemption is

complete. In Christ's case it was pure hatred against good, He undergoing it for us. For His love they were His adversaries. But they, the lovers of evil, are before the Lord continually; the time of showing it is His own, for us when His work of subjugating our will, teaching us holy dependence, is complete; in Christ, when it has been manifested and God fully glorified.

Psalm 110. On this psalm, glorifying Christ at God's right hand, I have only one remark to make. The last verse shows the perfection of Christ in this spirit of dependence on the way, the path in which we have to follow Him as walking in the new man; glad of the refreshments of God, but dependent on them, and taking them as they are found, that is, as God Himself gives them in the way—the spirit of lowly dependence.

Psalm 111. In a vast number of the psalms of this last book, the present intervention of judgment and power is so contemplated, that instructions for the trials of the way are less to be looked for. It is the case in this psalm. It raises, anticipatively no doubt, its hallelujah for the works of God. Only this is to be remarked, and so always, that these works of deliverance are always conformable to, and founded on, and make good, the truth of God's character. They are verity and judgment. His commandments are proved sure in them. They stand fast forever and ever, and are done in truth and uprightness. Hence to enjoy the fruit of them, our path is to walk after the Lord's ways and reckon on the sureness of His promise, and, if He tarry, wait for Him. But, as we have always seen, mercy and compassion towards us are found and felt in them. If we are delivered, it is sovereign goodness. Hence the fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom; obedience leads us to intelligence. Being in the path of God, light is truth in that path, and according to it.

You cannot separate the true knowledge of divine things from godliness. It is the nature which is godly, obedient— grace dependent on God, which alone desires or understands them. "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God" (John 7:17). Hence, in the path of obedience, realizing the light in a subjection which owns God, more is found: for the light and the path of the new nature are one—the truth as it is in Jesus, the having put off the old man and put on the new, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness. We are renewed in knowledge after the image of Him who created us. In this path we have to walk by faith till power comes in. In Israel, of course, it was more as law; but the principle is always true, as true knowledge is the knowledge of God. It is impossible to separate true knowledge from a state which owns God for what He is—obedience and dependence on Him.

Psalm 112. I leave aside, of course, the promises of temporal blessing, which apply directly to the Jewish people and system. These latter psalms refer especially to them, because blessing is just come in by judgment, but some principles are worthy of note—the wisdom of acting in obedience through the path of trial is specially insisted on in these psalms. Much was there (there always is) to say that faithfulness was folly and ruin. God warns them, and in that is the path of wisdom. It lasts in its effects when the wicked disappear. the generation of the upright will be blessed. His righteousness endures forever. No doubt darkness seems to shut him in, but light arises for him even there. We must learn to trust to God: blessing is sure to the obedient. But thus walking with God, peace of heart and the sense of goodness make him gracious and full of compassion towards others—upright too, with them. Self-seeking is not his governing principle. He shows favor, is liberal in heart, nor is there rashness of self-will. He carries out and carries through his matters in the fear of God, with soundness of mind; he does not use lightness, that his yea should

be nay. Guided by God in going into them, he carries through his path to the end, because it is God's will, and with the strength and steadiness that the consciousness of doing it gives. And this is of importance in the path of the saints as a testimony that God is there, and His mind the guide of our path. He abides—he that does God's will does so.

Further, when the power of evil is abroad, he is not shaken. In the midst of exercises of heart, of moral evil, he has been with God. His will has been supreme with him. He has looked at God as One whose will ordered all, and God Himself as all. If He was pleased, he was content. Circumstances had lost their power as motives, and God had, so to speak, taken their place in his heart and mind. Hence, when adverse ones arise, they find God there known, trusted: his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.

Psalm 113. One principle comes before us here but one which cannot be too often brought before our souls, one which we have constant tendency to forget. God chooses weak things, that it may be evident that good and blessing comes from His power and love. God uses means; but, when man speaks of means, he generally speaks not of reference of heart to God, prayer, His word, and the like, but of leaning on man's influence and man's strength. This is all evil. Oh that we may remember that God chooses the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and weak things, and things that are not, to bring to naught things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence! Blessing were not divine blessing indeed if it were not so. But then in this strength we may look for grace. He dwells on high, but humbleth Himself to behold the things that are in heaven and earth. He raiseth the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the needy out of the dunghill to set him with the princes, even the princes of His people, and takes the barren and gives her children like a flock—makes her a joyful mother of children. Such are God's ways. The heart delights in them. Power is His, and goodness, but what a lesson in the midst of this world, and for the heart of man!

Psalm 114. The same thing as to power is seen in this very beautiful little psalm. He brought water out of the flint rock. His presence makes the earth that has forgotten Him to tremble; but, for His people in the desert, His power and grace bring refreshment and life out of what seems to man hopeless and most opposed. Dependence and confidence in Him—such is the peaceful path of faith.

Psalm 115. The first principle here brought under our eye is setting the Lord's glory first, a simple but mighty one "not unto us, but unto Thy name." So we find perfectly in Christ. But this is followed, for all that, by the connection of that glory with God's people. The first principle gives purity of motive—this the courage and hope of faith. And note what is specially blessed—the name (that is, the revelation of God's character) is specially suited to the blessings of His people. He had spoken in promise, but they have failed on their side to take up the promise in the path of righteousness. Yet God has promised, and here His name of government in grace comes in. "Unto Thy name give glory, for thy mercy," which is part of His name; "and for thy truth's sake," which is another. And here the glory comes out—if He were not the former, the latter could not be. Righteous judgment would have cut off the guilty; but there would have been no fulfillment of promise. But mercy rejoices over judgment. What God is in His nature, love, interprets itself in His ways towards the failing, in mercy, leading them no doubt into the place of repentance that they may suitably enjoy—suitably to any moral relationship with God, but then accomplishing His promise in truth.

But the divine glory goes first. This is counted on.

God had made Himself, to display His ways, the God of His people. “Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is now their God?” Such was the ancient plea of Moses and Joshua. This is, further, in contrast with the idols of the heathen. When God’s glory is first sought by faith, it not only turns to the blessing of the people according to that glory, but it opens out into the consciousness and apprehension of that glory in itself in the hearts of the people. This is a great blessing. They joy, no doubt, in the salvation, but they joy in God. For the full display of this, He must come in in judgment; not for our blessing, for He has given us heavenly things, where His own dwelling is, in what He is in Himself, not merely as what He is in His ways. For we may remark how earth is here the sphere, and this present life the energy in which God is known and owned. “The dead praise not the Lord”; “the earth hath he given to the children of men.” We rejoice in being dead and having our place in resurrection with Christ in heavenly places. We cannot keep this too strongly in mind, though there be instruction as to God’s ways on earth in these psalms. In these last especially the earthly government is in view, because judgment at the end is just coming in. It is a blessing to have heaven instead, and our God, such as He is, our Father.

In Psalm 116 the suppliant has been heard; the government of God consequently enters but little into its composition. The soul has been brought down under the pressure of death, but delivered. It is the history of the remnant at the end, into which the blessed Lord so wonderfully entered, but which is not a prophecy of Him, and applicable to any so suffering, as is seen by the apostle’s citation of verse to (2 Cor. 4:13.) The deliverance is for this world. The thought of the psalm is—grace and faithfulness in Jehovah in delivering. The character of the saint is simplicity; a spirit difficult to some, but precious. It is formed by a simple-hearted reference to the thoughts of God and living in them, and then trusting Him who always makes His own thoughts good, and remembers those who thus trust in Him. The opposite to this is—the activity of man’s thoughts, his will and counsels mixing themselves with them. These perish, he is disappointed. The humble spirit does not think so much—it receives God’s thoughts. They have a moral character. He abides in them, is obedient, and waits on God. Compare Eliezer in Genesis 24.

The deliverance of God comes as favor and an answer to the soul, and is full of sweetness. His faithfulness to the state and expectation is felt. Hence, on receiving the blessing, thankfulness (not merely enjoying the blessing) is the fruit, and, “I love the Lord.” Hence sweet associations of soul are connected with it. It is felt that the Lord has dealt bountifully. The soul returns to its rest, faith had been at work before. The soul believed and spoke as trusting God, but was sore troubled—now finds the God it thus trusted its source of joy and blessing, not, mark, the blessing it gets. The soul was turned to Him, not to comfort, in the trouble. It is turned to Him now in the time of joy. The Lord Himself is before the soul, its source of blessing.

Note another thing in this psalm, the feeling of the failure of all men. It is not exactly “in my haste,” but in my anxious pressure of alarm, such as would make man flee in haste.

This gave the consciousness that man could not be relied on. It was not simple faith or sound judgment this, but there are moments when God makes us feel that we cannot rely on man but only on Him. Often we have comfort from men. “God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus” (2 Cor. 7:6). But we must not rely on man. Hence there are moments when we have to say “all men are liars,” and we are cast on the Lord.. How truly the Lord

was so, I need not say; yet in grace He could say to His disciples “Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations” (Luke 22:28). But there was an hour when He must say, “one of you shall betray me,” and feel it; and “all ye shall be offended because of me this night,” “and shall leave me alone” (Matt.26:31; John 16:32). That showed His perfection. It teaches us to lean on the Lord only, not diminishing cordial confidence and openness of heart, but teaching to rely on God. Unhindered joy will come afterward. But in all trouble the Lord thinks of us.

Psalm 117. The consciousness of grace and favor enlarges the heart. Israel never thought of calling the nations to praise when under the law. But now that mercy has brought blessing, they do. It is the sentiment of what God is to us, the thankful enjoyment of it as of God, which opens the mouth and heart by the knowledge of Him. It calls others to enjoy His goodness too. It is an assimilation to the divine nature and privilege in the knowledge of love; only, as it should be, we learn love by knowing its exercise towards ourselves.

In Psalm 118 we are still on the ground of final blessing, so that the government of God in the midst of trial is only referred to in the past. It is Israel’s recognition of the divine ways and of Christ Himself when blessing is come, owning that Jehovah’s mercy has lasted out all their ways and endured forever. I notice only the aspect of circumstances as applicable to us at all times. God is for His people; but men, all men, may be against them. One has only to trust the Lord, and victory remains with faith. But in this, where evil has to be governmentally corrected, Satan also seeks, Satan has, his part. How truly it was so in leading all men against Christ; how fully so in the last days of Antichrist’s power, I need not say; but as the book of Job shows, it is so in the various chastenings of God. Evil on the conscience, or even unconsciously in the heart, gives him a handle, sometimes a terrible one, against the soul even where it is upright. Rest is found only in self-judgment and confession of what gives him a handle. Satan would seek to make us fall thus; but behind all this the hand of God is to be seen, as in Job’s case. “Thou hast chastened me sore: but he hast not given me over unto death.” It is for blessing. One only could declare “The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me” (John 14:30); but with us, all is love and blessing to make us know ourselves, and then enjoy His blessing (compare Deut. 8), and fully own what Christ is according to His victory and glory in the counsels of God. We must be thus exercised, the ground plowed and harrowed, but the result is, “this is the day which the Lord hath made.” No doubt this is the final blessing of the earth when Christ comes, but in every exercise of a soul brought to the point of uprightness with God, the principle is made good; the gates of righteousness into the joy of communion, so to speak, are opened. And the mercy to which we had no title we own to be the Lord’s doing, and all is light. The direct application to the remnant is evidently the just application of the psalm, but we connect this great display of God’s government with the details in which it applies to us.

Psalm 119 is the expression of the effect of the law written in the heart of Israel, when they had long erred from God’s ways and were sorrowing under the effects of it. It is one of the psalms which pronounces blessedness.

We will examine some of the elements of this work in the heart. This blessedness is pronounced on “the undefiled in the way.” The world is full of defilement. There is only one path in the world (for ours is out of it, we are pilgrims and strangers following Christ who is gone on high; but only one in the world) which can be undefiled; that is, God’s law. It is not what is heavenly formed within,

affections set on things above, a walking in the Spirit; this no doubt will produce fruits which no law of God will condemn. It is the way wholly formed of God's expressed will for man's walk in this world. They "walk in the law of Jehovah." There is a delight in what is right, in what is not defiled by sin or the world; but what is in walking in the law. It is a perfect rule, according to God, in this world for a living man. But this is carried farther in the heart. It looks to the source. God has borne witness to His will, and showed that He would have man walk in it, and the heart turns to it, not only as undefiled and right, but as "His testimonies."

This connects itself with the desire after Himself. They "seek him with the whole heart." This is the general character of the effect of the law written in the heart. The practical effect is evident: they "do no iniquity." Not only the heart is set morally right in undefiledness, but evil or unrighteousness, relative wrong, is not done. Instead of their own will and puffing, as it is said, at God, "they walk in his ways." The authority of God is recognized in the heart, with diligence in acquiescence in it, and the desires of the heart are towards it. "O that my ways were directed," etc. It is not only the perception of God's ways—what is intrinsically approved in the heart; but the desire that the actual course of life were ordered so as to keep God's statutes; not satisfying our will, or our will being towards God's. And here dependence is felt as to the course of a man's life, and there is the desire it may be directed. Conscience and spiritual discernment go together. Shame does not flow from man's disapprobation; but from the conscience not being good according to God's revealed will. But this way is complete and an only one. Whatever is out of it is not undefiled—is the world, which is abhorrent from God; we must be in it in will, heart, and way, or out of it, and so ashamed, if the will of the heart be right. If my mind and soul have morally discerned the excellency of God's way, the conscience, if I am out of it in every respect, makes me ashamed. The heart set right has respect to "all Thy commandments." But where this is, not only the conscience is right and peaceful, but the heart is set free. "I will praise thee with uprightness of heart, when I shall have learned thy righteous judgments." There is knowledge of God through His ways, and the heart restored to Him, and having learned His thoughts (not only commandments, but His judgments), can praise Him not merely for benefits but in the heart's association with Himself.

Another element of this state is full will and purpose of heart to obey and keep what God has ordained or appointed, what has God's authority attached to it, not merely moral right and wrong. But it was a time when Israel had erred; hence here there is a special looking to God not utterly to give them up. We see thus that the form of this psalm cannot apply to the Christian. He never expects to be utterly forsaken; in a particular course he may apply this, when he is conscious of having followed, his own will. But from the general principle we may learn much, as that which is wrought in the heart as regards its moral disposition (vss. 1-8).

But there are other points practically. The tendency of man's energy, as such, is to follow his own will. This is now natural, not before the fall. Then man enjoyed, thanked, and blessed; he followed naturally in the path described by God— a simple one. Now, through that first distrust of God, will is come in. And here we have a difference of the very last importance in Christian obedience and the law. The law addresses itself, as such, to responsible man down here, without raising the question of and not supposing a new nature, though it may discover (when known to be spiritual) the need of one. It supposes a will and lusts which have to be checked and put down. The Old Testament does not speak of flesh and spirit, but of responsible men and their ways. Christian obedience is as Christ's; the will of God is the motive of action, not merely the rule. "I come to do

thy will" (Heb. 10:9): no doubt it will herein be a rule to guide us. In us this is a new nature, Christ being our life. We do not find in the Old Testament "he cannot sin because he is born of God" (John 3:9). It is not that there was not the desire to obey in renewed souls then; surely there was. It could not be otherwise. But the relationship in which men stood to God was a law without them to govern their ways when in flesh, not a known new nature standing in the results of redemption whose only motive of action was God's will. The prophets, indeed, pointed out Christ as such (as in Psa. 40), and the masters in Israel should have known that, to have their future privileges, they must be born of water and the Spirit; as in Ezek. 36. But obedience under the law was a rule applied to one who had a will whose movements were to be judged by the law, not a nature whose only motive was God's will, standing in the power of redemption so as to have the right to reckon a discovered old man to be dead, yea, whom God had pronounced dead through Christ. Hence the heirs differed nothing from servants, to do this and that, whatever their own will might be.

Ways, and not nature, were in question, even though renewal of heart were there. Hence the young man, where energy of will is found, is to "cleanse his way." Lusts would have carried his will elsewhere: how should he find the means of having his' way's clear before God? Watchfulness, the fear of God (not will) according to God's word. God's word— how precious to have it in such a world of darkness and will, to guide our feet in a path according to God's mind! For the heart is set right. It is not, indeed, the sweet enjoyment of love in a reconciled soul, love shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit given, but (what is of all vital importance) the heart right in the sight of God. It supposes the man away from God, but undivided in his desire. Both are true of the Christian. He is reconciled and has peaceful affections in perfect relationship (this one under the law had not); and he has earnest desire after Him that has loved him, as known and seen in glory, only as knowing (not merely seeking) Him. Here He is "with my whole heart have I sought thee"; no guile but the true desire of the heart towards God. Being so (the commandments of God being precious, as making known His will), the true heart prays not to be let to wander from them. God is looked to in goodness; for when He is truly sought, there is always some sense of His goodness. It is what distinguishes conversion from mere terror of conscience, desire towards Him and sense of goodness in God.

We have, then, another element. The heart which thus seeks God, and has a desire to do His will, not only seeks outward conduct to be right when the occasion arises, but keeps the word at the center, so to speak, and springs of action. He hides it in his own heart as that which he loves; "keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it (where that word is hid) are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23). How large a place the word has here! Note, too, man's estimate of conduct disappears. It is between God and the heart, and this is integrity of heart. It is not here a single eye to an object; so far as that is here, it is found in seeking with the whole heart. This is the integrity which, by reason of the desire towards God, takes His mind as governing the springs of life. It is a blessed and important principle. The word hid in the heart prevents sinning against Him.

But the heart goes farther. It owns the blessedness of Jehovah Himself, known in His ways, His goodness, His mercy, that endureth forever. There, in the midst of its distress, the renewed heart finds its resource and its rest. "Blessed art thou, O Jehovah." This makes the heart look for what He has decreed and ordained, and for divine teaching in it. This looking at God gives courage and the consciousness of integrity and faithfulness. When the heart is right, this is the case. The heart, however humble, when it walks in integrity, has the consciousness of it before God. It may see

weakness and infirmity in its ways, shortcomings of which it will judge the cause; but with God it will have the consciousness of entire guilelessness and purpose of heart. “This one thing I do”; “to me to live is Christ.” This does not affect humility; entire dependence on grace and divine strength for willing and doing is felt (we are in result unprofitable servants, had we done all), it is duty and delight. But there is the joyfulness with and from God that the heart is right.

Service flows from confidence in God and knowledge of His blessedness with the value we have of what God has given. So Christ fully in Psalm 40. The spirit is the same here. It is the effect of perception of divine things, in power and value for them, to make us declare them. It is glorifying God. Love to others may accompany this, but it is another thing. We owe it to God to declare what He is. He ought to be known, and what He is owned. The difference of praise is that the sense of what He is, is addressed to Himself. Perfection is where He is fully known, so that there is no need to declare it to others; all with one mind worship because of it. Then we hold nothing back, “all the judgments of thy mouth:” We are filled with what God is, its value; and it is uttered. We may be wise for others’ sake, but God is sufficiently valued to be fully declared. God’s testimonies become the riches of the soul. The possession of heaven somewhat modifies this; yet still, for here below, the way of God’s testimonies are joy, moral joy, as riches would be to men. But there is an inward life, which occupies itself with these things, as well as the activity of duty; much to be fed on, digested, learned in God’s testimonies. We meditate on them; we have thus God’s mind—the Holy Spirit’s intention in them. Thus the soul is fed in delight. But God’s ways are held in respect as authority to the mind. The heart goes with them too. It is not merely that they delight his soul, but there is the activity of the new man; he delights himself with them, he makes it the matter of his occupation, seeking his enjoyment there, and keeps it (oh! how needed it is) in memory, the true proof of affection (vss. 9-16).

From the third division, another element comes in. Its literal application is to the sorrows of Israel in the last days; in principle it applies to all times—the sorrows and trials which accompany godliness. The soul looks for mercy from One that is supreme, where it is a stranger. It needs this to keep the law. No doubt it may be strengthened even to martyrdom; but in general it looks for mercy to be able to walk. The heart owns it, is God’s servant, and looks to be kept in mercy in order to walk truly. This is a great point of the return of the soul to God. By this fact God has now His own place and authority as such. Whatever evil may be permitted. (Compare Psa. 94), God, our God, is supreme; and, further, goodness is always then necessarily known to Him.

But there is more; the soul thus knowing God desires the knowledge of His mind, not merely a rule to direct but “wondrous things out of Thy law.” And all this gives the consciousness of being a stranger in the earth. A good God (whose servants we are), and an evil world, make a man “a stranger” (we are much more through Christ). We need these—our own moral delights—God’s commandments; we must add the fullness of Christ. “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (John 17:16-17). And here the heart is fully engaged and filled; “my soul breaketh” forth, for there is infinite delight in the new nature, in the fullness of God’s revelations. It does break forth with delight. But this delight in the word gives a just estimate of man in the world, the “proud” man acting from his own will and setting himself up. He may seem to succeed and puff at God. He is under a curse, he errs from the one true way of man—God’s way. The exaltation of will brings necessary curse; for we are thus away from, in rebellion against, God—all acting of human will is. But godliness does more than make a stranger,

a sure thing for the heart, it brings cruel mockings, for proud man will not have subjection to God; it is contemptible to man; and the reasoner he cannot help him, he boasts. That is not contemptible, his will is in it. But with God, man must be subject, and the willful despise this, though often with misgivings of heart. This the saint, while enduring, seeks to be removed. God should assert His title, not suffer the faithful to be pressed down by evil. Still, meanwhile, he can retreat into his own delights; he meditates in God's statutes, hid there from the pride of man. They are his delight, and his counselors too (vss. 17-24).

He who seeks to follow God's ways will find himself often in evil days—days when the power of evil prevails and presses upon his spirit. What then marks faithfulness is, that the heart does not turn aside to an easier path or other comforts, but looks to God and His raising up the heart according to His word. There his heart is. He prefers sorrow with it to leaving it, but has learned to trust God, and in the sorrow looks to relief according to this revelation of God; and God can be counted on for it. The heart had been true with God—not only knew that He knew all its ways, but that there was the desire of being right in His sight and confidence with God even there. He had declared His ways.

This integrity in the time of trouble, when there is not the joy of God's deliverance, is very important—to be able to say, "When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, thou knewest my path." Still there is confidence in the result, so that the soul cleaves to God's ways, and the heart reckoning on His faithfulness is sure, if led by Him in faithfulness of walk it will soon declare His wondrous works. Not only did the heart take the lowly and abased place, as having no courage as to external things, but it melted within for heaviness—inwardly was in felt weakness. Still the strength it looks for is according to God's word. It seeks nothing but this. The false way, in the midst of which it lived, it would have kept far away from the heart. Through this it was downcast. But better to be downcast through evil than to walk merrily in it. More energetic faith might lift up. Still the sense of evil and dependence is good. It was deliberate. He knew all this, but he had chosen the way of truth. "Lord, to whom shall we go?" (John 6:68). How simple the path then! The soul had been steadfast, and another thing was connected with this. The heart sees that its joys and sorrows are in the hand of God. If it was put to shame, it would be His doing, but He could not for our keeping His own testimonies. "Put to shame" is not here bearing shame by man's mocking, but confounded as coming under judgment. After all, the free running in God's path is when the heart is set at liberty and free, joyfully with Him (vss. 25-32).

These last verses look for apprehension of the ways of God's precepts; so that the heart is taught in the midst of sorrow. Here it is more keeping and observing it in his path. Otherwise the first three portions were his own resolutions; here the demand of God's teaching. For the heart, true in its resolutions, then turns to God. It may be first for its sorrows, but then for guidance and dependence on Him. We need His teaching when the will is right, need understanding from Him—His help too. "Make me to go." But the heart seeks to be rightly inclined also, but that root of all evil turns it aside—covetousness. The same as to vanity, but this is all around us. It is not the inclination of the heart, but distraction and leading away the mind from God to folly. Hence the soul seeks to be given energy and life, to seek in singleness of eye heartily the Lord and His will. He seeks too that the word may be confirmed to the soul. This may be inwardly by the Holy Spirit giving it power or even by God's ways according to it. The heart follows God and bows in heart to Him at any rate, but seeks to be strengthened and confirmed. Reproach is when God allows

shame on one for righteousness without interfering to screen or save from it. It is as if He abandoned His servant to the mockery of the enemy, successful in his ways, or at any rate the faithful in a state to be triumphed over. So Christ: “Reproach hath broken my heart.” The world could say, “He trusted in God; let him deliver him” (Matt. 27:43).

But after all, what God ordained was good, in which the faithful walked. Why should he be left to reproach which he feared? The heart was right. It longed after God’s precepts, and looked for the Lord to give liveliness of heart and energy of renewed will, undistractedness through the faithfulness of God; that consistency with His own goodness and favor on which we can reckon in Him. “Quicken me in thy righteousness.” This last supposes an increased knowledge of God, so that we can reckon on Him. So indeed does all this demand on God for help and teaching. Uprightness and integrity lead to confidence in Him for our leading in the way of righteousness, which we know He must love. Being thus of one mind with Him, through grace, gives it; but the last word here shows deepened intimacy of faith, which counts on what God must be (vss. 33-40).

Remark here, that all through there is no thought of looking, in difficulty or trial, to anything but God. Help to keep the law, deliverance from trial because of it, these are sought, but there is not the smallest idea of turning anywhere else; it does not even occur to the faithful. This is true integrity of heart. God in truth, His will, God in mercy, God Himself as an object, but only God is sought—nothing outside or away from Him. His mercies are looked for, and that is right, and deliverance from Him, and this according to His word, for He has perfectly revealed Himself, and we want nothing short of Him. What an answer will His deliverance be to the enemy that reproaches! And the word He had sent to us was trusted in as well as obeyed.

This is an important point; it is not, only the authority of the word, but we have set to our seal that God is true; we receive it as the word of God, and God, we know, must be true, for we know Him; and the soul is interested in the truth of the word. It has taken it as of and from God, delighted in it, had its confidence in it, taken it in face of the wicked as that which it had of God (was perfect as He revealed Him), identified it, so to speak, with God. Hence, when there was deliverance according to it (and other the heart would not seek), it was the very answer the heart wanted to him that reproached; God’s word has an immense place in the heart. It is what reveals Him. Not only it does so, but it is what does so. (So John 5:39.) Had God abandoned the faithful, as fear would lead him to expect, the word would have been taken out of his mouth. Yet here it is not doubting the truth of the word, or its being God’s testimony; but he was allowed to accredit it no more by faith. This he fears because he values it. This was Christ’s trial and the perfectness of the cross, as to desire, “how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled?”; as to trust, “Yet thou continuest holy.”

Here the faithful has hoped in God’s judgments, God’s acting on that which is gone out of His mouth. His acting according to the revelation of Himself in His word; and this enabled him to keep it forever. So will it be with Israel when he is delivered from the oppressor at the end, the law having been written in his heart. Christ took none of the promises in life, but higher glory awaited Him as Man, an answer to higher and infinite faithfulness to God, faithfulness to make good His nature, to be the proof of it when abandoned, when only it could be done because of sin. Then will Israel walk at large, when God’s judgments have come in, for that was his desire, to be free to keep them in delight and joyfully.

Through mercy we may learn this by times, but our path is a higher one—to follow and suffer with Christ. But he has been encouraged by these thoughts. The word gets its value and God His place, so to speak, though unseen. He speaks of His testimonies before kings, and is not ashamed. This is the character of faith. It has the sense of the importance of God's testimonies, and is filled with it. Men take their place, may be respected, as due to them; but God's fills and governs the mind, not by effort, but, so to speak, naturally. The commandments of God become thus, instead of a pressure on the conscience, the delights of the heart. There is open confession and dedication to them; I suppose this is lifting up the hands to them. It is a solemn avowal and asseveration of heart; not only he has loved them, but he openly declares his owning their truth and authority, saying, That is what I own. And as he openly owns his affiance to them, so he meditates in them for his own joy (vss. 41-48).

But the soul has counted on God's word; God has taught and led the soul to do it, and now it looks for God to put His Amen to it (man through grace, having put his). This confidence of faith in God's word had been its comfort in affliction. There was that which was firm and steadfast for hope, and brought in God's faithfulness and testimony— Himself in hope to the soul, when all circumstances around were adverse, and nothing to lean on. And this is comfort, true comfort, in affliction; but it looks to God to fulfill His word—knows He cannot but do it. That very word had quickened the soul itself to do it. This lowly patient obedience, meekly accepting reproach, had been the scorn and derision of the proud; but faith in His word had kept the soul from swerving. It kept fast in the sorrow. It looked back to God's ways of old, when His hand had been stretched out. What made it obedient made it confident: that is, God was looked to, and this kept the vision and memory of faith clear. It counted on faithfulness, and it remembered judgments; for all this is the government of God. And His ways of old are ever the thought of Israel in the psalms, and, in their place, we can think of them; though our hope be elsewhere, as Christ's, in whose favor, when all was tested, it was not made good; but the better portion of resurrection was the answer for us.

But this thought of God's judgments does make it awful to contemplate the result for the wicked, who are hurrying willfully against them. But it is not only the end of the wicked that is spoken of here. The wickedness itself is to the soul poignant distress. The soul dwells in Mesech. It sees around what is grief of heart, for its delight is in the fresh air of God's holy will. The rank and fetid breath of sin is distress and pain to it, and seen not only intrinsically as sin but in the pride of wickedness. Still there is joy: God's statutes are its song in the house of its pilgrimage.

How true that is! How, when pressed in by evil around, does the heart find its relief and enlargement in the word and testimony of God Himself! His statutes are our songs in the house of our pilgrimage; and the loneliness in which the heart is in a world of evil (for it will and must be isolated, however sweet communion may be by the way, if it be faithful), will be met by the name of the Lord (to them Jehovah, to us Christ and the Father in Him). And, when cast upon our thoughts, these thoughts are filled with their names, and all is peace, and the purpose of the heart in obedience and communion is settled and strengthened. And this is the fruit of obedience, for holiness and communion—the sense of God's presence—are the fruit of obedience. So Romans 6:22, "ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life." The obedience here has the sense of diligent observation of God's precepts, a thing not to be forgotten (vss. 49-56).

In this part (vss. 57-64) we have more the affections connected with the word written in the heart: “Thou art my portion, O Jehovah.” The heart has Himself as its source of joy and blessing. This connects itself necessarily with purpose of heart towards God: “I have said.” It is impossible to look to the Lord as one’s portion without thus purposing to do His will, for that would be not owning Him. This too necessarily involves the desire of His favor, since He is God. Still the word here has its place, which has awakened this desire and confidence, both as assuring of the mercy and the revelation of the principles on which this favor and mercy are shown. I see the same desire, not mere obedience, though resulting in it, but the meditation of the heart: “I thought on my ways”—the heart’s inward exercises, a needful and important matter for us—“and turned my feet unto thy testimonies.”

We may obey instinctively, carelessly almost, with right intention, but showing that the heart is not with God, not exercised, not anxious as to pleasing Him, and in which, though the path be not evil, the heart may be in a very poor state. But the saint rightly with God will review the purpose of his ways, the direction of them, how far they are according to the measure of the purpose which the light given to us leads to, and, if the purpose be adequate, how far the filling up in practice be true to it and earnestly pursued—true to the character of that purpose. For we may be externally blameless, in appearance even amiable, and unfaithful to the calling of God. Here, of course, we have to turn to God’s testimonies, which are able to make the man of God perfect, “throughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim. 3:17). We see how having the Lord for our portion is the very spring of all this. Thus we should have a heart which thinks on our ways.

But this gives diligence when the heart is right. It does not confer then with flesh and blood, having only God’s favor in view and purpose of heart: “I made haste, and delayed not, to keep thy commandments.” How characteristic and all-important this is I need not say. It is the essential firstfruits and spring of a life true to God, as we see in the blessed apostle Paul. Suffering may be found in this path, opposition of the haters of the Lord, the instruments of Satan, but the inward life remains steady and rightly directed—does not swerve in its judgment of its path: “I have not forgotten thy law.” We may be occupied with opposition and evil, so as to have the state of our mind formed by it, though opposed to the wicked. It is but meeting flesh by flesh. He who looks to the Lord has the character of his path in the scene of wickedness formed by the unforgotten word, and this leads to see God as the dealer with these things. It looks for the perfectness of God’s dealings with evil.

This is a comfort, for an upright mind would often rise up in indignation against public evil; but the wrath of man does not work the righteousness of God. It is hard often for an active, energetic mind to take the lowly place, and not bring down fire from heaven, or will to smite with the sword, when Christ and His truth are insulted and annoyed; but in looking above we have songs in the night. The heart, in singleness of eye, led of God in His ways, has springs of joy which wake it up in the time of evil, and when it is alone with God. Sorrow may be around, but joy with Him. It arises. There is a chord of heart to praise. It is not only comforted in the sorrow, but freed from the bond of evil, active in praising Him whom it knows, and who is its portion. For judgment and deliverance will come according to the word, and the heart gets up to God as to it now. But though we are and must be alone in faith, not in fellowship, when the Lord is our portion, we are companions of them that fear Him and walk in His ways. And here the heart is able to turn round and, when all the evil had pressed upon it, yet see mercy. And so it is: evil may rise up like a flood, but the Lord is

always above it; and when the heart by faith realizes this, and the will is bowed as to it all, if it is then comforted by the thought of God's judgments, it finds the constant exposition of His mercy now, and seeks in peace to be led in His ways. This is an interesting part of the soul's experience under the influence of the word of God (vss. 57-64).

We have now the sense of blessings from God, and the heart turned to Him as its portion: this with the consciousness, the will being broken, of being His servant. Still in unerring goodness the word, the great subject of this psalm, has its place. The word is the path of Jehovah in His goodness, as it assures us of that goodness, revealing Him and His ways to us, as it guides us in our path. This is very precious, because it teaches how to reckon on it, and that we can. And here he had found it by experience; he had been afflicted, and he can now account for it; but as His word, so Jehovah's ways have been. So even (and it is most precious) we can reckon on it at all times. We may have more, but this we have. Now he looks for discernment as taught of God, divinely-given judgment and knowledge; for he had put the seal to God's commandments, for believing here is putting the Amen of his heart. Herein he can confidently look to be guided—so we; and it gives confidence to the heart, so as to look for it. His will had been broken. Affliction had been there; before, will had its way, forgetting God, and going its own way. Affliction is understood now, and obedience wrought.

How graciously God follows, though righteously as to government, and necessarily so in general! For sometimes He breaks the heart through favor as He knows how, when we have wandered away from Him. Hence God is known in goodness in the subdued heart; "Thou art good and doest good." The desire of the heart is after God's ways. Now "teach me thy statutes"; that is the goodness the heart seeks. This subdual of will and setting the heart right is beautiful to see. The pride of ungodly adversaries is before him, saying evil of him in untruth: it is natural if he has left their ways and his own pride of will, but experience has given purpose of heart. It was enough to have gone astray: he clings to that with purpose which he has now got; and the moral difference is great. Filled with will and self on one side, perhaps success; delight in Jehovah's law on the other: the law of Him whose we are—Jesus Christ's will in all things. But not only was there breaking of will and return; there is positive progress, through infinite grace, in this experience. The breaking of will brings the elements of the heart directly into contact with the word. Self is judged in the forms it takes within in the heart—what flesh is in its ways, however deceitful. Thus the heart gets to learn, freed from self, and, the light of the word breaking in on the heart, and exercising it, thus renders it cognizant of its import and power; for (though, yea, and because, it is of God) it is directed to and adapted to the heart of man: only till the will is broken and conscience awakes it does not reach it intelligently. See the parable of the sower and John 4. But then the law of God's mouth is precious above all, the expression of His own perfect mind and will, and of His will about us. We live by it, but we live on it too, and with delight as from Him and perfect for us (vss. 65-72).

The soul looks now to God as dependent for man's very being on God, so that He should surely direct and guide it, as Peter wrote, "Commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator" (1 Peter 4:19). The heart alone which knows Him in grace can do this. Otherwise we seek our own will in resistance to Him. But once He is known, He is known in all that He is, according to the truth of His nature in grace. This enlarges our knowledge of God, and applies it to everything. It warrants thus the desire founded on it. Here it is applied to the teaching of the word, because the soul is walking and to walk in the old creation. Still we can, as down here now, look to the truth of God's nature, when, as I said, He is known, and look to Him thus because

thus our dependence on Him, in the fullest and most absolute sense, is expressed, as well as the desire of the renewed heart. I only exist by Thy work: make me, then, to walk as disposed in heart and guided by Thee.

He who made can give understanding. But there was a common bond in thus looking to God—the same disposition of heart which delighted in His being owned and honored, and was kind to those who did so in the midst of an evil world. They were companions, as Malachi speaks: “They that feared the Lord spake often one to another” (Mal. 3:16); and as we see so beautifully in the lovely picture of the hidden ones in the beginning of Luke. There is another trait of this divine work in the soul. God being really known in the soul, it rises up to the justification of Him in His ways, however painful. Thus the heart knows in a double way that His judgments are right. They are His, and we know what He is. He cannot but do rightly, and more, rightly towards us. He is faithful to us in goodness; but then, secondly, we see the rightness of it morally. God ought not to allow evil—above all, not in His people. For their good He could not. Right and wrong are known and judged, and it is God’s care over His people which makes Him follow them in their ways. But the feeling that the chastening comes from God, though it gives submission, gives the desire of His favor, when the submission is complete. Still one desires relief; but a subdued heart, while naturally desiring relief, yet seeks divine favor in it, and comfort from God, not in self-will. “Let, I pray thee, thy merciful kindness be for my comfort.” “God…who comforteth,” says the apostle, “them which are in any trouble”; and this depends on God’s faithful word. On that goodness he counts, and looks for it; and this is right.

Mere looking for relief is self-will, and may be the means, if we had it, of more sorrow; but a subdued and broken will under chastisement is all right in desiring mercy. It knows this character in God, and desires that it may be exercised, if possible; and it can plead its integrity in this case, for the desire is right when submission is complete, so that goodness is felt to be in God. So here, “For thy law is my delight”; and judgment is the portion of the proud. There is the sense that the proud will is the subject of judgment. In the time of grace the Christian desires that will may be changed. Yet he knows faith is not of all. Here the desire that they should be ashamed is according to the righteous character of God. The faithful one keeps himself apart, and meditates on God’s revealed will. But there is the desire, not only of the favor of God, but that those who fear God should turn to the afflicted one. There is something special in these. It is not that he seeks them, though this be right. There is energy of affiance in God, and he seeks Him only, nor leans on another, but delights in their association with him. It is not that he was not a companion of those that feared God’s name, but here he seeks his comforts from God; and, as Job’s acquaintance came to him again when the testimony of God was with him, so it is here. Only, whatever the comforts of God, his desire is to be maintained in integrity. There is no thought of blessing out of the way of God’s word. So shall the servant of God not be ashamed (vss. 73-80).

Verses 81-88 go farther. The pressure of the power of evil is greater, and the cry more earnest, but the word is fully trusted. This blessed revelation of God Himself, of His will and favor, that in which He cannot lie, maintains the heart through all. How precious is it—the fact of having a revelation of Himself as sure as Himself! With these two grounds of appeal—the extremity of distress: he is dried up like a bottle in the smoke; but he dare not forget God’s statutes. But a poor, short-lived creature, it was time for God to lay to His hand, if he was to taste of mercy. And the sorrow he was suffering was both the pride of man, and was not according to the word which God

made good and owned. Yet that word was, all of it, faithful, and the persecution wrongful. It had gone very far. He was almost consumed in the land, the very place of promise and God's power; but he forsook not God's precepts. Mercy too is looked for as life-giving to himself. It is not only comfort from without, but the restoration of the soul itself, and, so is it kept firmly, and with good courage and confidence, the testimony of God's mouth. Thus sorrow itself and great pressure, where there is integrity, become a plea with God.

Another aspect of the word is now before the soul—before God in heaven itself. There it is settled forever. There, where He is, it remains in its own character of God's settled and expressed purpose. But God has acted out of heaven, though His purpose be settled in it. His faithfulness, His abiding by what He is and has said, continues through the changing generations of men. Hence, when we have His word, we can reckon upon it as sure as what is in heaven, it changes not, as God Himself. He established the earth, and it abides. All continues as God orders it; for—and it is another important truth—all that does exist is the servant of God. If even He has given them final laws, why do they abide in them? Because they depend on Him. They are His servants. All are His servants; but then the soul has its strength in this word. Here is a moral willing obedience in a renewed heart, and when circumstances were all adverse, it was hard to hold good, unless the moral side of the law had its power. God seemed out of the circumstances, but the inward delight in the law of God kept it fast.

We have, I think, something more, though this be interesting as a testimony to a renewed heart, and true as to us. We glory in tribulation, knowing its working in us, having the love of God shed abroad in our hearts, as it is witnessed in the gift of the Son, by the Holy Spirit given to us. "All things work together for good to them that love God" (Rom. 8:28). How truly Christ held to God's will, in the highest sense, against all adverse circumstances—even to wrath! This power of the word in sustaining the heart in sorrow, in its inward quickening and restoring power in the new man, gives purpose of heart in the consciousness of its divine preciousness. And this leads up to God in the consciousness that we are His. I do not say it creates the thought, but it leads the heart to the consciousness of it; and hence to look to Him who is faithful to save and deliver, and that, as even here, in the consciousness of integrity. "I have sought thy precepts"; and this must be so. Want of it enfeebles all confidence, though God may have mercy.

One sees how constantly the soul is seen in the presence of oppressing enemies; for the remnant will be so in the last days. In one sense we always are, but it applies often in evil days. "The wicked have waited for me to destroy me." But the soul waits in peace, occupied with God's testimonies. And this does give peace, and enables the soul to leave all to God. Another pressure of the soul is universal failure. Not that there is no integrity; but the heart would be disposed to say so under the pressure of it. But there is no fulfilling or completing—such is the force of the word—the will of God even in those who undertake to walk in it. But if the heart turn to the word, it has quite another effect. This very failure, though never justified, leads us to see how perfect, how complete, and wide God's commandment is—how it reaches to everything in which man can be engaged—everything in the relation of the creature to God—all moral relations (vss. 89-96).

Verses 97-104 are the affection and value he has for the law, its known experienced value. He loves God's law in itself. It is of God to him, the revelation of His will. It is his meditation all the day. It is not for the fruit he got from it, nor the wisdom it gave him towards others; he loved it for itself.

This characterizes the new man. But its effect when loved for its own sake was to make him wiser than his enemies, however subtle and cunning they may be; there is a path which the vulture's eye has not known—"wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil," which outreaches and baffles the adversaries of God and of the godly man. They can form no estimate of the principles of those who fear God.

But this supposes constancy and consistency in them. "They are ever with me." It is divine wisdom, and immediately so; so that it gives a discernment (because it acts on the soul itself, and forms it, and is perfect in every respect) which no human teaching, however godly, can. This may be very useful as drawn from and leading to the word; but even in the case of the highest gift nothing gained by it is in the faith of the soul with God, until it is learned there; it may be pointed out, interest the heart and mind; but, to possess it, it must be learned with God. "They shall be all taught of God" (John 6:45).

Nothing teaches like the word of God, sought out and searched in holy subjection, and received as a new-born babe.

We have thus understanding—divine wisdom—as to our mind and path: so it gives more wisdom than human experience, when God's precepts are kept. It becomes a positive motive; it is preferred to every evil way: we leave them all for that one which is God's way, because the heart has learned to delight in that. We see too how directly the soul connects itself with God in grace here, and has the consciousness that it is of God. This gives the word authority. "I have not departed from thy judgments: for thou hast taught me." This has great weight in the soul, when the power of God's word has been realized. What has been taught of man may be left for man; but what has been taught of God will never be left for God (John 6:68); and for whom else shall we leave it? It has the bond of faith and authority for the soul. It comes from and leads to Him. The soul returns to the thought of the sweetness of the word to the taste. These divine communications are the delight of the soul. It is not merely duty, though that is owned, but they are sweeter than honey to the mouth. Through God's precepts the heart itself is formed—learns to discern good and evil. It is not merely obedience to a law, but moral discernment grown up in the heart and will. By reason of use, the heart being attached to God's word, the senses are exercised to discern good and evil, and every false way is hated.

It is remarkable to how many things the word applies. In the last section the heart and affections were engaged in it for its own sake, leading to wisdom. Now it is a guide to our path through the world in which we walk, a very different service. It "is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path." This it is. It is the means of a right walk, not merely because it sets the heart right, but as casting light on this world; yet not merely light on this world, such as it is, but on our path through it. So Christ does not merely detect by practical righteousness, but he that follows Him has the light of life. It shows the path of the law, to us of divine life, through the world. But withal it never loses the character of obedience; here of course in Jewish form: "I have sworn, and I will perform it; that I will keep thy righteous judgments"; yet here, I think, with a decided moral estimate of their character in contrast with man and the world. It is not testimonies here, which is for oneself; righteous judgments are the contrast of God's ways and man's ways.

He then turns to his trials through which this path must pass. Affliction is here seen, not as coming from the hand of God, but as affliction. The former he had to learn, and did learn, his will being

bound. See Verses 67, 71, 75. So it was the wasting of human strength (vss. 81-83). Here it is viewed as affliction on the path which was lighted up for him by the word; and he looks for strength and revival through the word from God in his soul in that path. But the desire of the heart is not here deliverance, sweet as it may be, but that, in turning to God in this path of righteousness, the free-will offerings of his mouth may be accepted. He can bring, as kept there, and God's thoughts in him, free praises to God, that was not interrupted through affliction. He was brought low—had been astray, but, walking now in rectitude of heart, desired that these outgoings of his heart, fruit of the word's power, might be accepted. This is all right. It is not the joy of present salvation. There is all through the consciousness of having been astray; only the heart is set right. The word has power over his ways; he feels it as a light in these he has entered on; and, though in a certain sense under the fruit of his old ways, his heart set right can go forth in praise: can it be accepted? Such is his desire, and surely it would be.

But the lowliness of the desire is right, as the desire itself is the fruit of grace. It is not the simple-hearted praise of one in known relationship when it flows forth unhesitatingly as the natural and necessary fruit of blessing. As he praises, so he looks to be taught in God's ways, in contrast with evil. Purpose of heart then characterizes his path. His state of affliction, and even danger, was great; his soul was continually in his hand, but this did not alter his purpose, he does not forget God's law. He was not so absorbedly in the danger as to put this out of his mind. This is a blessed witness of the power of the link with God which grace gives, and how what is known of God, where faith is in exercise, is paramount to the strongest effects of circumstances and the power which Satan can exercise!

What God gives to the soul is kept in remembrance in spite of it. Craft and subtle wiles were in his path; and to an upright mind this is trying and painful, but his feet were steadfast in the way. They were set in that way to dishearten in it, but the word had its own power within; and the full secret of this was—he had taken God's testimonies as his portion forever. It was not present delight which may influence the mind, and be lost as in a moment; it was a divinely-given estimate of the good and divine truth that was in them. Hence, when really held by grace, it abides and is not affected by circumstances. The terrors of the enemy and his wiles makes the soul cling more closely to what is of God and truth from Him. They have been and are themselves the rejoicing of the heart; only we say more—nothing "shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:39). Hence obedience was the purpose of the heart, in its continual practice, or as a perpetual bond. So indeed with us. Still, we say rather, "having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end" (John 13:1). Yet even that leads to equally perpetual obedience as our very element and state as men (vss. 105-112).

This section is simple in its character. The soul states its own condition, but then looks out to see God's intervention according to the word, hoping in that, but withal apprehends God's judgment on the disobedient. "I hate vain thoughts: but thy law do I love"—thoughts, I suppose, of man's understanding and reasoning, but God's word he loved. The soul thus turned to God from man's reasonings. God, and God only, is his hiding-place and shield; he hopes in His word. So in turning to men he refuses evil-doers, his mind is made up, he looks to be upholden to the end, and not disappointed in this hope founded on the word.

But this desire is more precise; that is, he looks to the Lord to hold him up in the way; and he will be safe. He needs not only to be guarded, but kept morally upright—God's strength and grace to sustain him: otherwise the enemy would have the advantage over him; but thus kept he would constantly heed God's commandments. But he sees God's judgments on those that went away from them. That by which they sought to beguile men turned out to be emptiness and vanity. Deceit is, as regards men, falsehood—what was vain and false in itself. God rejected them, and treated them as naught— as dross. This encouraged the heart in God's testimonies, whose way the heart had kept, in spite of the wicked who puffed at them. But there was fear, and just fear, in the prospect of these judgments. We indeed shall be above them, taken out of the hour of temptation which shall come on all the earth, but encouraged by the word, and even by the judgment, in looking up in Him from whom it came. And such is ever the case in this psalm.

Nothing can be more natural, nor more true, than this righteous fear. The expression of the apostle (how perfect is scripture ever!) in view of deeper judgments, if less outwardly terrible, shows that, while he would not directly be in it at all, he was not unconscious of it. "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Cor. 5:11). It only awoke love (for he would not come into judgment), but he knew its solemnity and terror. It acted in sanctifying power, manifesting him as a present thing to God; but where one passed through it, though not reached by it, fear was right. So "Noah, being warned of God….moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house" (vss. 113-120).

There are three points in this section. He is fully in the presence of the power of evil, his regard is to Jehovah Himself; the energy of evil in its moral character only attached him increasedly to God's word and testimonies. This is the effect of nearness to God, because His presence keeps the heart free and confident, and maintains the sense of value for what is in the word. There is, I think, progress here.

In verse 82 it is "When wilt thou comfort me?" This is not so here, though Jehovah's mercy is earnestly sought. He appeals on the ground of righteousness to God's protection, but, with this, if waiting in anxious desire for deliverance, yet for the word of God's righteousness—more, I think, than faithfulness to promised deliverance, as verse 124 shows. When delivered, his heart would be set free in obedience. But he looked for more than deliverance, or measuring this by the evil he was under. His heart had got to God, and he looked to be dealt with according to His mercy.

This is progress too, and, I think, shows consciousness of integrity on which God had set His seal in the heart. When under the sorrows of God's chastening hand, we look for mercy, for deliverance: grace and caring for His favor leads us to it. But it is left to Him, as wholly undeserved; the pressure of the power of evil is felt as deserved, and deliverance from it is mercy enough; but when this has wrought its effect, when the heart has been purified to think more of God, and His holiness and will, and less of the sorrow and evil from without, so that it springs up from under it, so to speak—when the heart is morally restored (and God's place in it in contrast with the sorrow is just the test of it), it measures what it seeks for by God, into whose knowledge, revealed within, it has, so to speak, got back. Hence in what follows we see the fruit of this reconciliation with, or restoration to, God. The soul has got into the place of uprightness, and it says, "I am thy servant." In such a shape we have not had this yet. Holy desire, confidence, true confession, we have had—the general expression, "Thou halt dealt well with thy servant." But this

is another thing. He presents himself to God directly as being in this relationship and place; “I am thy servant.” It is perfect submission, but of one who holds the place, God owning him in it, and he knowing that He does. This is saying a great deal. What a ground to ask from God, understanding that we may serve Him! For what a thing it is to serve God rightly such as we are! No doubt it is a great encouragement being able to say, “I am thy servant”: so the parable of the talents, where confidence in Him, who had enabled them to serve, was the spring of service. But there all was happy and right. Here the soul was only getting back to say, “I am thy servant,” after long chastening for wanderings.

Verse 126 shows the same growing confidence, and, taking the blessed title of one free with God, God’s law is precious to himself; not a tittle can pass from it till all be fulfilled. And when the believer can look out of himself, it is a plea with God. It is time for Thee: “They have made void thy law.” What a principle it is that God’s authority must be maintained, so that the extreme of evil gives the assurance of deliverance. But it makes God’s law exceeding precious. The love to the law (and here this is the expression of God’s will) grows with the growth of the power of evil. We feel more how precious it is, how sure it is, how it comes from God; and what makes His intervention precious, as against the power of evil, makes His word precious against the development of evil itself. There is a double feeling as to this. The commandments of God are loved above all that could be precious to man. There is decision of moral judgment. All God’s precepts are taken as absolutely and the whole of what is right, and every way of vain falsehood is hated. The decision of good and evil is absolutely by the word (vss. 121-128).

The soul has now got into a place where it not only obeys, and tastes the goodness of the law, but estimates its value in itself. There is intelligence. “Thy testimonies are wonderful: therefore doth my soul keep them.” God’s words getting into the heart give light: even to the simple they give understanding. Thus they become to the heart the subject of earnest desire; the soul is engaged with the excellency of them. It was a thirst produced by them; not a filling of the heart, though a desire formed by them. There may be intelligence, obedience as regards the path we walk in on the way, and hunger and thirst after righteousness, a moral forming and filling the desire, but the satisfying it will be only when the promises are fulfilled, and God takes His place, of whose mind His testimonies speak. So with us, though in a higher way; for it is Christ Himself, and a heavenly cry.

Here the cry is for this mercy ordering his steps, delivering from oppression; and one sees he is in the midst of evil, one looks for God’s face to shine upon him, and to be taught. He has deep grief because the law is not kept; but this seems to flow here more from the sense of the excellency of the law than from love to the persons who failed (vss. 129-136).

But the righteousness of God’s law, and the key it gives to God’s ways, leads to the recognition of what Jehovah is who gave it. “Righteous art thou, O Lord, and upright are thy judgments.” That is the way Jehovah deals with a case, or the moral decision which He utters as to it. His testimonies He had commanded according to righteousness and faithfulness. This characterized them. The contempt of Jehovah’s words had roused zeal so as to consume him; he became as an earnest adversary, in collision with evil yet in power, as Christ in the temple. But whatever the evil around, there is in one rest and comfort for the heart when the word of God is known and loved. “Thy word is very pure.” Try it ever so, it is only more proved to be purity itself; the heart loves it as its

resting-place and joy. And it gives greatness and courage to the heart. One may be small and despised, yet one has the courage to keep God's precepts in spite of the power of the world or its scorn, for they are God's words—what God is as judging evil and good; He is everlasting. His righteousness is everlasting, and His law truth.

It is not here surely the truth that came along with grace by Jesus Christ; but in the presence of all else on the earth, which is a lie, that is truth, true religion, God's mind about everything, in contrast with man's thoughts and all he sets up to be; and God will make His judgment therein revealed good forever. Compare Isaiah 42:3. It is not the absolute revelation of God as He is; that is in Christ. But it is the revelation of God's judgment as to man, as to good and evil, and that will be made good forever. Executed judgment will be verified. Those that have sinned against the law will be judged by the law; just as those that heard Christ's word will be judged by it. The tribulation of the power of evil will take hold of the remnant, but there will be the comfort of the commandments being their delight in the inner man. So we in all sorrow, in the evil day, in a yet higher way. And now he arrives at the point we have touched upon. "The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting." They come from God, His will and judgment concerning man; and that He will make good forever. What he has to look for is understanding; then he will live, guided in the path where life is found, found even when the wicked are cut off, yea, never so found here below as then. This is true of government as to us, yea, even of Christ ("as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love"). As to life, it was in Him, and in our case we have it by Him: so all that live; but it was only brought to light by the gospel. What was presented to them as the governmental way of life, and will be so literally at the end, is the governmental way of blessing for us here below (vss. 137-144).

Here the soul expresses, and expresses to God, the sense of its dependence. This is an important point. We are dependent, know ourselves to be dependent, and remain quiescently so. This shows want of interest in that for which we are dependent, and want of reckoning on God's faithful love. If we did, we should cry, "If thou knewest... and who it is... thou wouldest have asked of Him and He would have given." Here he cries with his whole heart, and declares his purpose of obedience to Jehovah's enactments.

Then he looks for deliverance that, having, he may keep them; no hindrance, and his heart so disposed. There was diligence in the cry too; for the word, which led his heart, was trusted; but it was not only for the cry to be delivered he was diligent, but to meditate in Jehovah's word itself. Deliverance, no doubt, was sought, but the word itself is loved. All this goes together necessarily in the soul. Deliverance is to be with God, freed from transgressors of His law, from rebellious oppressors. The meditation of the law is to be with God, and the word which makes us hope is the testimonies we delight in. Still he looked, as we shall, in trueheartedness, in distress (so did Christ Himself to be heard) and according to the kindness of Jehovah, but with the desire that the work of power might be wrought in him, to be quickened, receive life according to the mind of God (that is, which had its nature and desires according to God's judgment. He does not speak as dead, but of moral quickening). We know it must be a new life.

The sense of the present power of evil was upon his soul. Jehovah only was his refuge he must draw near to. This is beautiful, the true only resource which gives a perfect principle. "I waited patiently for the Lord"—perfect submission to His will; no deliverance sought until it was so, till His

will brought it; but faith knew Jehovah was near and the path plain. All His commandments were the one true path of security and of God. Jehovah's testimonies were founded forever. They could not change; they will be made good.

Only God must come in, and that was his cry and demand here. These verses are a cry for deliverance, but it must be, if true and of God, according to His word and making good forever its truth, in its moral testimonies, and as the foundation of hope (vss. 145-152).

The soul of him who opens out his heart to God is much more in presence of the persecutors and enemies, God's deliverance and of the need of help, than in the beginning. There what the law was for the heart was more in view. So it ever is. With Christ the word of blessing begins; at the end He is in presence of the enemies, and looks for deliverance. So Paul: he begins with the carrying out of the blessing; at the close he has to do with persecution and desertion too. So ever, when good is persevered in, because the testimony of God in every shape and faithfulness draws out opposition, and the place of the word in the world, not in the heart, is more distinctly felt. Still there is no uncertainty of heart. Salvation is needed, that is, present deliverance, but it is far from the wicked. But where righteousness of heart and way is, the affliction is a ground of pleading with God.

But, with deliverance, quickening also is sought, the practical power of life according to the word and revealed judgments of God. Righteousness is sought in liberty and power when righteousness is loved in the heart. External security in the word is sought, but internal power too. In the thought of Jehovah's tender mercies quickening is sought according to God's judgments. The felt goodness of God leads always to the desire of His will. When the purity and blessedness of His word is thought of with delight, His loving-kindness is thought of as that in which He should quicken us. His word is so precious, we look to grace to form us freely into it. Truth and perpetuity characterize the word. I question whether "from the beginning" is the sense, and if not rather "the sum," the whole contents, but cannot now say (vss. 153-160).

The soul goes something farther in this portion. The heart stands in awe of God's word—a godly feeling. It comes with God's authority; yet he rejoices in it as one that has found great spoil. This, that is, the connection of these two, characterizes the true full apprehension of the word. It is God's—a most solemn thing; the soul trembles, as it is said, "at thy word." It comes with divine and absolute authority; but as it is God's word, and we have a new nature and are taught of God, we delight in an unspeakable way in that which is of and reveals Him. Nor is there any difference as to good and evil, the law being taken as the truth or true measure of what is right. He hates and loves—hates lying and loves the law; not merely what is right, but God's authoritative expression of it. And all this begets praise, because the heart rises up to the source of these things.

It is not merely that we have what is good; we have it from God. He praises Him in the relationship he was in with Him. These are Jehovah's ways with His people. But the expressed will of God has another power when really received: the heart is in peace. It is a known perfect communion from God with which the heart is satisfied, and, if it trusts in God, circumstances cannot stumble the heart then, because it has and enjoys the mind of God, which no circumstances can affect. There is no stumbling. I have what is perfect from God, know it to be so, and enjoy it in a new nature. That is affected by nothing without.

Another element of a godly walk besides obedience is found here. “All my ways are before thee,” but this leads naturally to obedience: but the heart and conscience are all before God. It is a most important principle. So Paul, “We are made manifest unto God” (2 Cor. 5:11); only this goes farther. He looked at complete final judgment of men, and for that knew the righteousness of God. And it was not merely his ways before God as to His earthly government. He himself was manifested, as men would be manifested, before the judgment-seat of Christ, who judges as Son of man perfectly every secret emotion, the heart itself brought out (vss. 161-168).

When men have gone astray, cries and supplications go —first, praises and testimony after. Still the cry and supplication is a godly one, though it arise from need. He seeks understanding, intelligence, not exactly of the word, but according to it. It is that wisdom in discernment which those taught in God’s word have. They sec clearly in what is before them. No doubt it is God’s mind and will they discern; but they discern in circumstances. They walk not as fools, but as wise. The word has formed their judgment. Then the soul looks to be heard and delivered. Still its delight is in God’s revealed will. It will praise when really taught it of God— for thankfulness comes first—for it is our own portion first of all; and from God; then we have liberty to speak of it to others.

This is an important principle also: no testimony, no preaching, no teaching, even if the matter of it be all right, is right teaching, when the soul is not filled for itself first from God. We must drink for ourselves that rivers may flow. Indeed all else dries up the soul. “That thy profiting may appear,” says the apostle. It is only fresh, good, and powerful, when it is the soul’s own portion first with God. The help of God’s hand, the longing for His salvation, is not merely that we may be delivered. That may be sought, if it only be sought in some bye-way, not God’s way. But when the heart is in God’s precepts, only God’s salvation is sought.

So Christ: “I waited patiently for the Lord.” There was submission to God’s will. God could not come in till His will was done, so that His glory should be made good in coming in—till His counsels were fulfilled, and perfect judgment wrought by His coming in. And this the soul had learned to desire, though often out of sorrow. There was Christ’s perfectness in this respect—there our path in submissive uprightness. Then the soul praises God, God Himself in it; and God’s own judgments held us. This is a principle of great perfectness and great blessing. Yet here, though brought to this, yea, because brought to this, the people then—so we, when occasion arises—acknowledge that they had gone astray (for that is their case, and is the condition of the whole psalm, the law being now written, in desire at least, in their hearts), and gone astray like a sheep wholly lost. The humbled and repentant remnant (and, I repeat, we, when we have wandered from God) look for God’s seeking them, for they were upright in heart, mindful of His commandments.

This gives the key to the whole psalm—Israel gone astray, the desire and love of God’s law in their hearts, but their circumstances and condition not yet set right by Jehovah’s deliverance, but their hearts set right, that He may come in His word, and His deliverance being their desire, and His word the ground of their hope. In the restoring of any soul we have an analogous process, specially when under chastisement. It does not seek comfort without restoration, where uprightness of heart is. Only if we know the Lord, we stand in Him as our righteousness. This they could not speak of as established, or their hearts in it. They were only looking for it when delivered. It had been prophesied of: Jehovah would be their righteousness. Gracious and true as this is, our

place is infinitely higher (vss. 169-176).

I have thus closed this running notice of Psalm 119, of which I feel the poverty. But I feel every day more that, true and applicable as all this may be to the government of our hearts, we are far away from Christian ground here. Nothing makes it more sensible than the Psalms. Neither the Father, nor divine righteousness, is known in them, nor that whole class of feelings, blessed and holy as those feelings are, which flow from them. May we remember we are Christians!

Psalm 120. These psalms of degrees all treat the circumstances of the restored but undelivered remnant: our part now is to inquire into their moral bearing. The first psalm declares their state and resource. “In my distress I cried unto Jehovah, and he heard me.” The character of evil is spoken of: deceit and hostile power. It was grief of heart to have constantly to say to this. But such was his condition. He was dwelling in the midst of evil. It was his sorrow, and distress to him. He sought peace: they were for war. It is the spirit and character of the Christian in the midst of the power of evil, which, when called out by the presence of good, shows itself thus. Judgment however would come on the false tongue. It is the simple expression of the grief of a soul, peace-loving and peaceable, having to do with the wicked deceit of men. The resource is calling on the Lord, who hears.

Psalm 121. Where should the soul look? To the hills? Compare Jeremiah 3:23. Help was to be found in the Lord. I suppose it is: Shall I look to the hills? My help is in Jehovah, and Jehovah would surely keep me. He slumbers not, nor sleeps. The point is, Direct me away from all false and vain hopes, and set forth the one true object and resource, surely to be reckoned upon, and reckoned upon to keep all evil away. Only we must note now that the literal application of this is not now just. Christ has been reckoned among transgressors; and we have to go on not looking for absolute deliverance: yet we are to be assured that the hairs of our head are numbered. God withdraws not His eyes from the righteous now; but we do not look in result to be kept for earth, as the Jew rightly will in the path of faithfulness. Yet our Father does watch over us with unceasing vigilance. We may be at peace under the shadow of His wings. Our instruction is, in the midst of every evil, to look only to the Lord.

Psalm 122. The Lord’s house (that is, His presence and worship in the place of His rest) is our desire (for us, heaven). But love to that place of God’s dwelling is accompanied by the sense that all this is united in blessing. It is loved, not only for the Lord’s own sake, the center of all, but for all the saints’ sake, for our brethren’s and companions’ sake. This cannot be the first thing, but it is the first circle round the true center —love to all saints. Heaven is loved, but it is loved as being the dwelling-place of Him with whom we have to do—our Father’s house. If heaven is dear to me, that is what especially makes it so. We desire even the church’s good now for the same reason. We do take our place in heavenly places. They are bright and holy: we rejoice in it. But the house of God is the center there for our hearts.

Psalm 123. The hearts on God wait for deliverance. So we. There is pressure on the heart by the presence of the power of evil. We wait continually upon God for the coming of the blessed Lord to remove it all. The contempt of the proud will cease. All will be wholly changed to the soul’s rest.

Psalm 124. God alone keeps His people. The great point all through here is to look to Him alone. And it is our part along our path, and specially in these last days. All other refuges will give, in

something or another, a wrong direction to the soul, will lead it into a false path, make its state less holy in purpose, less pure and wise in walk. God can make use of everything, because His motive to bless us is always in Himself, and He disposes of everything; whereas we are formed in heart by the objects we have, and must adapt ourselves to what we lean on.

Psalm 125. But then trusting in the Lord is perfectly sure. A divine and almighty hand secures us. We know, from many passages, the Lord may see good to let us suffer, but not a hair of our head shall perish. When His time is come, the rod of the wicked shall not be on the lot of the righteous. He may let us suffer for our God, or for His name's sake; but even so it is not according to the will and power of the wicked, but according to His own. Only this supposes one walking in His ways.

Psalm 126. We find here a partial restoration, leading to look for full blessing. God may have delivered the soul too from the alienation and sorrow of its evil days, when it has gone wrong, backslidden, without its being yet fully restored. God comes in in goodness on repentance, encourages us, brings blessings we never could have hoped for, re-establishes the soul in the place of blessing, makes His favor so far manifest, so that we feel He is for us with great joy. Yet it is not the peaceful flow of favor in communion with Him, as if there was nothing but favor naturally enjoyed in the place we are in. Just as to Jacob at Peniel, God blessed him, but would not reveal His name—blessed, but did not reveal Himself. The soul gets the blessing from God, finds so far His favor; but it is not in communion, nor does it receive the communication of what He is, so as to be able, going forth from Him into the world, to be a witness for Him in it. This is our true place. No doubt to be blessed and restored, when we have gone astray, is great mercy; but our place is to be peaceably in communion where God has set us with Himself, and thus the vessels of His revelation of Himself to others. And this, in the Jewish form of it, is what our psalm expresses.

But there is another principle also. In a world where the power of evil is, sowing time, in which we meet the evil in possession with the word, is a time of tears. "I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them" (John 17:14). Christianity was sown in the tears of the Son of God. It is the fruit of the travail of His soul which He will see in that day. So in all service (and we must make up our minds to it), where there is to be real blessing, there must be the sorrow of the world's opposition, and even in the church the greater sorrow of trials, of failure, and shortcoming, where we desire to see Christ fully represented. But, going forth with the precious word, we may reckon on bringing our sheaves back with us.

Psalm 127. This psalm tells us that God alone gives the increase. All labor, all toil, is vain, except the Lord Himself and His hand be in it to work and bless; as the people said of Jonathan, "he hath wrought with God this day" (1 Sam. 14:45). But thus the diligent efforts of evil-doers result in nothing, and (blessed be His name!) He gives rest and peace to His beloved, without all the toil and labor with which the reckless men of the world seek it in vain.

Psalm 128. But if the Lord's blessing alone can keep or give success, they who fear the Lord can count upon it. And this is true. It does not exclude persecution, nor does it exclude discipline and the exercise of faith. But when we walk in the fear of God, we are in the path of peace even here. "Who is he that shall harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" (1 Peter 3:13). It does not mean a prosperity which consists in gratifying our lusts, but in the peaceful enjoyment of divine favor here below. But there is one joy above all others, here spoken of as the then fruit of godliness—the seeing the Lord's people, and the Lord's habitation, in prosperity and peace,

manifestly blessed of God. This, as regards this world, is the highest, most constant, wish of the heart. Blessing shall come to us out of God's dwelling-place, the place of faith on the earth, before the final temple of glory is built and we see blessing resting on it.

The details are of course Jewish, present outward blessings. This is the final blessing promised in the place of distress. And on this faith counts in the evil day and time of distress. Joyful to receive any anticipation of it in the church of God now (and in this detail it applies now), we know that the peace will be perfect when God shall have accomplished His counsels. We do look for it before, but we are sure of it then, for He wills the blessing of the church. Zion is the place of faith. It is not the temple on Moriah, but where David placed the ark when he had brought it back. The Lord is owned there. So we—we have the blessing in the seat of grace in power; we shall have perfect rest.

Psalm 129. The soul looks back and sees God's faithful dealings all along the road—a blessed thought! How sweet it is to turn back and see, while we were obliged to walk by faith, and it was as though He beheld not, the eye of the Lord has unceasingly waited on us and ordered all things! It is the effect of integrity to be able to do this. It is true that he who could say, "Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been…of their pilgrimage" (Gen 47:9), could also say, "The angel that redeemed me from all evil" (Gen. 48:16). And it is blessed to see His faithfulness, even when we have failed, when our unrighteousness commends the righteousness of God. Still it is another thing when, in the path of God through trials and difficulties (perhaps doubts and fears of success as to service and making good what was committed to us), we can trace the good hand of God all through. And here sorrow and trial are looked at, the hostility of God's enemies against God's people. But it was in vain. God, even if He had chastised, had been faithful, and now had manifested His righteousness, faithful to His own ways and promises, the expectation He had raised, the trust He had called for. He had cut asunder the cords of the wicked. We may expect it. He will chastise if needed, though He does not afflict willingly; but He will make good the expectation of faith. He will deliver and bless; and the expectation of the proud shall be as the grass upon the housetop.

Psalm 130. The last psalm considered the sorrow and suffering of those that are the Lord's, and the pleasure of the wicked in their oppression. This refers to the chastisement and evil to which I have alluded above in commenting on it. The sorrows have their character to the soul, not from the oppression of the wicked, but in the consciousness of sin with God. The oppression is unrighteous, the pleasure of wickedness; but while, when God restores, we can see this, yet restoration is with God and in looking to His mercy, owning— and yet in spite of—what we have deserved, and looking, with a heart which has the sense of its sin, to His deliverance. For here it is not forgiveness in the sense of justification, though allied to it, but of government. But it is the question of the Lord's marking iniquity, not of oppression, though this were the outward rod that brought iniquity upon the soul from God's hand. But the Lord is cried to. No turning, to gain release, to the oppressor; that is in character apostasy, and accepting the power of evil and making terms with it. The soul is in the depths, but it refers it in integrity to its sin, cries to the Lord in faith as one who forgives; waits for the Lord to come in when He is pleased, so as that the deliverance is righteous, and His favor too, and His word is trusted in. "Let Israel hope in the Lord," he concludes, and this glorifies His character as above evil and Himself good; and, till deliverance has that character, it is not looked for. With Him is mercy and plenteous redemption; mercy to the faulty soul and

plenteous redemption. Thus there is truth in the inward parts, and God's true character and His active power in complete deliverance are known. How far better than compromise with evil itself!

Psalm 131 gives us another character of the returning soul—the soul right with God. It is not speculative or haughty in mind, does not reason about matters. It walks in meekness as a weaned child and waits for deliverance; it hopes in the Lord. But activity of mind as to what ought to be, and managing matters which are really in God's hand, do not go together with true hoping in Him in lowliness of heart. And this is often a great trial of faith when we see the power of evil.

Psalm 132. This psalm is important as showing the position which all these psalms of degrees occupy. We have indeed the house, as in Psalm 122; 127, the former of which seems to refer to the temple; yet (I think) hardly there as yet accepted and built of God, as Psalm 127 shows. The remnant was rejoiced at the thought of going to the house and Jerusalem, and we have it clothed with the thoughts of faith. But the Lord had not yet built it. For all the songs of degrees are the expression of the godly ones' thoughts and feelings between their external restoration, when the sour grape is ripening in the flower (Isa. 18), and the full restoration to the Lord's enjoyed blessings, their enemies being cut off by judgment. It is all Isaiah 18, but with this we have Zion and David— the interference of power in grace, connecting the hearts of the remnant with Jehovah as a present thing, and giving the present testimony that His mercy endureth forever. For David placed the ark on Mount Zion, and had this song first sung after the ark had been delivered from the Philistines, and brought up from the house of Obed-edom. Israel in responsibility had failed, and God had delivered His strength into captivity, and His glory into the enemies' hand. Now it was brought out, and sovereign grace for His name's sake (first by a prophet, and next properly by power in grace, by a king) acted in behalf of Israel, and gave a new link and ground of relationship in the ark on Mount Zion. This was not the temple, the place of settled peace and prosperity; but it was a link with God renewed to faith, David being the center. David's Son, as the true Solomon, would give in time the full blessing; for David did not, after all, build the house. So the place of rest here is in the heart and in hope; what we have is the person on whom the blessing is founded. Compare 2 Samuel 7 and 1 Chronicles 17.

We have David brought before us as the great dispensational root and characteristic consequently of the blessing, but the house is the subject, a dwelling-place for the mighty One of Jacob. Hence also it is not wilderness blessings. It is not, "Rise up, Jehovah, and let thine enemies be scattered"; and, "Return, O Jehovah, unto the many thousands of Israel" (Num. 10:35-36). It is, "Arise, O Jehovah, into thy resting place, thou, and the ark of thy strength" (2 Chron. 6:41). It is Zion which is God's rest forever. This it is He has chosen; there He will make the horn of David to bud. The person of David's Son, royal grace in Zion, is thus what characterizes the blessing. Whatever house is built, David and his trouble are remembered, not Solomon, the typical son of David and his house. In truth Solomon's faith was personally every way inferior. He went to Gibeon, not to Zion; to the empty tabernacle, not to the ark until afterward. David's heart was on the house. It was all right. But God built his as He replied to him. It is the personal grace of Christ that is the center of all, and the faith that, when the outward blessing was not yet there in peace, formed the true link with God.

What a blessing for the remnant then, and this is in principle our case now, and especially in these latter days! His tabernacle and His footstool are more than the temple. Hence, in the Epistle to the

Hebrews, the tabernacle, never the temple, is taken as the figure and shadow of the blessings of faith, though not so the very image. Still God's rest is desired, that is, that He should rest; and so we worship in His house.

Let us see a little in what particulars this is brought out. The answer of God is in everything beyond the desire. There are three requests. The first is that Jehovah should arise into His rest, that Jehovah's priests may be clothed with righteousness. This became them, it was the right desire. The righteous Lord loveth righteousness. His countenance beholds the upright. How often had they been otherwise! The second is, that Jehovah's favor and blessing might be such that the saints might shout for joy. The third is, that for David's sake Jehovah should not turn away the face of His anointed. As to David there is the positive promise, and the conditional one. The answer then comes. Zion will be His rest forever. He hath desired and chosen it; her priests will be clothed with salvation, her saints shout aloud for joy. There the horn of David will bud, his crown flourish on him—the true David and David's Son, the Beloved.

And now note the principles. The afflictions of faith are the true path of blessing. A rest for God is the desire of the new nature; for sin, disorder only, has disturbed that rest, and, note, that rest which has its place in His relationship with His creatures, for in Himself He ever rests; but He must rest in holiness and love, in the state of the creatures, with whom He has to do, being according to His mind and love. This the heart desires. It is God's rest, nor can the heart rest till then. But this is according to the manner of His presence; in Israel covenant-promise and governmental glory; for us our Father's house, God's rest according to His own nature, holy and without blame before Him in love, and in glory. That is in the Beloved, the true David, the Anointed, the Christ—this both secures and gives the true character of the blessedness in, with, and like Him.

But, note, that simplicity of faith, its proper energy, leaning not on the past which is ruined or to be forgotten, but on what is before us as its object, and on our only dependence, on divine leading as to it—simplicity of faith, wrought as it is by God, leads into the place of God's desire and God's election. David brought the ark to Zion, but Zion God had chosen, had desired for His habitation. This in us is identified with a new creature, being made partakers of the divine nature. In this faith lives and acts and judges. It is in the saint a new nature, living on Christ as its object and food. And it learns and knows the place of God's rest herein. For David and Zion are really identified each in its own way with one another. Thus our new nature, God's desire, God's election, God's rest, and Christ Himself all coincide.

But the place of Christ's glory, which is God's rest, where He dwells, God owns as His forever. "This is my rest." And faith looks at all connected with it, priests and saints as God's—"thy priests" and "thy saints." But then He, taking Christ for the resting place of His glory, and contemplating the place of His dwelling and rest and habitation (that is, for us, the church which is His habitation, His tabernacle, His city holy Jerusalem)—He having thus so associated Himself with her (compare Eph. 3:21 and Rev. 21:3), looks at the priests and saints as her priests and her saints, thus specially showing His delight in her, His identification with her. His priests are her priests, His saints her saints, as that to which they belong. Then it is He sets up the glory of David's horn, the glory of the power, and rule of the Beloved; and this (while David is the foundation, His everlasting glory the result) is the subject of the psalm—Zion— for us, the church, the heavenly Jerusalem. This is His rest, His dwelling place forever, His desire, what He has chosen. And if He fully glorifies

His Anointed, as He will and must do, it is there He will do it. Though His name flourish in Himself (for His person must be the ground and center of glory), yet its place is in the city of grace and glory. Her priests, her saints will have salvation and abundant joy. One cannot say her David or her Christ; that would be out of place. His dignity is our personal glory, but it dwells here as the place with which it is associated, and all the rest can be called hers. The glory is His, the place of it the chosen city of God—for us, the church, the heavenly Jerusalem.

Psalm 133. There, too, blessing and unity are, but here after the analogy of Aaron; the lowest skirt of his garment partakes of the anointing of the head, and this one Spirit makes the unity according to which (Eph. 4:3) they ought to dwell together. The blessing too was there. The abundant dew of Hermon, that is, abundant as on Hermon, fell upon the mountains of Zion. This fellowship was rich in blessing from above, as the desired refreshing of abundant dew fell on the everlasting hills. For in Zion Jehovah had promised the blessing. The anointing of the Lord, the Holy Spirit, and the refreshing of goodness from on high in abundance, shall accompany the unity of Israel in Zion. How far more deeply true was it on the church, when the anointing of the Holy Spirit and His full ministration of grace by the word revealing heavenly things enriched and gladdened the unity in Christ which that Spirit formed! Alas, where is it now? Yet it is our privilege.

Psalm 134. These psalms of degrees close by a summons to bless Jehovah. There in the sanctuary they were to bless; on the other hand blessing is pronounced out of Zion upon him who has gone through the sorrows and endured. It is Melchisedec blessings, only in Jehovah's sanctuary, and out of Zion where grace has set power to bless. It is the full crowning expression of the result of these psalms; the points, able to bless Jehovah in His own sanctuary, and the godly man blessed out of long desolate Zion, but where Jehovah now dwells. The city over which Jesus could weep, whose dust Jehovah's servants had remembered, was now the seat of Jehovah's sanctuary, and, what was more, of Jehovah's presence. This will not be fully ours till we are in our Father's house. But then, though praise will surely go up unceasingly, we shall not have need to call on others to bless. We are kings and priests, as indeed we bless now as such in spirit, and as more than that, as dear children holy and beloved. It is in the holiest of all, where no Jewish priest could enter to bless even in figure, that we stand in reality, and bless Him in whose presence and light we stand there. Night we cannot say then, for "there shall be no night there" (Rev. 22:5); now we praise in spirit here, saying, "the night is far spent" (Rom. 13:12). And as to our souls, the darkness passes, the true light now shines.

But it is in the holiest we bless, in God's own presence, and hence in heaven. We may well say He has set us in a wealthy place. And while on earth it will then be Jehovah the Creator who will bless out of the chosen place of grace in power, He who gains eternal life, and in whose knowledge it is possessed, blesses us as brought home into the possession of it in the seat of the unclouded knowledge of it, where what He is, as the power and source of it, is fully displayed. To know the Father and Jesus Christ, whom He has sent is eternal life. The Father has life in Himself, and, in the Son, man here below has life. He was it with the Father before the world. We have it in Him, and there in that which that life is, and therefore enjoys, as a holy being enjoys holiness, a loving being love, we shall possess the divine fullness in God of that which we delight in. And it is the God of redeeming love, the Father and the Son, not simply the Creator of heaven and earth. Such is our place. We enjoy it now by the Holy Spirit, but it is now only in earthern vessels. Still we are called to be "holy and without blame before him in love" (Eph. 1:4), and children with the Father,

and our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. The accomplishment of promises in grace is much, the enjoyment of communion is more. The psalms of degrees are the progress of Israel in the land, out of sorrow and through sorrow, to the full blessing in Zion, which forms the crowning result, Jehovah being there.

Psalm 135 gives the more general praise of Israel, not so much priestly praise, but then it consequently brings out the place of the people as such with God. They are in the courts of God, there as His people, praise Him, for He is good, and it is pleasant. We do praise Him as priests in the sanctuary. But we praise Him also as on earth in the sense of His goodness, and praise is pleasant. His name is known; that is, His revelation of Himself, so as to be known to us. But there is more: we sing, as we do all else, as the elect of God, holy and beloved— an immense privilege. It is not only that God is good, what He is in nature; but we are the special objects of His favor and delight. This, when known, is an immense delight. As people of God we know it, and for ourselves as part of it, but when personally brought home it is of divine delight to be the peculiar treasure of God, and that not as a national election but according to His own nature, the personal objects of His delight. It is known, it its evident, as of pure grace. It is what gives it its value. Faith recognizes it as true, rests in it. It is a doctrine of scripture—the faith, but in relationship it is great delight. But we know withal that He is great, and thought we know Him as Father, yet we do know Him, realize His presence, as exceeding great, and as supreme above all; and the heart delights in this. Our God is above all.

It is more general for us than for all Israel who could speak of other gods, but the absoluteness and supremacy of God for the heart remains true. He is sovereign in His actings everywhere, a comfort when we have to traverse in weakness a world of wickedness. He disposes of everything. He has smitten the power of evil and brought out His people, and brought them into a heavenly inheritance whence the power of darkness are expelled. This is true for us now, as in Ephesians 4 and Colossians 2, though not for the possession of the inheritance. And we reckon fully on the final result. And it is looked for presently, though no day or hour be known. This as to Israel is brought out here in a remarkable passage.

The original promise in which God appeared to Moses as taking up Israel forever in grace, His name of memorial forever, is cited; and the prophetic declaration in Deuteronomy 32 of what He would do when Israel had wholly, utterly failed—judge His people and repent Himself concerning His servants. The idols are naught. It is in the place of royal rest that praise is found, the Jerusalem where Jehovah dwells. And so for us, the church, and even the individual saint, knows itself as the heavenly dwelling-place of God, the bride; and now we dwell in Him and He in us, as we know by the Spirit, and collectively too are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit; but it is as a new heavenly thing, as that which is heavenly, as that which remains.

Psalm 136 celebrates a blessed principle in connection with Zion, the place of sovereign grace in power. Our having the place of praise and thanksgiving depends on this, that His mercy endures forever. Ichabod had been written on Israel; the ark, where the blood was to be placed on the day of atonement that Israel might have a place with God, was taken—as far as Israel went, lost. But God’s mercy endures forever, and David, so soon as he sets the ark on Zion, establishes this song there, celebrating the alone Jehovah, the Creator and wonder-doer of His people. His mercy does endure forever for us. Christ and the Father’s love in every way secure our blessing and ourselves

for it. But while glory awaits us, and He will confirm us to the end, we possess that in which He confirms us, even eternal life as His children. The life we have and know it; the inheritance we have nothing of as yet, but are assured of and being kept for it. And in this wilderness we can abundantly say, His mercy endureth forever. But it is only along the road we say it, because we have eternal life. Only if a soul wanders from Him and is restored, it can say with special application that His mercy endures forever.

Psalm 137. There is a double application of this to our souls. Nothing can make us forget the heavenly Jerusalem, the house where God and the Lamb are the temple, and where they dwell. All the glory of the world is nothing compared with that heavenly home. But the church on earth, which will be it in glory, arrests our hearts; we see it desolate and her walls cast down, her children scattered or in captivity. But the saint's heart is still there. The outward worldly glory of Babylon cannot efface the attachment and love of heart to the church as God founded it on earth; and even the judgment of those who corrupted it is looked for with joy by the Christian. Not of the individuals, a Christian could not do that—it would be revenge—but of the whole power of evil.

Psalm 138. But the enduring of God's mercy forever brings out a blessed apprehension in the heart of many other truths, which make God's character known, and His word precious as revealing it and as sure, so that the whole heart praises (and this is a very important element), not will do so for some blessing, not even thankfulness for that which we do desire, while the main current of the heart is elsewhere than with God; but such a learning of God as makes the whole heart praise Him, and this is always in circumstances which make the whole heart want Him; as it will be with Israel in the latter day. This may be learned gradually by emptying of self, or in times of deep trial when help fails, and thus self is broken up within. Hence too, when God is thus known, He is praised in presence of all the pretentious power of this world, which seemed to make those that leaned upon it happy and enriched. We praise with the whole heart, we praise before the gods. All within, all without, has given place to God known and revealed in His word.

Lovingkindness and truth are the great traits in which He is known, just as grace (a fuller word) and truth came by Jesus Christ, who is the living Word. There they came, and we know their fullness and perfectness in Him; here they are learned by experience, and it is lovingkindness in nature and circumstances, not infinite and perfect grace in itself. But God had here made good His word. His faithfulness had exalted itself, and taught the saint how right he was in trusting God when all seemed contrary. But this involved His goodness also in caring for us and persevering in His love in spite of failure. His word taught us to trust in Him, was in its nature a call to it, revealed His goodness to sinners to this effect, but called us to wait on Him to this effect, to trust Him though it set us in a lowly place, apparently far off from all our desires, and left evil in power to try our faith. So it was with Christ and those who followed Him.

But there is another point. The saint, led by this word and guided in his thoughts by it, cried and was answered; and, before the public answer came forth by power, God strengthened with strength in his soul. How true this is of Christ even, and of the Christian! But this gives the assurance that all shall have to own the power which we have trusted in the time of darkness. We have had God's mind, following Jesus, done God's will (by power) before power came in to deliver and make that will good. But every knee shall bow to Him to whom our knees have gladly bowed. But they shall praise and bless His name (for those are looked at here) who own that power truly in

that day.

Thus the word revealed God as the object of trust, and then His faithfulness came to make good all that He had led the heart to trust in. The word gave both—revealed God and gave that to hope in which it was fulfilled. This brought out another character of goodness. The Lord, high, as He was, had respect to the lowly. He is too high to make a difference of man's exaltation. If we look down from heaven, all is flat upon the earth. But there are high and low here, and God thinks of the lowly. Trouble too comes on the faithful, but the goodness and the promise give the issue according to the word. Nor is this quite all. God will perfect what concerns us, make good in blessing in and to us all that was in His heart, and which He had revealed in His word, in relationship and communion with Himself. Over all, through all difficulties, and, beyond all, His mercy endureth forever.

Psalm 139. But it is not without the most thorough searching out of all that we are. But this, where there is confidence, is a great grace; for He who alone can do it, and does it according to His own perfectness, does it to purify us from all inconsistent with Himself—His own mind, and hence with our blessedness, which is in communion with Himself.

I do not think that the psalm goes beyond creation and God's knowing perfectly His own work, though there may be a known analogy to the church. It is the conscience brought into the sense of God's perfect acquaintance with everything in us. All is under His eye and He actually sees everything. It is not only He sees, but He searches. He is there with us, however offended, in all our ways. This produces uneasiness. Adam innocent could not have thought of it. There was no reflex act in himself to judge how he was going on; no thought consequently of what God had to see. He enjoyed and blessed, or might have done so. But where there is a knowledge of good and evil, a reflex act on what passes consequently in our hearts, the eye of God that reaches all its recesses, knows all, makes us uneasy, that is, makes the disturbed conscience uneasy. God is everywhere and in every corner of my heart, and darkness and light are all the same The very fact makes us uneasy now in our natural state; for fear and moral fear has entered in and is become a part of our nature. Still, where He is known, there is confidence, and here integrity of heart gives confidence; not here the peaceful confidence of known redemption and living in a nature the fullness of which is Christ Himself; but the state of heart which gives confidence, as being the integrity of the new nature. And this knowledge which searches the conscience is drawn from creative power.

We are the work of His hands. Here it is man as man, so that the earth out of which he was fashioned at first is as the womb out of which we were born. God has formed us, be it in the womb of dust or of our mother, the place where we were nothing before we were. The same God has ever thought of us along the road, and here confidence has been acquired; though thus acquired it reaches to all God's creative knowledge and power. If He sees in the dark, He keeps in the dark. When we awake, and so it will be in resurrection too, we are still with Him. He knows our thoughts, but thinks of us when we think not. Thus if God knows all our thoughts, and long before His are precious to us, to such the putting down of evil is the sure expectation, yea the call for judgment on the haters of the Lord, whom we therefore abhor.

Christians do not desire their ruin as souls, nor does God; but, looked at as wicked, as haters of the Lord, one does desire their removal by judgment, abhors them as such, and rejoices at their

being taken away from corrupting and destroying the earth. But if this desire of their judgment be holiness and righteousness, not will, we shall desire the full searching out of evil in ourselves. It is the hatred of evil as under the eye of an all-seeing God.

But it is exceedingly beautiful to see this integrity of heart brought into the full light of God's presence (once shrunk from as searching all). Now it desires the thorough searching of God, that it may get rid of the evil that it hates. Note too, mere integrity will not suffice without God to find out evil. An honest natural man may use his conscience, but as the natural eye must have light to search with, so we the presence of Him who is light. He who had kept the commandments for his own conscience from his youth up shrunk from that which searched his heart and its motives. So we, even if desirous of knowing the evil of our hearts, bring God into the work, and seek Him to do it. If not, there is not integrity.

Psalm 140. I have only for our present purpose to note that it teaches, in the relentless and crafty malice of the wicked, to cast oneself wholly over on the Lord. The saint cannot rival the world in craft and plotting, but there is One above all who knows the end from the beginning: to Him we have to look. The character of the Lord's people in presence of this wickedness is to be remarked; they are the afflicted, the poor, righteous, and upright. And they can reckon upon the Lord against the evil-doer and the wicked man. Jehovah is owned as his God. So we acknowledge God fully as ours in the revelation of the Father and Jesus our Lord. He is owned, that is, in face of the world.

Psalm 141 looks indeed for deliverance, but more for rightness of heart in trial. The desire is to be with, near God, that God should draw near. The heart is with Him—is right with Him. He does not say deliver, as his first desire, but "give ear to my voice"; that his prayer may be incense, the lifting up his hands as the evening sacrifice. He seeks too (and how needed it is), that in the pressure of evil God should set a watch before his mouth and keep the door of his lips. We may be true and right in principle on the Lord's side; but how does an impatient or pretentious and reproachful word mar the testimony, give a handle to the enemy, and, so far, set the soul wrong with God!

No point is more important than this for the upright. He who can bridle his tongue, the same is a perfect man. He looks to be in no way drawn away into the paths or society of the wicked. What he wants is to be kept in uprightness. If the smiting of the righteous be needed, he will rejoice in it, as an excellent oil to anoint him, and honor him as a friend. Grace accompanies this. When calamities come upon God's outward people, for of such it speaks here, who have been the enemies of him who has sought to walk godly and keep himself from evil, his heart yearns over them; there is no rejoicing nor triumphing over them; his prayer ascends to God for them. He looks too to the overthrow of those who had power over them, smitten by the enemy, as that which shall break down their pride for good, so that they would hear his words; and he, whatever trouble he might be in, knew their sweetness. The distress was deep, evil in power, but his eyes were unto God.

But again we find here that what his heart is on is the nearness of his soul with God; "leave not my soul destitute." This is a sure mark of the renewal of heart. So the thief on the cross does not even think of his sufferings, but asks Christ to remember him in His kingdom. It is a full picture of uprightness of heart, in a soul which, having been away from God, is morally restored but still under trial.

Psalm 142 is the expression of extreme distress, refuge failing him—no man caring for his soul. He cried unto Jehovah with his voice. This, as we have seen, is more than trusting Him. God is known in the revelation of Himself; so we look to the Lord and to a Father's love. But in crying with the voice there is confession of His name, and open acknowledgment of dependence and confiding in the Lord. The heart can open itself out before the Lord, not be careful, but make its requests known. It is a sure sign of confidence, making our trouble known—a great thing to leave such with God. But there is another comfort here; he was in the path of God. And from this grew the sense, of immense importance in the times of trial, that God knew, acknowledged, and had His eye on, as accepting it, the faithful man's path. This is a fountain of strength and comfort. It supposes faith—that realizing that one's way is pleasing to God suffices. The spirit may be overwhelmed by the pressure of enmity and desertion, but the soul is in peace, resting in the approbation of God.

Psalm 143. I pass over here the desires of judgment as dispensational, as we have often seen. In this we have the soul bowed down under the trouble, but in principle set right with God as one chastened for sin, only in the midst of those hostile, but brought to uprightness. It looks for mercy that it may not be under judgment from God, but that God may be a deliverer, and looks for it as in heart belonging to God and His servant. It is broken by the affliction, and trusts God, and seeks His way. It transfers the evils, so to speak, from God to the adversary, associating itself in heart with God, and looking that God should own it and take up its cause as against the power of evil which He had used as a rod. We have this experience when we have suffered from malicious enemies, but through our own fault. The heart true with God when thoroughly subdued and set right, accepting the punishment of its iniquity instead of excusing itself, can then look to God to take up its cause against the malice, but not till it has set God's glory above itself. The soul then clings to the enjoyment of God's lovingkindness in a subdued and softened spirit, and its motives are purified, which is the very object of the discipline, not merely its ways, but its motives, and so power of communion, which is directly in relation with our motives and state of heart.

There is a strengthening of the bond of the heart with God, and His will is sought because it is so. "Thy Spirit," he says, "is good." The heart lives in the sense of what the Spirit works in us; His influences in the heart are good. The soul has found where good is. There is accordance between the heart and the things of the Spirit, and it is felt, and true delight is in the soul in it. So we say, Praise is good; it is right pleasant, felt to be pleasant, and pleasant because it is right. There is the sense too of divine favor with it. But withal the soul seeks to enjoy it, where all is in harmony with it, where its exercises and fruits will be natural (for he was in the midst of unholy enemies). For us this will only be in heaven. The heart is separated by trial to God through grace, and in uprightness owns it cannot stand in the judgment, and looks for divine favor and deliverance.

Psalm 144. I have only a remark to make here. All these exercises make us learn what man is, and the whole bearings of good and evil. When man is seen, known, judged, and yet delivered, there is an acquaintance with the whole scene which makes God's patience, goodness, and ways known and perfect in our eyes. "Man is like to vanity," but we sing a new song; happy are the people that are in such a case. We indeed have a far more radical acquaintance with this. It is settled at once by one act in the cross, and we reckon ourselves dead and alive unto God through Him that is risen. It is a new creation, and we are children with the Father. Still every one does not learn it like Paul, and in every case it must be learned experimentally. Only a simple mind laid hold

of by Christ, which therefore does not confer with flesh and blood, learns it easier and walks in the power of it. Only alas! how many like to be Jews, and live only to die at the end, and so learning it, instead of dying and then living as alive to God, and so pass into Christ according to the power of that life, whether they wake or sleep.

Psalm 145 looks back and shows the soul (for I do not speak of dispensation here as such: in that aspect it is the Spirit of Christ showing what passes in the millennium; but it shows the soul) recounting with praise and thanksgiving the works and ways of God, where it can look back—the greatness of God. But then in these ways the character of God has been fully displayed, and the soul has learned that blessed lesson, knows what He is. See verses 8, 9, 14-20.

This is a great blessing. All that we have passed through exercises us, breaks our will, makes us know ourselves. We have learned by it, and, in the preparation of the heart it gives what God is. Israel learned themselves in the wilderness, but here they learn God, if they had hearts to understand it; first, what He is, and then in what He shows Himself such to others. Not only His greatness; this indeed has been shown in bringing all to His own ends; but He is gracious, good, thinking of others in love, and full of compassion. He is slow to anger—perhaps the heart has complained of that sometimes in trial, yet we need it—and of great mercy. Yes, we are often Jonases, though we need or have needed as much mercy as Nineveh.

But what should we have lost, to say nothing of losing ourselves, if our God had not been all this? But this is the God we have to say to, and when we are delivered, we delight in Him, such as He is. No doubt by faith we delight in His being such, but we have to get our wills broken, our heart set right in its desires, tempers, and whole state, to delight fully in God who so long suffers evil which we hate, and the evildoers who thwart our desire of good, but with which our will mixes itself, and taking perhaps its most subtle form. “Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not came to destroy men’s lives, but to save them” (Luke 9:56). He was the manifestation of God in forbearing love; and we have to walk in love as He showed it, offering Himself up to God, in nothing seeking His own will, committing Himself to Him who judgeth righteously.

Finally in peace we shall heartily rejoice in God as such. And it is His nature and character; He is good to all, His mercy is over all His works. Compare Peter, the apostle of God’s government and judgments (2 Peter 3:9), the epistle that applies judgment to the wicked. He is, too, the faithful Creator (1 Peter 4: 9). One sees in this passage, as elsewhere, how the Epistles of Peter take up the government of God as the Psalms, only introducing redemption.

First then we find mercy: the Lord occupied with the need of men, all that fall (that is weakness), those that be bowed down (that is oppression); then even, as he says in Jonah “and also much cattle,” He it is that takes care of and provides for man and beast. But then, further, there are moral character and relationships in which He has to do with men. He is righteous in His ways, takes account of all that is due to others and also to Himself. He Himself thinks of others, for this also is righteousness in Him, and there is gracious consideration in His works—no evil. His ear too is open to the cry of those who seek Him—fulfills the desire of those who fear Him. He preserves those that love Him. He is thus interested in every want, and takes notice of all our ways. Thus the exercises of our hearts will have caused us to know Him.

The following psalms are the hallelujahs of a delivered people. Some elements of God's ways in general may be however found here, because God in the deliverance has shown of whom He thought and His care for them.

Psalm 146. It is the wisdom of trusting the all-enduring ever-living Lord that is spoken of. "Put not your trust in princes": his breath goes forth; all his thoughts are gone. Not so with God. Not only He has power, but He is faithful— keeps truth forever. And again His tender mercy is brought out for the comfort of those that are in sorrow. The oppressed, the hungry, the prisoners come before Him, are the objects of His care and power; to the blind He gives eyes, He raises up those that are bowed down. All this is comfort of heart to those that are in sorrow and trial, that are oppressed. But farther He loves the righteous, so that men, whatever comes upon them, can trust in Him. The stranger whose heart may feel sick where he is, the fatherless or widow whose sustaining props are gone, He preserves and relieves. The heart of the righteous has its sure confidence, of the bowed down and those deprived of earthly stay, the sure hand of a God who cares for them, because they are such. It is what God always is.

Psalm 147. The great principle in all these psalms is that the one true God, the Creator, and He who ministers to every creature, is specially known as the God of His people, and is known by His delivered people to be righteous, full of compassion, and good. His ways and character have become known to the delivered ones; but He is the God of Israel; as we say, our Father, or the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

All this is largely brought out in this psalm—the ground for trusting Him in every trial, but for seeking Him and walking in righteousness, for He takes pleasure in those that fear Him. But, besides this, another blessing is spoken of, belonging to His people and so to us, His word. This is the first of blessings. He gave it to His people. He had not dealt so with any nation.

There is a difference between us and Israel here. This in itself is true of both; but the Jew was shut up in his own system. The temple was a place of resort for all nations, but for Jews even there was no access to God Himself, no knowledge of Him by the revelation of Himself. The law told them what man ought to be; God's dealings taught them many a lesson, if they would learn it as they do here; but the way into the holiest was not made manifest, and there was no going out with the testimony that God is love. They learned from His ways on earth, but did not know Him in heaven and will not, as we do, even in the millennium, though mercy and redemption will be clearer for them. We do; we know God as light and love. We shall be in the Father's house then. Hence, while we have the word which reveals Him who has sanctified Himself, a man in heaven apart from the world, we have known God's love issuing forth and in the power of eternal life. We know the Father in the Son, and then God as love, yea, we are in Him and He in us. Hence we have a gospel ministry, and every one is a witness of divine love and heavenly righteousness.

We have no priesthood here, save as we all are, but go with boldness into the holiest, our great High Priest being ever there. The word is in this respect another thing for us, though still God's word. We have the word for others because it is the true knowledge of God Himself in grace, a heavenly word. Some other elements of goodness are spoken of in this psalm, though the general tenor of it be the same. He heals the broken in heart, He binds up their wounds. There is not only tender compassion in grace, but remedy, and, more and more, He establishes securely, strengthens the bars of the city of God, and blesses His children in her. Thus we have a richer and

fuller unfolding of mercy in this psalm. The general principle is the same. God's ways revealing what He is in its effects of goodness and righteous government, a knowledge of God by His statutes and judgments; but not the revelation of Himself and introduction into His presence as He is, nor knowledge of Him as Father. It is indeed in contrast with it. See Ephesians 1:3-5, where we have the Christian's place, as in verses 19-23 our relationship with Christ, to which add chapter 5: 25-30.

Psalm 148. With this remark I may merely note the character of this psalm. All creation is called to praise God, but with the additional word—He exalts the horn of His people. It is more than deliverance and mercy. He exalts them in the creation as the people of His favor on earth. He is the praise of His saints, a people near Him—a blessed thought, but how far more blessed to us who will be near Himself, unveiled in His house and in His presence! Israel is near the Creator, as His people on the earth; we with God our Father in heaven, like the Lord Jesus His only-begotten Son. In this, as in the following psalm, deliverance is not spoken of, for there is progress in them: first, mercy and deliverance, favor to the tried righteous within her; then the horn of His people exalted, and Israel a people near Him; and now it is joy and triumph.

Psalm 149. He takes pleasure in them, and they are His weapon against His enemies, the high praises of God in their mouths and a two-edged sword in their hands, executing the judgment written. We see at once how we are on the Jewish ground of judgment in this world. There is a delight in the setting aside of evil by power, even for the Christian. "Rejoice over her, thou heavens, and ye holy apostles and prophets" (Rev. 18:20); but this only when the church gets on prophetic, not on her own, ground. Hence the Father is not more spoken of in the Apocalypse than in the psalms. Where the relationship is with the Father, there it is carried out in love. And this difference, often noted, is as distinct and plain to the spiritual mind as possible, and of all importance to make the psalms intelligible' and set Christianity on its own true ground. The Christian is not a Jew; the revealed name of God to him is not Jehovah but Father, as Christ so markedly states.

Psalm 150 gives the full praise to Jehovah in a double character, the sanctuary and the firmament of His power, for His ways which come from the firmament of His power were always according to the sanctuary in which He governed Israel, and made good the revelation of Himself there. So indeed with us, He makes all things work together for: good to them that love Him; but it is according to the heavenly place to which they belong and to which He is bringing them. Christ is in the firmament of His power now. He is praised for His acts, praised for His greatness manifested in them. Jehovah is the theme of praise—Jehovah the God of Israel, but Jehovah the Creator and Sustainer of all—the righteous judge. But here it is Jehovah, God in His sanctuary; as we, after all we have received in a higher way, glory in tribulations, and finally in God Himself—not in what we have received. It is not even here, Praise our God, just as that was; but it rises higher, "Praise God in his sanctuary." The deep sense of what God is goes out beyond the relationship in which we are, though it is relationship with Him in the highest way that we have. Our Father's love, ours and Christ's, is sweet, but we joy in God. Blessed be His name!

Chapter 6

Practical Reflections on the Proverbs

The Proverbs refer us directly to the government of God on the earth, more entirely, because they are less prophetic, than even the Psalms. Prophecy, referring to Christ and the remnant, necessarily looked to His rejection and that of some of them from the earth, and hence, though dimly, brought in light from beyond; telling us at least of the resurrection and ascension of Christ and His session at the right hand of god, to go no farther. The Proverbs do not enter on such topics. They show us that the practical path of a man is here below, as guided by the moral intelligence which the fear of God and the divine word will give him, what true wisdom will teach him. Only the book does show that this wisdom is of God and cannot be really without Him, and thus leads us on to Him, though obscurely, who is the wisdom of God and the power of God

The body of the book consists of details of practice, the first nine chapters more of general principles and the formal characters of evil to be avoided. What is in contrast with wisdom is self-will. Hence the beginning or principle of wisdom in us is the fear of God—here especially of Jehovah, because this was the name of God in covenant with the people, by whom that fear was to be guided, and which is another element in it. But the repression of our will leads us necessarily to the will of another, and the only true right source of conduct is God, for it is evident He is sovereign and has a right to will. But He has formed relationships and created duties, and man has acquired the knowledge of right and wrong; but reference to God can alone keep this steady and clear. For first of all, the first of all duties is to Him, and looking to Him alone keeps the eye single and clear from self, and as to its other duties. For, besides will and lawlessness in itself, the existence of the spirit of independence and our separation thereby from God has given us necessarily the lusts of other things. We must have something: we have left God, and do not suffice for ourselves. Hence lusts of other things come in, of the flesh and of the mind. But an immense complicated system has grown up through this, and Satan's power—the world. Hence we need guidance and instruction through this, to know God's will in the midst of it, the application of wisdom to details.

For the Christian, following Christ, being an imitator of God, is the grand point; but he also has to be "not as fools but as wise….understanding what the will of the Lord is" (Eph. 5:15,17). Christianity goes higher than Proverbs, for it deals with motives and gives divine ones; Proverbs experience, though of one judging according to the fear of God. Still such an experience is of great use. This wisdom, as we know, Solomon sought and obtained, and gives us his resulting experience in this book. We have several words used in connection with this: wisdom, a common Hebrew word, chokmah, meaning practiced, experienced, skilfull. The wise men of Babylon are so called and it is constantly used for wisdom which God gives in Daniel. We have again musahr, meaning instruction, warning, advice, used for chastisement too (Prov. 1:3; Job 5:17). We have also beenah, meaning discernment (Prov. 2:3). We have, as regards the simple one liable to be led by everybody, ormah, as in Proverbs 1:4, prudence, used for cunning also, but cunning had by no means originally a bad sense, it meant knowing; as regards the young, knowledge. And mezimah, discretion, (Prov. 2:11), being what we call up to things; and lastly, tachbuloth (Prov.

1:5), wise plans or counsels. The instruction is said to be in good conduct, righteousness, judgment, and uprightness. We have besides this, lekah (Prov. 1:5), the wise will increase or add doctrine, logos. But this is a matter of attainment: the wise will attain this, and counsels, and to interpret dark sayings and proverbs in which wisdom is shut up.

Such are the objects proposed in Proverbs, but not by man's cunning, but by beginning with the fear of the Lord and so growing up in discernment. It is always needed to be "not as fools but as wise." A true Christian may do something from want of discretion which may put him in difficulties all his life. No doubt there is carelessness in it; still he may be very sincere. But still Christianity seems to me to have a somewhat different character of wisdom—"wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil" (Rom. 16:19). The Christian follows obediently Christ; and this is the path of wisdom where he has the light of life. He is so governed by motives, Christ being all to him, that his path is simple, his whole body is full of light, having no part dark. This is somewhat a different kind of wisdom, though it makes us wise in conduct.

There is wisdom, but more simplicity, because governed more by motives, and following Christ.

I now turn to the unfolding of this wisdom in the early chapters of this book. The first object is to know wisdom and instruction. Such is the full and general object of the book; that is, the experience of a wise man, and a man corrected and disciplined, where he needs it, from will in any form: wisdom more as to what is without, instruction as to what is within, and, he adds, to discern things that differ, words of understanding—"perceive" and "understanding" have the same force—to get a discerning mind as to what passes before us, specially what is said. But the next passage enlarges the thought—gives the object and character of the teaching which this wisdom involves where it has to be taught. Wisdom, instruction, and discernment were the aim of Solomon's proverbs; but what was its character when a person had to receive it? It was good or wise conduct, righteousness, judgment, and uprightness. You then have the simple and the young specially brought forward; and it was to make them intelligent and up to what was passing, what they had to do with, so as not to be misled. There was the giving the sum of wisdom and instruction, the means of receiving instruction, in conduct, righteousness, judgment, and uprightness—not merely a complete system, but ourselves learning the things that ought to be when needed; and lastly, the simple and young made intelligent and to know what they were about, capable of going through the world, undeceived by it.

The last point noticed here (which is an accessory to the rest, and more of intellectual enjoyment, though of a moral character, than the obligations of wisdom) is the capacity to enter into riddles and dark sayings, which clothe moral truth in a form that gives pungency and power to it, and hides it in forms which, when penetrated, give peculiar point to the relationship in which wisdom stands, give deeper and more interior apprehension of the truth on the one hand, and more vividness on the other. I take a very easy and familiar instance. The bramble said to the cedar in Lebanon, Give thy daughter to my son to wife; and there came by a wild beast in Lebanon and trod down the bramble. How much more that comes home than a precise statement that the king of Judah was feeble! Proverbs and dark sayings, riddles, parables, all come under this class. Spiritual apprehension is often needed to see their application.

This closes the preface: Solomon now enters on his subject. "The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of knowledge"—not of wisdom, but of knowledge. A weighty sentence. All true knowledge, all

moral knowledge begins by putting God in His own place. Nothing is right or true without that. For to leave Him out falsifies the position and relationship of all. I may know physical facts and what are called laws (that is, abstractions from uniform facts), but that is all, without it. Not that there are no instituted relationships, for there are, as parents, husband and wife, and others now man is fallen. But right and wrong refer to each in its place. And not only is the fear of God a motive, which maintains their authority in the heart, but, if I leave God out, what has instituted them and given them their authority is wanting. Each stone has its own place in the arch, but if the keystone be wanting, none can keep theirs.

Besides, the fear of God is the setting aside of will. How much that works in reference to constituted natural authority, or even mutual obligation, is evident. I cannot even know physical things fully without the fear of God; because causation necessarily comes in. How the fear of God, He being the Creator, affects that, is too evident to dwell upon. The chief theory of antiquity, almost universal (practically, we may say, universal), was, that there was and could be no creation.

The only modification, as far as I know, was the production, by an unknown monad of a good and an evil cause—the Bactrian and Persian faith, Zoroastrianism. Others got out of the difficulty by emanations. It was impossible for the supreme God, the monad, to have to say to matter: axons with some, the Logos, demons, something like Zoroastrian Feroers, and the Logos, with Platonists, were resorted to by others to solve the difficulty for millions. The monad was alone, and while asleep nothing else was; if he woke, creatures appeared, but it was all Maya, illusion; when he went to sleep, they disappeared again. The true philosophy was to find it out, have done with creation, and be absorbed into universal spirit or into the one divine spirit. Modifications there might be; for hundreds of millions thought and think matter eternal, and that true philosophy, or true knowledge, is getting delivered from matter and gaining Nirvana, that is, being extinguished as a lamp goes out.

Is this knowledge? Spirit is far more real than matter. But God was not known nor feared—gods were, perhaps, consequently, but not God; and gods were temporary creatures, like men, and more so, and knowledge there was none. Deliverance was in knowledge—that all things were nothing. Some would make a Buddha above God, some absorb a man into God; all the rest perished or disappeared, for there was nothing really to perish. Is there nothing like this now, when there is not the fear of God?—nothing in the modern doctrine of development of species, which would tell us that all comes from a scarcely traceable worm which has left its mark upon some lower Silurian or Cambrian rock, or its analogous fellow in some more recent system, or a polypus, or a graptolith; the apparent ancestor of man being a penguin or an ape, for this is seriously the infidel system of some—opposed indeed, by others equally infidel, by some other speculation, in which definite and permanent species are recognized?

Is this knowledge? No. The reasoning on facts, even without God, even in that which is the legitimate sphere of experimental science, is only the leaving man to the wandering of his own mind, who never will, and never can, know creation without knowing a Creator; that is, without that faith which believes that the worlds were framed by the word of God, and that the things which are seen were not made of the things which do appear. When we turn to moral things and intellectual philosophy, it is evident there can be no knowledge without the fear of God; for then I enter on the

sphere of relationships and obligations; and how can I be right, when I leave out the first and principal one? I cannot think of mind and find it sufficient for itself within itself. In point of fact, it has aspirations, and longings, and thoughts of a Being above us, power out of our reach, goodness, good and evil— of an end of our being, which is not apparent. If mind cannot suffice for itself, is it to turn to what is below it and exercise merely its powers? If above, what is God? what are my relationships with Him? where do they end, how begin? Will they end? I must know God to be at rest. God must have His place. Now putting God in His true place—that is the fear of God—is the true beginning of all knowledge.

There is here a modification of this. It is the fear of Jehovah; that is, it was a known relationship which man had with God, and it is living in that relationship as so known, for example, putting Him in mind and conscience in His true place as in that revealed relationship. Inconsiderate persons, running wildly after their own will, despise wisdom and instruction, the experience and judgment of mature, experienced mind, or the warning and discipline which may apply to what is not such. But there is a subordinate principle to the fear of the Lord—subjection in these relationships in which He has established authority in the first instance and immediately over the movements of man's nature: that is, the father and the mother. God has established this as the first and original bond of authority; will is in subjection, and honor, obligation, respect, come in. The parent is the source of the path of the child in contrast with his own will. It is not a law to meet and break his will (if he be not willful), but to instruct, form, guide, but with authority; yet as honored by the child and respected, as holding God's place, and with affections which produce willingness instead of will; still it is authority. Here we have therefore instruction, guidance by warning, discipline, and even by chastisement (paidia; Heb. 12:5). So he is not to forsake the precepts and admonitions of his mother, those early influences which first bend the mind to good. This is a deeply important principle. It is not, like marriage, first instituted of all. It begins with authority, but authority in relationship of love, the source that forms and fashions as well as controls the character, the name that God takes in highest grace towards us; not a lawgiver, but an authority, but whose word is law, where it is a question between that and our own will.

This closes the positive side or development of good by which the Proverbs are introduced. The evil side is next considered. "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not." Evil is in the world, deceit, and motives for sin. That which is first put forward here is the desire of wealth, and wrong and violence to obtain it. Corruption and violence are the two characters of sin and fruits of will in a fallen world. Here man is not treated as lost and sinful in his nature; he is under influences, he is of and in this world; he is in the world, but there is a way of wisdom in it. The first influences are supposed to be the true healthy ones of father and mother, and the fear of Jehovah. "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it," is its language; and as we may every day see the young growing up and getting out of the influences and shelter of the home of their youth—as of the corrupt woman it—is said, "the guide of her youth"—so they are looked at here. It is not the light of the gospel on man's nature and state, but the path of man as brought up in this world—what is the way of wisdom in it. Hence, after the influence of father and mother, we read of sinners enticing. We are reading of influences for good and evil in the world in which we are; the way of wisdom and folly in it. And he begins with the son as under the healthful and divinely ordered influence of the father. Violence is first treated of, induced by the lust of prosperity in this world; but laying wait for blood thus is laying wait for one's own soul. With this

warning, and knowing this, the net is laid in the sight of the bird in vain. That is the effect of true instruction. This leads to the warning itself, the display of the net, for all to hear.

Wisdom speaks with the authority of God and aloud, “she uttereth her voice in the streets.” This is an important principle as regards the results of sin. We have seen the parental care of the young to preserve from evil, but in the ways of God there is another testimony—the public warning and call to sinners which wisdom sends forth amongst them. “Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the street”—in the concourse of men, to the simple and to the scorner, the guilty yet misled ones, and the open and insulting adversary, and calls them to turn at her reproof, and proposes to bring forth to them, and lead them into, the full outpouring of the Spirit’s teaching and the words of God. It is not here pouring out the Holy Spirit on them: that is quite another thing; but the Spirit of wisdom was there for them, and the words of wisdom to teach and build them up. The expression is remarkable. You have the Spirit and the word, though the former, in the sense of its utterances of truth for blessing, poured forth to them. You have the Lord’s complaints in Luke 7, where yet wisdom in all her ways is justified of all her children. But it is in vain. Hence, when in the day of desolation and judgment, they will call, but there is no answer. They may fear the judgment, but there was no love, no submission to the truth; they will eat the fruit of their own ways. The ease and prosperity and carelessness they have been in, will be their ruin. The passage does not go beyond judgment (but God’s final judgment) in this world, and that there peace would be the portion of those who hearkened to wisdom. Nor be it further remarked, is there any reference to grace or its power in renewing or quickening. It is man in this world dealt with in his responsibility.

Proverbs 2. The next chapter takes us farther. It takes the ground of the son, the subject and obedient soul receiving the words of counsel, and hiding, keeping up within himself the commandments ministered to him, so that he inclines his ear to wisdom, and the heart applies itself to understanding. If more, if she is sought for as invaluable, and searched out as hid treasure, and avowedly and professedly sought after, the result is the apprehending the fear of Jehovah, and arriving at the knowledge of God. Here therefore it is not a call to men which we have, but the heart itself seeking for true wisdom as its portion and treasure, and thus the intelligence of relationship with Jehovah and the knowledge of God are obtained. “For Jehovah giveth widsom.” It is not merely that I by man’s understanding get wiser, but Jehovah gives true wisdom. It is what He has said, His word, which gives true knowledge and understanding, and he who seeks it will get it.

But there is more. He has laid up treasures of wisdom, His own counsels, for the righteous. And surely there are in His word treasures of wisdom and knowledge laid up for those who walk uprightly. Besides, He is their shield and protects them in their walk. He watches over His own way. It is a divinely-protected way: “the paths of judgment,” when men walk in God’s fear, are kept and protected by Him; and “He…preserveth the way of his saints,” for God’s way and their way are the same, as Moses said, “Show me now thy way” (Ex. 33:13), and Jehovah was to go with him. This is a great blessing. It may be a wilderness, in which there is no way, but we have God’s way in it, and marked by His own presence. “When he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them” (John 10:4). His word is, Follow me. “If any man serve me, let him follow me” (John 12:26). And then as Moses saw that thus he would practically find grace in God’s sight; so here “then thou shalt understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity” [or rather, uprightness] “every good path.” Walking uprightly (vs. 7) is consistently with, and in faith of, what we know of God. What is

said of Abraham and of Israel? “Be ye therefore perfect” (Matt. 5:48).

Here it is uprightness properly speaking. Walking in God’s path before Him, there is the spiritual and growing discernment of what is good and what is upright. This is the positive side, but there is besides this the way in which it guards from evil.

“When wisdom entereth into thine heart,” when it forms thus the spirit and mind, and the desires are formed after it, so that it lives in what is good, and it finds this divine knowledge pleasant to the soul, it becomes a discretion which preserves from the evil which is around, and the snares laid for us, keeps watch over us, and discernment shall watch thee, “keep thee,” as one who watches and keeps (as was said before) the path. That from which they are kept is twofold here: the wickedness of men and corruption.

There is no question of going to join in violence to gain wealth, nor is that from which we should be kept the wrong done to us by evil men; but the wisdom and sense of what is right, which the fear of God leads to, keeps us from being led into the path of the wicked man. Wickedness is deceitful! We are apt to get hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. We have need to walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise— wise concerning that which is good. Restraint of heart which walks in the fear of God, lowliness (for it is the opposite of pride), is guided in judgment and sees God’s way in the seemingly bewildered concourse of men and circumstances. It has its own way, and has only to follow it; only it depends on God for it. It is the way of the evil man from which the soul is kept here (vs. 12). The servants of Jehovah are supposed to have a path of uprightness, to a certain degree; so has natural conscience. The evil man has left it.

The other character of evil, from which the discretion of wisdom preserves us, is “the strange woman” (vs. 16) the snares and attractions of corruption. These are the two forms of evil, wickedness, and even violence and wrong; that is, leaving the law and seeking to satisfy one’s lusts by violence and corruption. So even before the flood; so on to the last days, when the beast and the false prophet represent these two principles. “The strange woman” departed from both the principles we have seen: the fear of God according to the revelation He had given of Himself, and the ministration of care which gave authority over the early thoughts, and a place thereby in holy affections and subjection, “Which forsaketh the guide of her youth, and forgetteth the covenant of her God.” All are supposed here to have had to say to God in known relationship, and to be brought up in His ways—to be in the covenant of God’s people. Nature and grace, as I have said, are not contemplated, but the ways of a people under covenant and law. The ways of “the strange woman” are death. The language is stronger here than with robbers before, or wicked men just above; they are bad enough, but the way to “the strange woman” is the way of death. It is corrupting, destructive of heart as well as conscience. True affections disappear and are turned into lusts; self-will seeks full gratification where there is not affection at all, instead of another being an object whom we love and esteem, whatever the relationship. It is self in its lowest and most absolute form. All through into Babylon, its last form, “the strange woman” has the judgment of God against her, and the ruin of man written on her forehead for those who can read it.

Proverbs 3. The first two chapters of Proverbs complete, as a kind of preface, the exposition of the subject—the true wisdom which keeps from the different forms of evil in this world, from what sin has brought in. The last verses of the second chapter show that it relates to God’s government in this world, and supposes relationship with God as Jehovah in Israel—it does not touch on a new

nature. In the next two, though there are warnings, we learn more what wisdom is, its judgment on all around. We may first remark, that subjection and obedience first characterize the path of wisdom, and it is in a known relationship in which he is thus guided. “My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments” (Prov. 3:1).

But, further; it is when the young man, once led as a child, goes out so as to have his own principles tried, and what governs himself inwardly brought to light. He still is obedient to what he has learned, and so far is in subjection; but it is now his own moral character, and he has to trust God inwardly, not be in the shelter of a paternal home and authority. Oh, how often we see departure here, and fair hopes and lovely blossoming of recipient youth turn to bitter fruits! It is a sad thought to see so many young, in whom the Lord could delight, turn to the way of their own will, and the ways of this corrupt world, fallen and degraded. It is against this these exhortations seek to guard the mind opening to its own responsibilities. Both what is right, and deference for those divinely established influences are to be maintained in the soul. And I may remark, however wrong example and the direction given to life may be, yet the wickedest of parents would desire his son to be virtuous; and deference to a parent will be a bright spot in the wildest of sons, and a hopeful influence.

But there is another point of great interest here before we enter on details—the perfect analogy of the language here with what is historically related of the Lord. “Let not mercy and truth forsake thee,” it is said to the young men. Now “grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). He was that, its perfection, which the young man was to seek to keep. It is added, “So shalt thou find favour and acceptance (esteem) in the sight of God and man.” So Christ “increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man” (Luke 2:52); and He was subject to Joseph and His mother. It is deeply interesting to find thus in Christ that which wisdom is sketching out as the divine path of man on the earth. It is thus we shall find, whatever elements of good are scattered up and down in the world, all concentrated in Christ as a man in this world. It is not merely a theoretical doctrine, but to be traced by spiritual insight into the positive unfoldings of good and life in the word. But this is deeply interesting: so in Psalm 89:1, “I will sing of the mercies (chasidim) of Jehovah.” Then in verse 19, “Thou speakest in vision to thy Chesed [holy one].” He summed up this “mercy” or “grace” (the same as grace in our chapter) in His person. Luke gives us more the man agreeable to God; John that which came amongst men from God. So all through these gospels, though united in His Person. These four verses, therefore, comprise the character in which the divine influences of instructive care are to form the incipient path of responsible man. It is not law but character. And this is to be noted.

He now enters into details in verses 5 and following. Two paths are before man—to trust God, or himself and his own wisdom for his happiness. This is just what Eve failed in; she did not confide in God, trust in Him and what He had said, for her happiness, but leaned to her own understanding, thought she should better secure it by doing what she thought would be advantageous. So every sinner; he thinks he can better secure his own happiness in doing his own will than in listening to God. Trust in God is the first positive active principle of life and wisdom; the next is owning Him in our ways, taking His will, authority, as that which is to form them, not our will and wisdom, and that openly (vs. 6). He will surely direct our steps. No human wisdom can guide like that. It may be very cunning—know human nature. But God has a way which He has laid down morally for us—a path of obedience, of righteousness, and of God; and He who has done so orders all things. In the end

His judgment will prevail. We may not see it prevail here—thus faith may be exercised; where His direct government is exercised, it will, but always in result. The end of the Lord is sure; heaviness may endure for a night, for a season if need be; but, for the faithful soul, joy cometh in the morning, a morning near to come. But self-confidence is ruin. “Be not wise in thine own eyes” (vs. 7). They do not see far if they only see self, and that is what always is in our own eyes. The fear of God, as we have seen, the moral path of His fear, is that on which He waits in goodness, however things may seem—this, and departing from all evil. This is something more than walking in His fear—there is an abhorrence of evil, partly in itself, partly as contrary to His will. I may walk in God’s fear, do no evil myself, without, I think, being characterized by departing from evil. No doubt, walking rightly is not doing evil. But evil is in the world, and there is, so to speak, a positive character of relationship to it, that is, departing from it, abhorrence of it. Adam, innocent, would have walked uprightly, done nothing wrong; he would not have departed from evil, he had nothing to say to it. I have or may have. I depart from it, leave and break with it. This has to do with holiness. We have seen Jehovah owned by confidence, and in His servant’s ways. It requires confidence in Him to guide one’s ways by His will. Now we come to another way of owning devotedness of heart, owning all positive good and blessing to come from Him, and manifested in the ready but due offering of a willing heart. Thus blessing is found, temporal blessing; Verses 8-10. It must be remembered that we are always here on the ground of present government in the earth. Higher objects may bring sorrow as regards this world, as it has ever been. Now we can only apply the principle. Peter’s epistles give the degree in which this government applies to Christian standing.

We are ever directed thus to another form of this government—Jehovah chastens those He loves (vs. 11). There is not only a government of the world for external blessing, but a direct personal government which occupies itself with the individual, a most gracious and precious truth. “He withdraweth not his eyes from the righteous” (Job 36:7). God deals with us personally for our good—“that we might be partakers of his holiness” (Heb. 12:10), for our profit. It is wonderful grace that He, the High and Holy One, should thus perpetually occupy Himself with us, leading us to the enjoyment of Himself. For He deals according to His own nature and in respect of all that is inconsistent in us with it. The word draws two conclusions from this truth that it is God’s love. It will not be without a cause in me; it will never be without love in God. Hence I am not to despise, for there is a cause in me which makes the Holy God of love act so; I am not to faint, for it is His love which does it. It is correcting a son in whom his Father delights. Anything that leads us to wisdom is indeed blessed— we may now say, to what Christ is. He is the wisdom of God, as He is the power of God. His word should dwell in us richly in all wisdom. This is really wisdom.

The inspired writer here speaks of it as known in detail by the Old Testament saints. He could not, of course, say they have the mind of Christ, but rays from it flowed down through inspiration, besides the law. That was binding surely. This is the Lord’s mind. Happy is the man who finds it, and his thoughts ordered according to, understanding, that is, the communication of God’s mind, and not man’s will. In verses 14, 15, He compares her to earthly treasures, yet blessing even in this world accompanies it; but more than outward blessing: it is a path of quietness and peace of spirit, cheerfulness of heart, because there is nothing on the conscience, and the heart is able to enjoy; no unsatisfied desires, but free affections; no restless will, but the sense of divine favor. Through this communion with God, “she is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her.” The two

words here used go farther than verse 14; there she was even as a sought treasure, here held fast as what the soul kept, valued, and was kept in. It is the abiding and purposed mind of the soul, as Barnabas exhorted them with purpose of heart to cleave to the Lord. It is not only, “I have suffered the loss of all things,” with the apostle, but “I count all things.” The knowledge of this wisdom (there fully, for it was Christ, and Christ in glory) had possessed him, the rest so as nothing. He held fast and retained it.

Note, this applies to an abiding character, as well as keeping it so as not finally to lose it. But that which is known in subjection in the creature is displayed in power in the ways of God. By wisdom He founded the earth; it was the thoughtful plan of ordered wisdom: in its place, the expression of His mind and will, of His thoughts, not the fruit, as our efforts may be, of a careless will, or, at any rate, one that does not know the end from the beginning, but the perfect ordering of One who did, and who ordered it for the purposes of His wisdom. And here it is Christ comes so fully in. For even this visible world was created for Him to be the heir of it, to be the heir of it moreover in the nature of one of His creatures (not the first and highest as a creature, but one for whom the earth was created, as its head, and he set as God’s image in it, yet proving himself a mere creature in the fall), to be heir of it moreover by redemption, in which all that God is should be displayed, though He went down to the lower parts of the earth in perfect subjection. “All things were created by him and for him” (Col. 1:16). The wisdom of God and the power of God are displayed in Christ. He is “the firstborn of every creature: for by him were all things created.” All center in Him, as by Him all things were.

Now when we obey and walk in the mind and word of God, we are put in the path which this infinite and all-comprehending wisdom has arranged. No creature without a will gets out of it: will only departs from it. God does not reveal it as within the scope of our minds, because we should not be in our place in it. It is the simple reception of His word which gives our place and duty according to the perfect wisdom which has ordered and comprehends it all. Yet by the Holy Spirit there is in the gospel a communication of the mind and purpose of God. He has made known to us the mystery of His will: hence it is said, “Who hath been his counselor? or, who hath known the mind of the Lord that he should instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.” “Jesus Christ who of God is made unto us wisdom” (1 Cor. 1:30), wisdom as to where we are, wisdom in making us know God, wisdom in making us fear Him and showing the perfect path of subject wisdom in Christ, the purpose of wisdom in His glory, gathering all things into one, the image of the invisible God. And, more than all this, it is a wonderful thing to say, “We have the mind of Christ,” when Christ is the wisdom of God.

But this wisdom was shown in the structure of natural creation (vs. 19): only it is impossible to separate one part from His whole purpose. The highest part of it was in purpose before the world, is now out of it, and will be more completely fulfilled when this world is over: only this is the scene where it has been displayed—what the angels desire to look into. The church is the great sphere of its display, the central sphere where God dwells. But in creation the mightiest and the smallest things are alike the fruit of it. The earth itself, the mighty deep, and the breaking up of its fountains, and the small dew that refreshes the tender grass, all come from His hand, all are the fruit of His wisdom.

We have in the Lord here—wisdom, discernment, and knowledge (vss. 19-20). Then the young man (the son of wisdom) is to keep counsel, a new word (ch. 2:7), and prudence: the last we have had at the end of chapter 1:4. It shall be comeliness even in the eyes of others, as well as life inwardly, that is, the power and enjoyment of life in the soul. It shall make us walk safely and not stumble in the way; it is the daylight of which the Lord speaks, the path of God where God is (compare John 11:9-10; Phil. 4:8-9); and, when we lie down, it shall be in felt safety and peace. This leads to another point—the way in which, so walking, confidence in the Lord is maintained in the heart. “If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God” (1 John 3:21). A stranger from God in this world, the power of evil is in the world; and fear accompanies, for the spirit of man, its unknown course, and the secret power that guides it. Walking in holy subjection before God, which is our wisdom, we can confide in Him, who is over all, without whom not a sparrow falls to the ground. It is not that we know what is coming, but that we know that the Lord is there, who rules and orders all. Nothing happens for us: God’s hand is in everything; and we confide in Him. Indeed everything will work together for good. At any rate, we confide in Him.

But wisdom is generous and considerate (for selfishness is destroyed), and it acts in simplicity and unaffectedness, for this is always the effect of the presence of God on the soul. It is ready to give, and does not pretend willingness when it can give and does not (vs. 28). Simplicity is a great trait of walking in the presence of God. There is no seeking, moreover, to exercise a power which gives or shows superiority; no spirit of mischief or wrong, nor jealousy of others are in that position; the spirit of peace and quietness is in the heart of him who walks with God. He is happy in himself, and is not restlessly striving for it in this world. A wrong way may exalt a man in a world of evil. It is not the way of peace. It cannot be approved of the Lord. I may not see the issue of it (God has revealed it to us in Christ; the day of Jehovah of hosts is on everything that is high and lifted up), but I do know it is not the path of a soul subject to God, where peace is; and the desires that awaken it are checked by His presence and true wisdom of heart which looks to Him. Scorn from Him shall be the portion of those that scorn; they shall be ashamed of their portion and of their pretensions, of that folly which did not make its account of God. But grace, present favor from His hand, is the portion of the lowly; and the wise, when He exerciseth strength, shall inherit glory.

Proverbs 4. We have now especially the source of instruction, and while kept as knowing from whom it has been learned (though here it is natural care, but according to divine order as to Abraham, seeing “he will command his children and his household after him... that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him”), the Proverbs are on this ground adding the responsibility of the hearer and the resulting judgment of God. The affections of the parental teacher were fully known as response looked for in the obedience of the child. It is not law, but wisdom and wisdom’s commandments, good doctrine, understanding. There is responsibility, commandment, and counsel; divine wisdom as to our path, followed in obedience, but not law. It is divine knowledge in the midst of evil (which the law is not, but forbids all evil). It is Abrahamic, not Mosaic, though a child of Abraham would keep the law if under it. This is important to remark. The law is in every sense by the bye, though a perfect rule for man in flesh. God founded the earth by wisdom, not by law. It is a far larger thing—the whole mind of God—for us learned in subjection in the subjective relationship of nature, which God uses as a means. It was as so taught to be retained in the heart; it was to be discovered, attained: this could not be said of law. There was nothing to discover. They were then neither to forget nor decline from it (vs. 5).

We have something more than the affection of the heart for that which is come from God, and in this way of affectionate instruction; that is, keeping the words of this instruction, retaining the commandments of parental wisdom, and living. There is something very striking in the likeness of the language here to the language of Christ in the New Testament. The Sermon on the Mount is just the sayings of wisdom that are to be kept. So the Lord says, “If a man keep my sayings, he shall never see death” (John 8:51). “If my words abide in you,” says Christ. “He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings” (John 14:24). “If a man love me, he will keep my words” (John 14:23). There is more than that in Christ; but He takes the place of wisdom in all He says. There was a person and source of grace, One in whom in subjection these words were filled, and whose words when He spake were the absolute expression of what He was. Still the analogy between the language of Proverbs and Christ’s words is striking. He walked in the daylight of God’s will—in the day and did not stumble. So here he who follows wisdom will not stumble. Hence “wisdom is the principal thing.” It is really “life,” the path of life. Power as displayed in bringing in right in the world is not come yet—it will. Our path now is wisdom, the mind of God good, in the midst of evil—not that which puts evil away (that, as to the state of things, is Christ when He shall appear)—the will of God good, in the midst of a world departed from Him; subjection and the consciousness that it is not by the coming in of displayed power, but the walking, in spite of evil, in His paths.

Then, as I have remarked, it is not the child kept authoritatively in the paths of good, but the pressing in love that, in his own heart as a responsible person, he should cleave to the good he had learned—take this wisdom as an object of his own heart and delight, exalt it, cleave to it. It is the way of life, grace, and glory. Two things flow from it: no straitening of the ways, no stumbling of the feet (vs. 12). Some seem in haste to go forward necessarily. Because wisdom is light and guidance, we shall not be straitened—and in perplexity in our path, not knowing which way to go, because wisdom, God’s discerned will and mind, tells us. There is a voice behind us saying, “This is the way, walk ye in it” (Isa. 30:21). And our goings are held up in God’s ways. For in the path of divine wisdom there is nothing to stumble over.

This is a great mercy. The heart is at large in walking, and the feet safe in the way. We must bear in mind that the rejection of Christ has in an external sense modified this, though the fire was indeed before already kindled. It is, as regards the flesh, for man’s natural heart, a strait gate and a narrow way. The spirit is at large and free in it, truly and wholly so; but when the will and human passions are at work, it is strait and narrow. Hence for man’s heart, as such it is represented. We should need no way, were evil not here. Adam had no need of a way. In heaven we shall have no need of one, but through the world and wilderness we have one. And there is but one—the way of wisdom, Christ, the heart guided of God Himself in the conduct that flows from Him and suits Him in a world of evil, of which path of wisdom Christ is the perfect expression in His own Person; and with this is God’s government (not yet outwardly displayed), so that it leads only to the cross, yet has His blessing, He making everything work together for good to those that love Him, and if it does bring the cross, giving a heavenly crown as the blessed result. All this is clearer for us now, of course; still in substance the way of wisdom was ever the same. It was always the path of life, a divinely marked way since evil came into the world.

From verse 14 we have the contrast. There is a positive path of wickedness, of self-will that seeks this world. Into that he fears that God is not to enter at all. It too is a marked way. The way is depicted in its full fruits, but it is the way of man’s will. It is the way of hatred. They love to make

others fall. It is a dreadful thing. But it is the sign of power, and malice is in the heart. The mischief inflicted on others is a sign of their comparative powerlessness. But the path of the just has fruit, leads on to something beyond, of which it is the way. There is no fruit in the ways of the wicked, but present gratification in wickedness. It is a departure from the place of peace and blessing, from God, and then self-will gratifying itself. It ends in death, but it is the way, not the end, which is judged here.

But there is a way which comes from God, a spirit and mind from Him, in which the just walks in the midst of evil, though here viewed practically and as from without. And though we have it here as guidance in the midst of darkness, and it is simple obedience of heart to God's directions, in the abnegation of will, yet it is of God and leads on to Him, to the perfect day. It is His path, though for a man (hence perfect in Christ all the way), and clothed as to circumstances in the path of this world, yet His way in it; and it issues in what it is in itself, and in its source, the perfect day. It is a beautiful image, for the dawn is from and in itself perfect light; but it is, so to speak, making its way through the darkness, but it issues in perfect day. So this path, coming from God—and in which man owns his relationship to God and all to whom God has placed him in relationship, according to His will and in subjection—issues in the full light of the relationship itself. In Christ we have the perfect expression of it: come from God, walking as man perfectly according to God in the midst of evil, He ends in glory as man; Himself indeed light all along the way, and forming the path of wisdom in the world. He that follows Him does not walk in darkness, but has the light of life. Christ Himself contrasts the way of the wicked with that of wisdom in the language almost of this passage. "Jesus said unto them, Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you; for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth" (John 12:35). This as regards others, believing in Himself: as regards His own path, doing the will of His Father, see chapter 11:9-10. And note in this last passage, He looks for "light in him": it is not in the wicked, and the world is always in darkness; so is it not with him that has Christ—God in man, as light, as the wisdom of man in this world, the light of life.

The rest of the chapter (vss. 20-27) is urgent exhortation. The ear must be attentive, the eye fixed on God's words; in the midst of the heart, the center and spring of walk, they must ever be kept. And this is indeed what is needed, as indeed it is urged: "keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." All goes well if that source of thought and object is filled with the word of God. Christ's words must abide in us, the heart's affections be formed in and by them, and we shall find the truth in good as in evil of the saying, Mine eye affecteth my heart (Lam. 3:51). There is power in the word and revealed wisdom of God for the renewed man (not to speak of its being the instrument by which we are begotten of God) to lay hold on heart and conscience, and to fix the mind of the inner man with formative power. It produces good in us; we live by it, we are changed into the image of what we contemplate. "Sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth" (John 17:17). "For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth" (John 17:19). It is the way of life, and health, and freeness of heart to the whole man.

But we have to deal with evil (here the ways of evil, for the Old Testament does not deal with old and new man, that supposes knowledge of Christ) in ourselves. "A froward mouth and perverse lips" are to be put away. He that governs his tongue, the same is a perfect man, able also to govern his whole body. It is the first index of the will and passion of man unsubdued, or of his having perfect rule over himself. This we must put away, not only following evil. Compare

Colossians 3.

Next, singleness of eye as to the object we pursue. If the path is strait, it is also straight, and, looking right on, there is energy in following. “This one thing I do”—consequent purity of affection; we are morally what we love and think of as an object. It is our mind. See Romans 8:7, 27. There is not a distraction nor a setting of the mind on vanity (and so a shutting out of what is holy and good, and a coming in of what is beside Christ) but God is obscured, His love and light hidden, if not doubted of, communion gone, the free peace of a holy heart. The power of evil is felt: it lies at the heart— not so easy to get it out, though grace does it. It is not faith which is at work—the new man in the things which belong to it, but the conscience making us feel we have wronged the love and favor we enjoy.

But, further, we have to “ponder the path” of our feet. A careless imprudent walk is not the fear of God. It is carelessness about God who has given us a path of wisdom in which our steps can go. Compare Psalm 17:5, the same word. “And let all thy ways be established.” It is exhortation, but (I think) exhortation to secure the fruit of the first part of the verse. We are not driven about by influences or distractions. There is firmness in our path, because it is a known one. It is not blown about by winds of doctrine, or counsels taken not as wisdom, but because we do not know what to do—the influence of the world. There is firmness of purpose. God’s mind and God’s will command the judgment, the heart, and the ways. There is not counsel with flesh and blood. It is the simple settled intention of doing God’s will as a delight and obligation both. It is then pondered before God to find His will in the particular case, and the, feet guided. But it is a settled thing with the heart to walk in God’s way. It may have to ponder and seek from Him what it is; but as it only seeks that, it waits till that is discovered; and then all is clear. There is no uncertainty of purpose, nor distraction of will or motive, where God’s will is discovered. There is one straight path, nor is there then any turning to the right or the left. It is sufficient that God’s will has been found.

Proverbs 5 takes up the question of purity in our ways, as that of violence had been already spoken of. We have divinely ordered relationships and, affections, instead of lusts and self-gratification in sin. How great: the difference! Nothing degrades the heart and understanding like corrupt lusts. No doubt violence is bad enough; yet it does not degrade within, does not pollute and destroy the spring of affections, but corrupt lusts do. That which would have been affection for another becomes corrupt heartlessness.

Two things are looked for from the heart of the young man, attention and subjection. Wisdom and discernment are in him who teaches, the father, who has a divinely given place of authority and intelligence in his claim, clothed in affection, over the heart and ears of the child. It is not commandment, as of an infant, but, as we saw at the beginning, the divinely ordered but acquired influence of the parent over the moral affections of the son. It is authority, but authority in counsel: “Attend unto my wisdom,” and be subject to my discernment, that is, of what is right. The effect (vs. 2) is preserving moral acuteness, being of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord (not “regard” but “keep”)—this quickness of moral perception. The lips are the expression of the heart, its index. The heart would be in such order, and —the will so subdued, that what came from the mouth would be the expression of knowledge. It is saying much.

The character of the woman is here (vs. 3) “a strange woman.” “Strange” is a word a good deal used and important. All gods that are not Jehovah are strange gods; fire not from the altar was

strange fire. It is that which does not belong to us, not in the divinely given relationship in which we are, or the thing spoken of stands. Any but Jehovah was a stranger; any but the consecrated fire was strange; any but the shepherd even was a stranger. God made them male and female, “bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh” (Gen. 2:23), the utmost intimacy of relationship as belonging to him: the expression of that was right. This was mere corrupt lust; the woman, a stranger to this divinely formed relationship. It spent the nature and heart, and ended in death. The heart, allured by evil, is turned into another channel, from pondering “the path of life,” following the path of lust to death. What is right is not weighed in the soul. The special warning (vs. 8) is withdrawal, not coming near the door of her house; living away in another scene of thought and being where will does not go in the path of lust, nor lust have occasion to seize hold of the will. Disaster and ruin follow in that path; but on that I need not insist. It is a giving up of self and self-government to fruitless sin. Hence what he recalls when ruined is not that he had not followed in a right way, but that will had been at work and warning despised. He had hated being set right, the exercise of moral discipline and just chastening, what arrested his will morally or even externally. There was the will which did not like to be checked, and the pride of heart which slighted corrective warnings. There was no obedience (he did not listen); no inclining the ear to that influence morally above us, which we have seen spoken of. It is to be noticed how this letting loose of the will and refusal to listen led or let loose to all iniquity and evil. The evil too, as it was reckless, was shameless. He was all but in every evil, in the midst of the congregation and assembly (vs. 14). He was almost as bad as Zimri, the son of Salu. But what takes away the heart takes away shame, and puts the effrontery of evil into the will.

The verses which follow (vs. 15, etc.) look at corruption in another character—the breach of the relationship divinely formed. What preceded has judged the will, let loose in corruption, and shown its debasing influence, and how it cast out all good in the heart and made selfishness the rule of life. Here it is another aspect of good and evil. The father insists on the close maintenance of the relationship itself as contrasted with the breach of it. God has formed it as a bond and center of affections. And even in human affections it is a great thing to have a center, so that the heart is united in itself there; and it is affection in righteousness according to God’s mind, so as that conscience does not war against the heart and make it evil and will, but God’s authority and creative will puts its sanction on it, so that His blessing can be enjoyed in it. Every way due and right affection is thus in the heart. We may go out in expansive kindness to objects outside of it—all right; but here affections are centered; and there is a bond; and duty puts its seal on it. But if the heart thus has its center in a help—meet for it, where it was not good according to creation to be alone, man was formed to be a center; and this was through his children. He multiplies himself. With illegitimate love this evidently cannot be; but living in his family (the first circle of divine order, formed by God Himself in paradise), drinking waters out of his own cistern—the concentration of affection by which it is his own, his fountains are dispersed abroad, and rivers of waters in the streets. That is, he is fully represented by his children, and has his importance everywhere through them. He is dispersed abroad in them. But there is unity in the whole family thus. His fountain is his own; that is, the whole family circle in its source. Fountain is so used in the Hebrew scriptures, as “the fountain of Jacob” (Deut. 33:28).

But there is more than lust, and due affections, and the healthfulness of divine order in man as formed by God. Man walks in God’s sight (vs. 21): He is the avenger of all breaches and wrong in

that order. But we may remark here that the reference is to the government of God. God observes it; and he reaps the consequence. It is something of Elihu's statement in Job. His own sins bring him into sorrow and misery; he eats the fruit of his ways. God is not mocked. What man sows he reaps; and this remains. It is not doubtless directly applied, as in God's government in Israel. Still God orders all things; and though the world, as Job justly reasoned, was not an adequate witness of His judgment of good and evil, yet He has so ordered things that sin bears its fruits: man sows to the flesh and reaps corruption. But, further, he is deprived of all intelligence of the ways of God, and following this, dies in darkness. And his life is a life of error. He shall go on from one folly to another, repeating and multiplying his departure from the one way of divine wisdom. There is one thing, I think, very striking—how much more, when wisdom is occupied with the government of this world, or governing a man's ways in it, it has to dwell on evil than on good. It is a sad thought, but so it is.

Proverbs 6. Two great principles of life are stated in the beginning of this chapter: not to engage oneself for the future; and not to be lazy and indolent for the present. God has set us in this place, humble diligence as a duty now— His ordinance since the fall. "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread" (Gen 3:19). "If any would not work, neither should he eat" (2 Thess. 3:10). On the other hand, engaging for the future is that, the result of which no man can command. The contrary of peaceful labor for one's need is the violence and rapine already spoken of and condemned as one of the two great characters of sin, at least as towards men. The other is, besides wrong, defrauding a brother in the tenderest point, sinning against oneself in corruption and lust, "his own body," as Paul speaks: all surely evil withal in God's sight.

If a man has engaged himself, he is not to slight of course his engagement, but to take it as a present obligation; but if he would be free, go and get the person he is pledged for to discharge it at once. Otherwise we are in a way we cannot control in the hands of others, so as not to be free to serve God's will, and perhaps to meet an unknown result though under obligation to do so. Christians will find this rule of immense importance for the quiet and peacefulness of their lives, and the violation of it sorrow and trouble of heart. Indolence and laziness carry their own judgment with them, as every one has seen; "poverty come as one that travelleth."

It is remarkable to see the Spirit of God so graciously descend to these details, in the way of practical wisdom, and the results that flow from conduct in this world, but on which so much depends of the peacefulness of the spirit in our path. These are warnings as to oneself.

What follows (vs. 12) describes the perverseness of the wicked man, the man of Belial, the man who is void of God in his mind and consequently follows vanity. In every moment he is at mischief: his eyes, his feet, his fingers, all seem to carry on mischief. Perverseness is in his heart: so it works through all that he can signify anything with; he devises mischief continually, causing discord amongst others—a sad picture. But we cannot but feel how we are occupied with evil here, for we are in an evil world, and our path is through it. Only I have to learn it thus in the word by faith, and not in the practice of it, or by familiarity with the practice of it in the world. But judgment comes on such. He is unexpectedly destroyed without remedy. He has been occupied with evil; there remains but judgment. "Judgment" here is the instruction of Proverbs; and surely, though there is not a direct government by it, so it is continually in the world even now. The character of the man of Belial and vanity is then described in the traits which the Lord hates.

Proverbs 7. In this seventh chapter we have another aspect of wisdom's ways. It is not open wickedness in which the will is active against which it directs its remonstrances; it speaks of the snares laid for those who have no intention to do evil, but whose lusts and passions lay them open to those snares. Hence the soul is called upon to be previously diligently filled with the precepts and counsels of wisdom, that it may be in no way taken in them.

This is a very important point. It is not sufficient (how often has the Christian found it!) not to have any intention to do evil, nor even to have the intention to do right. We are in a world of snares and temptations. We have to watch and pray, lest we enter into temptation—to have the soul filled with the divine things of wisdom, and the thoughts of wisdom guiding the mind and the path, so that the allurements of evil and Satan's wiles take no hold upon us. The mind lives in another sphere. It is indeed another nature to which evil is offensive, and which detects it in the allurement itself, and deals with that as evil, instead of being attracted by it. The precepts and light of divine wisdom fill and guide the thoughts; and evil is evil—is contrary to the state of the soul, walking in lowliness and obedience, not as fools but as wise, simple concerning evil indeed, but wise concerning that which is good. The words of counsel, implying, as we have seen, obedience and subjection of heart, are to be kept, and the commandments of a father laid up. And they are to be kept as well as laid up, and treasured, delighted in, kept before one's mind on the fingers, and tables of the heart, and confessed and owned as that with which we are of kin, to keep us from the flatteries and allurements of sin.

The young man void of understanding went—notes the way of her house. It was not a deliberate purpose, as verse 21 shows; but the path of wisdom and her precepts would never have led him there—would have led and kept him elsewhere. He followed at least the idleness of his heart. This is a solemn warning. Nor is there light on this path. He was not walking in that light in which a man does not stumble. Nor is the conscience ever really good there. It is not an actually bad conscience, but a good conscience is always in the presence of God. "He that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God." Here there were passions ready to be ensnared, without a safeguard; and a conscience which darkness suited better than light, which was not walking in the light; idleness of will which had shame, in a measure, of its own ways. It was not a path in the broad daylight of God. And, oh, how great a thing it is, and how blessed a thing! Look at the path of Jesus: where was that? We have greatly to seek this.

But now we have the boldness of a hardened conscience—a terrible thing. A defiled one with a broken heart Christ can meet; but a bold one is a shocking thing. There is no home to such a heart. But the idleness of passion is no safeguard against its ways. It can flatter, awaken lust, be ready to minister to it to win to its ways. It reckons on fear in the unhardened, though it has none. It has its means, however false, of guarding against it; for vice is a mean thing, even if hardened. There was no "good man" at all. It was naked vice; but stolen waters are sweet, though sin fills with fear. And the idle soul is caught in snares its will did not seek; but it was none the less the path of death. Nor is it the only snare the idle soul may meet. The soul that does not watch and pray (that is not filled with wisdom's ways and wisdom's thoughts, kept by God's presence) will meet temptation somewhere. Still, here it is the snare of the strange woman. Her house is the way to hell. She has cast down many wounded, and strong men are all her slain. It is not human strength that resists temptation and passion; and such temptation has been the ruin of many who

in this world were mighty, and even morally mighty. They have fallen under the snare, and were ruined; those who otherwise boast themselves have through this been weakness, and brought to ruin. The wise man presses it on him who had ears to hear.

Hebrew scholars make here in verse 26, a word which usually means “strong” to mean “numerous.” I confess I do not see why, nor how, it can be sound with “all.” “Many wounded has she made to fall, and strong ones are all her slain.” I do not see the sense of “numerous are all her slain”; but that strength is of no avail against the snare—figuratively to show the danger, and how powerful the snare is. To say that all her slain were strong ones is every way to the purpose. However this I must leave to abler Hebraists than myself. Only the Hebrew word is everywhere else used for mighty, or strong. The Authorized Version gives “strong,” but turns “all” into “many.” I confess, “strong ones are all her slain” is much more to the moral purpose of the sentence than anything else.

Proverbs 8. Wisdom is not in this world simplicity, but leads us into it. Simplicity is the blessed result in the highest way, when God is all to the new nature. But God is wise in His ways in ordering all things; and we are now in a scene of evil, and a complication of received good and actual evil in will and fact, which needs for him who would go aright a path which the vulture’s eye hath not seen. In truth there is none in the world in itself. Where all is morally wrong and departed from God, there can be no right path. Adam did not want a path. As to him he had only to stay where he was. When we have gone wrong, and are driven out by God, and so need a path, none can be found. There is none. But God deals with this scene—now with man in it, hereafter with the scene itself—and has a path and result which was before the worlds, and which wisdom points out to us, calling men into it. Where shall wisdom be found, and where is the path of understanding? It is not to be found in the land of the living. “Destruction and death say, we have heard the fame thereof with our ears” (Job 28:22). So they have. They tell us the vanity of all the scene we are in, and, above all, of man at the head of it, the sorest place of all. But it is only negative. This is an immense truth, that there is no way for living man fallen from God. This is what is described in the Book of Ecclesiastes. Man under the sun, his will works. What can his will, multiplied in the contentions of many, do? But “God understandeth the way thereof, and he knoweth the place thereof” (Job 28:23). He ordered creation, but “unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding” (Job 28:28). This, as Ecclesiastes says, is the whole of man (Eccl. 12:13). That book does not go farther, and it is a deep and immense instruction to get this by itself—the position and condition of man as such ascertained, bringing God and responsibility to him, without reaching Him, but looking at man as he is here, and without revelation, but knowing good and evil, accompanied by the declaration of judgment.

Proverbs takes a wider sphere, because it is occupied with wisdom, not with man simply as he is. Hence we have always God in Ecclesiastes (save the fear of Jehovah at the end), Jehovah in Proverbs. The sphere we live in is one of a perverse will in man, who will not have God, but a knowledge of right and wrong in himself, of the difference of right and wrong, in a scene where nature retains abundant marks of a wise and good Creator, of almighty power, yet in this its lower part in a state of ruin and corruption, away from God, and in what man knows to be corruption about Him too; so that, when he has not revelation, that is, the word, he is fain, in hopeless subjection to what is false, to rear his altar to an unknown God. Such instinctive knowledge there must be as makes him feel that he knows nothing of Him—a sad condition for a responsible soul.

Wisdom, the word of God, comes into this scene, shows what it is, reveals God in it, the way of truth; but that word shows it existing in God before the world was. It looks back to creative wisdom, but to a purpose then set up which will be fulfilled; but it deals with what it meets with, and shows with divine light what is the scene and state of things of which I have spoken. Its utterances are the truth, and reveal withal the counsels of God. Christ was, and of course is, this wisdom, but He is more, for He reveals God Himself; and then comes in necessarily another thing—grace and truth come by Jesus Christ. This last we have not here. It was foretold and prophesied of, but could not be till the Lord Himself came, and effectually for us only when redemption was accomplished, and He had glorified God. Compare Titus 1:1-3; 2 Timothy 1:9-10. But we have the general truth of the activity of God's testimony, which, after all, is grace, His dealing with the consciences of men, and wisdom in the creation; and in a general way, that His thoughts and purposes of divine delight rested in the sons of men—accomplished so perfectly in Christ's incarnation, proclaimed so blessedly in the angels' song, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2;14); but here, too, wondrously set forth, showing the dealing in truth by wisdom with men, and the unspeakable testimony of where His delight was before the world was—wisdom having its delight where God's delight in eternity was. Its delight was in the sons of men. Now we say, "Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:24).

But the revelation of wisdom and its exercise is in the midst of an evil world. What wisdom has to say she would not have to say if the world were not evil; yet it is a strange thing, and must be wisdom to speak God's truth in such a world. And such it is. We read in Ephesians, "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is" (Eph. 5:15-17). "Redeeming the time" means seizing opportunities, as Daniel 2:8 (margin), which I note because it shows the world to be evil, and, though under God's hand, still evil to be in power. And then wisdom has to cry. It reveals surely, too, all the counsels of God in Christ, blessing beyond the evil. "We speak wisdom among them that are perfect" (1 Cor. 2:6), wisdom ordained before the world to our glory; but even this is brought about as to the wisdom of the way by the coming of evil and redemption. It is divine wisdom bringing good out of the evil in accomplishing His counsels towards us. Sin, weakness, guilt was our state, but through redemption issuing in glory, according to the display of God in that redemption, whose love, mercy, righteousness, supremacy over evil have been glorified in the work of Christ, and we in righteousness brought into that glory; that as sin appeared sin, working unto death by that which was good, the perfect law of right for man, so God might appear God by the display of all that He is, in bringing us to glory through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Here we have it in its elements. We have seen it hitherto as the order of subordinate authority and parental care, the maintenance of paternal order. Here we have something more. The world is evil, and wisdom cries aloud in testimony in the midst of the world as it is, though revealing the grace that accompanies wisdom.

"Wisdom crieth, and understanding putteth forth her voice." Wisdom I take to be the gathering up all that experience can give, so as to judge of all things by it, only that in God it is intrinsic knowledge of all things, and all their relations and state. This He furnishes to us as far as we are capable of it as creatures in His word. Every word of wisdom is perfect as to that to which it applies. It comes from a perfect divine knowledge of all, and our path in it, as God sees it. It applies to what we are in, but it comes from God, who knows His own mind, in what we are in, and

about it, and that He gives—only we know in part. As having received it now, we have it all ours. “Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things” (1 John 2:20). We cannot instruct the Lord, we are told, but we “have the mind of Christ.” As addressed to us, it is the perfect light of God on that of which it speaks to us. The world is in confusion and evil. Grace makes God cry to us in that day. It was present in Christ. Compare Isaiah 50.

Understanding puts forth her voice, as wisdom comprehended all, and brought divine light to bear on it. Understanding discovered all. Verses 2 and 3 show remarkable the character of this testimony. She meets man where he is, lifts up her voice above the roar and confusion of man’s restless activities in this world, meets him in the throng, and puts herself forward in the highway of passage to bring in the light of God, and His claim on man for his good. She summons man’s ear to hear, and think of something besides the urging of his own will and the turbid stream of his passions and earthly hopes. “Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of man.” So Christ, the life, was the light of man. Christ, though He did not lift up His voice in the streets, but only to be so much the more heard of all that had ears to hear, yet sent it on the house-tops by His apostles, Himself the perfect subject and wisdom’s self, rather than the proclaimer of it, yet sowed the word—Christ, I say, was this wisdom displayed in subjective perfection in this world. Every word He uttered was a part of it, and the right part when He uttered it. How He discovered all I need not say. He did not learn wisdom partially by experience, as that which He had not (though as true man He grew in it), but was that which experience is to learn. Sorrows He learned for us, difficulties, opposition; but He was wisdom in the midst of it. However, God in active grace brings this to bear on the consciences and hearts of men— says, “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear” (Matt. 11:15). The word was proclaimed, on “the top of high places,” in the view of men, in the thronged resorts of man, and where every one must enter that belonged to a human dwelling-place or home.

And her address was to men. God’s word and wisdom are formed for and expressed to them. When it was there in life, “the life was the light of men”—theirs in divine counsels, and adapted to their condition.

It came to bring the truth, not to find it. It came to the “simple” and “fools”; it brought light and understanding to the simple—the hearing ear, through grace; it brought to the simplest and most foolish divine wisdom for themselves— a light and guide in all the circumstances they were in. They were excellent things, for they came from God, and revealed Him, and they were right things—put everything in its true moral place with God, and with God’s authority. For wisdom’s mouth speaks according to the real nature and state of things (vs. 7), and that as to their relationship with God—tells the truth of everything, and is equally abhorrent from all evil itself. This is the great controversy with man’s pretensions. He has his own mind the center of all the confusion, leaving out God, and pretending to judge by it the scene of confusion he is in—yea, even to judge God Himself, and what He ought to be. Wisdom is bringing, in applicable detail, the light of God and His authority in it, into the scene of confusion, which is so as departed from Him. The will of man will not have it; his passions and lusts are dearer to him.

But there is another character of divine wisdom; it is straight and simple (vss. 8-9), because it is profound and perfect. It is itself—itself in the midst of confusion and complication, but always itself. Human subtlety and wisdom must take the tortuous course which seeks to avoid the evil which it

belongs to and lives amongst, of which it forms a part, though it may be a cleverer part; but it must act by the motives and passions which govern man, because it has nothing else to act upon, nor by. It cannot be above the sphere to which it belongs, though it may see a little farther into it than the simple and foolish; but it cannot see beyond present motives —they are its motives. Divine truth and wisdom brings in God, and what is right, with authority—is it in testimony, or in fact, if we take it as embodied in Christ. Hence it is always itself, for it is what comes into the scene, not what is of it, though light in and adapted to it, and (acting on conscience, that is) is light to the sense of right and wrong by bringing in God, the fear of the Lord, and hence gives a perfect path. The words are in righteousness, and in righteousness for and in the midst of the scene of will and confusion sin has brought in.

I take the most common-place outward example: “Thou shalt not steal” (Ex. 20:15). In paradise there was no stealing. In heaven there will be none. In a perfect state such a thought could not exist. Yet property and rights of property have introduced confusion and ill-will and oppression on one side, and wrong on the other—in all ages a problem that no man can solve, and that there is no right to be found in. One form is oppression, another ruin and disorder. Wisdom is content with what it has, and covets no man’s; it has the key to a perfect path of its own in the midst of the confusion, because of introducing God and His fear. It takes the heart of man out of all the motives which produce the confusion that exists, and gives it its own path in the midst of it. This is the most commonplace case, which I take on purpose.

Hence the Lord declines decision (He came not then to judge) in a case of alleged wrong (Luke 12:14), and continues, “Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth” (Luke 12:15); and then exalts man’s thoughts above such objects even as man, and brings in God as known goodness to those who had faith in Him; and this goes on to the highest display of the life of Christ in us. It was the law’s place to mark this path in fact for man, not to reveal counsels or redemption or the display of God in man, but the path of man before God. So far it was wisdom, but it could not display God in counsels or in love connected with them, or it would not have been a law for man. Now we learn not man before God, but in Christ God before man, our rule of life, though this will surely not violate the other—“against such there is no law” (Gal. 5:23). Thus there is nothing tortuous (“froward”) nor twisted (vs. 8), winding through the evil ways and corrupt motives of men to find an advantageous path through them.

Hence he who walks by divine wisdom is counted a fool— told he will be a prey to the world; for the world after all reckons on evil and looks to its subtlety as its resource, to knowing more evil and plans to circumvent it. But obedience to the word is divine wisdom; for divine wisdom, that knows all things, has formed the path. We have to walk according to that lovely and divine precept that grace only could give us—“Simple concerning evil,” and “wise unto that which is good.” Hence to him that understands—his an ear and capacity to receive what is divine, “they are all plain.” They are God’s path, declared by Him, what leads in a straight and blessed path which is its own—that in which Christ walked. He that finds knowledge discerns that they are upright, “right” in themselves—the divine mind in us, we can say.

Now the new man discerns the uprightness of this path. As the Lord says, “Wisdom is justified of all her children” (Luke 7:35), though the world see not or hate it. “Plain” is that which is straight

before us. “Let thine eyes look right on”; compare chapter 4:25, where the word “right on” is the same as “plain” here (Prov. 8:9), and “straight” the same as “right” here. It is all simple to him that takes divine light for his guidance, in thankful submission to Him who gave it. The path of Christ is the perfect expression of it: He is the wisdom of God. In value surely nothing can be compared with it—to have God’s way, and that a right one, through a world of evil. But, in a world like this, there is need of not being fools but wise. And wisdom sees everything in divine light, and detects at once its character. It is of the profoundest subtlety in this way. It has the discernment of God. A scene of satanic deceit is perplexing to the mind perhaps. What is it? The entrance of it is contrary to the fear of the Lord; the whole thing is judged, though I cannot account for the hundredth part of it. The soul, not guided by the fear of the Lord, plunges into a scene beyond its powers, and is the sport of Satan. The fear of the Lord and the Spirit of truth, for the simplest mind, has preserved from and judged it all. But it is really the subtlest judgment which the humanly wise are taken in. “I wisdom dwell with prudence”—the reflective judgment, which the fear of God calls for and produces as seeking always His will, giving a discernment which judges of the true character of everything. It is subtle, dwells with it, is found where this is. It is strange to put plain (vs. 9), and prudence (vs. 12), together; but it is just what divine wisdom does. In the “witty inventions” it is the cogitations of the heart which find out these witty inventions. When fully developed in us, the spiritual man discerneth all things, and he himself is discerned of no man. He judges all around him, and whatever he has to walk in; but his motives, principles, and aims the natural man discerns not; his path baffles the cleverness of him who has not the Spirit. (See Rabshakeh’s interview with the servants of Hezekiah.) He is sure of his way, or motives, and principles: unknown to the unspiritual man, his way is a riddle to him. The result proves its wisdom to the world. His “witty inventions” (well-considered thoughts) are beyond the ken of the natural man. This leads to the great principle and spring of it—the beginning of wisdom, “the fear of the Lord” (vs. 13)—the bringing of God in so that His thoughts, not our will, have authority over us. Where that is, we hate wrong, the exercise of will, and selfishness, contrary to the relationships in which we stand. All self-will, and setting up of self, the evil way and perverse words, wisdom hates. But if the heat and pretension of will is hated of wisdom, with it is counsel (vs. 14) — the wisdom of a staid reflective mind, subject and looking to the Lord, and the resources of sound judgment in difficulty, discernment, and strength. Compare Ecclesiastes 9:13-18, where mere physical strength is contrasted, and the way wisdom affords security is spoken of.

We now come to its direct earthly aspect in connection with God’s government of the earth. Government, righteous judgment, the rule of the great, depends on it. Thus we read of the wisdom of Solomon. They have to represent God in the discernment of good and evil and the maintenance of right by authority on the earth; this they can do only by divine wisdom.

But then there is another point applying to all hearts— loving it for its own sake, and diligence of heart in seeking it: real delight in God’s wisdom in itself, and the sense of obligation to realize it. “I love them that love me, and they that seek me early shall find me.” Wisdom is loved for its own sake, and diligence of heart seeks it as a duty incumbent on us. But in the earthly government of God it brings its reward. This was fully the ground the law went upon. The God-fearing obedient man was to be blessed in his basket and blessed in his store. But there is more than this—riches that do not perish, and righteousness that the heart delights in as its treasure. Wisdom walks in the path of righteousness, discerns by the action of the conscience and the word how men are to walk

and to please God. It discerns what is right in all the complicated scene of this world, gives a sure path in it according to God. Seeking only to please Him, it gives motives above the circumstances and thus a path through them. We do what is right in them. We walk in firmness and a plain path where the circumstances would afford none. This is a great comfort. We are not careful to answer in the matter. Divine wisdom is in the fear of the Lord and uprightness. There is light, divine light, on the path, where all is dark around, for divine wisdom knows its path here by righteousness. This is its path. That is a light on the path. We cannot do otherwise, though it may seem folly, and trial may accompany it. It is God's way, and that turns out right even in this world, though it may at the time seem a sacrifice of everything, and bring trouble upon us. So Joseph; but it led him here below under God's overruling hand to a place which, humanly speaking, he would not otherwise have had. This was not his motive. He did what was right and would not do what was wrong, and it brought him from a captive slave to be lord of Egypt.

I know Christians have much higher objects in hope and are called by them; but here we are on the ground of God's government of the earth, and that government is carried on now, though not in the direct way it once was in Israel—a people of His own. Nor does wisdom ever get out of these paths. She is found only in "the paths of judgment." In all cases and circumstances in which man has to walk, a way cast up in righteousness is the only one wisdom can walk in. She is always found in the midst of them (that is, cannot be out of the paths so formed and marked out). These are God's, these are wisdom's. And where God's government is exercised in this world and for it, as wisdom's place, such a path issues in blessing and prosperity. Suffering in a hostile world may be more specifically our portion now, though from Abel down it was there. Still there is such a government of which God has not let loose the reins. "He that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil and his lips that they speak no guile: Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it. For the eyes of Jehovah are over the righteous" (1 Peter 3:10-12). It is not only in Job's time that it was true, that "he withdraweth not his eyes from the righteous" (Job 36:7). This is government and the path of wisdom, an interesting point. But now the Spirit of God comes to counsels and purpose.

Wisdom has brought light into this world of confusion, divine light, but existed before the world was in the thoughts and counsels of God, Christ being the center of all these counsels, and the object of God's delight. He is the wisdom of God, as the power of God when He works. His works were the scene of wisdom, and the wisdom was eternal—was there before the works and power displayed in the works, but with a fuller counsel yet. There is a path which God treads, so to speak—a path unfolding what is the fruit of His thoughts; but that path is not mere power without a plan and counsel; nor is he dealing wisely with what He finds, as we have to do. Wisdom is precious in that; but then it is in subjection, and a righteousness which is true wisdom, but which is obligatory on us: we have to find wisdom's path where we are, by doing right, for we owe that to God. But God possessed it in the beginning of His way. The point is not here that there was wisdom displayed in creation—no doubt there was; but the point is that, before the world existed, wisdom had its place with God. We have to find the path of it in creation, now ruined; but God's mind and thought was before it all. This is what is brought out from verse 22 to the end of verse 29. No doubt wisdom was displayed when He prepared the heavens and put a compass on the face of the deep; but before all wisdom was there. It was there when He did it; but itself was from eternity. The earth was an occasion for its display—a work adapted by wisdom to the divine glory

and the ends of that wisdom; but it was wisdom, it was itself, before it found a sphere for its display; and creation was its fruit, but not its object. It was itself, had its place with God, and its object on which its purpose rested.

The first statement as to this is, that Jehovah possessed this wisdom already when His way began the movement to produce anything outside Himself—to reveal Himself. In the beginning of His way, before His works, wisdom was inaugurated, established as the authority and order on which, being in the mind of God, all was to be ordered and established. But, secondly, it was there in the secret time of eternity. It is in fact summed up in John 1 concerning the Word. Jehovah possessed this wisdom (it was the outset of all things) before the earth—in which His ways have been unfolded—existed. It was produced from Jehovah, brought forth as the fruit of His being in itself, before creation—what was outside Himself— existed. And not only this earth, but when He "prepared the heavens," wisdom was there. All this marks this wisdom as the produce and mind of Jehovah in itself and in Himself, before mere creation (which existed from His fiat and word) had begun to exist. It is divine and in Godhead, as creation exists by His word outside Himself. No doubt it is spoken of mystically here; but Christ is it, and its revealed fullness and manifestation. He who is this was in the Father before the world was, before anything existed but what was in Godhead itself. He was God, but, as thus looked at, as subsisting, He was with God, and all things by Him, as the whole scene of the wisdom of the divine mind. But there was more than this. Wisdom was, objectively, the delight of the divine mind. The thoughts it produced were perfect, necessarily as itself, and the delight of the mind that produced them. They answered to it. We do so with our petty minds, and yet ours answer often imperfectly even to our small minds, and all is partial. Divine wisdom was according to divine fullness and perfection, and expressed it as a whole, and was the divine delight. Christ was all this in His Person; but here it was taken up abstractedly. It was always with God, by Him, in immediate intimacy of nature and fellowship; One brought up in love by Him; His delight day by day. It is a wonderful description.

But not only was divine delight in this wisdom here fully looked at as a person, but it too (or perhaps we should now say He) was ever rejoicing before God at all times. This object of God's delight was rejoicing itself before Him; so, subordinately and by grace, we are "holy and without blame before Him in love" (Eph. 1:4). But here it was an eternal and divine object— what was in Godhead itself, yet with God objectively. Jehovah possessed wisdom as His delight before anything out of Himself was formed; and this wisdom was One rejoicing before Him. But there was a purpose that occupied wisdom before the sphere and scene existed in which the object of that purpose was to be developed. Wisdom rejoiced in the habitable parts of God's earth, and its delight was with the sons of men. How wondrously does this come in! Though surely a wise God ordered the creation, yet wisdom was set on other things—man was the object in view. That wisdom, whose joy was before God and who was the delight and joy of God, was not delighting in the earth but in the habitable parts of it. There was purpose. A poor trivial part of creation, if merely of creation—if we look at the vastness of the scene in which he moves, but the center of all God's purposes—the object of His thought before creation—complete in purpose, in whom, according to the purpose of that wisdom, was to be set up the whole display of it. The habitable parts of God's earth wisdom delighted in, and its delight was in the sons of men.

Man was first created a responsible being, but as a being, God's delight, the center of His ways here below, made in His image, after His likeness, and the image withal of Him that was to come.

But this (though God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life so that he was His offspring) yet was a responsible man as a creature, and as a creature failed. But after many exercises and preparatory dealings of wisdom, He who was the wisdom of God and His power, by whom all things were created, became Himself a man. Life was in Him, “and the life was the light of men”—in its very nature was such. The angels could then, in unjealous and holy strains, declare that God’s good pleasure was in man. A wondrous and blessed thought! He who had this place with the Father was made flesh—God’s delight down here, God manifest in flesh; grace to man, grace in man, man taken into union with God in one Person—the pledge of peace on earth, “Glory to God in the highest.” But as yet, as to its effect on others, it was connected with the responsibility of those around Him—“He is despised and rejected of men” (Isa. 53:3). This unspeakable favor and blessing (for the creature’s mind was still in question) was rejected and cast away. But now wisdom’s purpose could come out, and—founded on that perfect work which He accomplished (through this very wickedness to make it more complete and glorious) on that which glorified God Himself—the purpose, established before the world was, is revealed in glorified man, yet righteously in obedient man; and in One who had glorified God in all that He was, in that in which He who did so was made sin for us. He met all the requirements of God, all the responsibility of those who came to God by Him, bearing their sins; He manifested the righteous ground of grace addressed to all, and glorified God so as to bring many sons—man—into glory, God’s glory.

Now came out the manifold wisdom of God by the church, displayed even to principalities and powers in heavenly places, in the union of man with the very center of glory, and heirs in that, of all which was to be placed under His hands as man. The proper purpose was our own place in and united to Him and with Him; but this involved the dominion which belonged to Him as man (see Titus 1:1-2; 2 Tim. 1:9; Eph. 1:3-5 and following, and 1 Cor. 2:6-8); all the responsibility of the first man met, for those who believe, and as to God’s glory, absolutely and completely; and the foundation laid for the accomplishment of God’s purpose in righteousness, according to the full glory of that purpose—grace reigning through righteousness unto eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Responsible man came in between the purpose and its accomplishment—failed as such; and then in the perfect man, the Son of God, grace finds its free display in righteousness and the purpose accomplished in glory. When we know Christ, we know the meaning of that; His delights were in the sons of men. Wondrous thought! but how true, how simple to us, when we see the eternal Word and Wisdom a man! How sweet, for we are men! How wondrous, to see glory in righteousness with Him when grace has reigned through it, when God has been glorified and has glorified our Head with Himself; and we soon to have the rest with Him according to the same righteousness! “For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one” (Heb. 2:11).

It is because God’s delight is in the sons of men that wisdom now calls them to heave (vs. 32); and though her ways seem strange to the pride and pretension of man, boasting of righteousness because ignorant of God, yet wisdom is justified of all her children in the solemn call to repentance on responsibility, and the blessed announcement of grace in goodness, both the proofs of mercy, of God’s interest in man; and, indeed, all God’s nature and ways—all His being is displayed in redemption and grace. Love, mercy, holiness, judgment, righteousness, patience, intolerance of evil, majesty, and tender condescension in grace; the coming in of evil, its extent, and the surmounting it in grace, and yet through righteousness, such as naught else could have done—all is brought out in the work of Christ and by its effect in the heart of man, so that in him it should be

all displayed, yet all be sovereign grace to him; for the Son of God being a man in glory and having died, tells a tale nothing else could tell—divine glory; and death as made sin, yet death overcome in resurrection, death to deliver us, death where all was perfectness for God and in man, and by which God could display all He was—Christ gave Himself up for that, and is in the glory.

Therefore wisdom calls on us to listen to her, for it is grace: it is because God delights in us. “Blessed are they that keep my ways.” It is the activity of God’s goodness calling to that only path which leads to rest and the peaceful favor of God: and I recall here the distinct principle of this chapter. It is not the warnings of natural authority, the ordained channel of wisdom in a relationship formed by God. It is the direct call of wisdom; the call in grace of the divine Word itself to man as such, because His delight is in them, as in the ministry of John Baptist and Christ, above the natural relationship, and directly from God to the consciences and hearts of men, bringing about purpose; but in the righteous, gracious summons of God. It is wonderful—this direct appeal in grace. It may rudely break in upon the natural relationships and set five in one house divided, three against two and two against three, because it is direct and individual from God Himself and it brings about purpose in result. Hence, though peace on earth even was to be the result in purpose, yet in present operation Christ could say, “Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth?” (Luke 12:51). And hence He was straitened till the baptism in which He glorified God was accomplished; because the unbelief of man drove back into the recesses of His heart the love, which, when the work of glorifying God in righteousness was accomplished, could flow freshly forth. Then the ground for the accomplishment of purpose according to glory was fully laid, and Christ enters in resurrection into the fruit of righteousness in glory; and, when all is accomplished, He will raise us up at the last day, responsibility being fully met, yea God glorified, in that which did it.

When wisdom came addressing itself to responsibility it had only to complain. “Wherefore, when I came, was there no man? when I called, was there none to answer?” (Isa. 50:2). But the truth was, the Son was too perfect, too glorious, to be discerned by man. God “hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes” (Luke 10:21). Blessed those who (in this gracious appeal to children, which puts God in grace, where nature stood in authority on His part—not my children indeed, but “children,” sons, interested in them in that character) keep wisdom’s ways, “hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not.” The first we have in the Sermon on the Mount, keeping wisdom’s ways: the second in Mary at Jesus’ feet, and in principle in those who knew that the words of eternal life were to be found nowhere else. “For whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favor of Jehovah.” But there is more than pressing men to hear and keep the instruction of wisdom (compare Luke 11:28; Matt. 13:23); there is earnestness of heart on our part, waiting upon it, “watching daily at my gates, and waiting at the posts of my doors.” It is not mental effort, the production of the human mind, but waiting on divine teaching as Mary did, “as new born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word” (1 Peter 1:2). It is not here the proclamation of wisdom, but the desires of the heart towards it thus manifested. Here life is found, for it is the word of life, and that man finds the favor of Jehovah: the double aspect of divine blessing; in us life, divine life, and divine favor resting upon us. He that sins against it injures his own soul (vs. 36). There is a path in which will walks to its own ruin. It is not God’s path. Our own will hates the path of divine will, which is for us a subject path, but that ends in death. It is not the causes in grace which deliver which are spoken of, but the fact of what is found in result. As the

apostle teaches us in Romans; “to them who, by patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory and honor and immortality,” eternal life was to favor. “If a man love me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him.” “If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love” (John 15:10). It was no question surely whether Christ had life; He was life. But that was the path in which He walked in divine favor. It is not here grace saving sinners and giving them glory, but the path (including the state of the heart) in this world, in which life and favor are found—God bringing in testimony in grace of what He is pleased in, and wisdom showing us how we are to walk and to please God. It is for us what we have heard of the word of life. We live by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

We have seen the wondrous revelation of the purpose of God in man, but we must remember that here earth is dealt with when we come to details. The principle is always true in every testimony of the Lord now or then. The immediate connection here is the earth, because there this testimony came, there it found responsible man. Its most direct and evident application is in the Person of the Lord Jesus on earth. Only like the parable of the sower, or John the Baptist even, it is always true when the cry of wisdom or wisdom itself is gone forth. John was transitional and pointed to another; that other was wisdom’s self, and John (Matt. 11) had to come in on His cry. Still the children of wisdom justified God’s wisdom in him. The law and the prophets were till John. He led into wisdom’s paths, going before the face of the Lord.

Chapter 7

The Whole Armor of God

Ephsians 6

The Epistle to the Ephesians has a peculiar character. It considers man not as having a life of sin, which he has to hold as dead in principle, and to resist in practice; but, in order to give God His own full part, and the blessing He gives its full character and perfection, it treats man as dead in trespasses and sins; and hence his whole moral existence is a new one, and depends on God, and is derived from His power; it has its origin and subsistence from His creative and lifegiving energies. It is a new creation.

Hence, in the first chapter, before even speaking of the redemption which meets the necessities of man, the Spirit directs our eye to the eternal counsels of God's grace, towards those chosen in Christ (vss. 3-6), the unspeakable riches of the blessings to which they are destined. The inheritance which has fallen to them in Christ comes afterward (vs. 1), as a subordinate thing. Hence we have the union of the church with Christ as its Head, exalted above every name in this world and that which is to come: hence the vivifying and raising up with Christ, and setting in heavenly places in Him, where all difference of Jew and Gentile is forever lost; and our creation again in Christ, the Holy Spirit, according to the mystery hidden from ages, but now revealed, becoming by His presence the power of the church's unity as the habitation of God; and the conferring of every gift necessary for the perfecting of the saints, for the gathering and edifying of the body by the Head on high, who had received the Spirit to this end for the members thus united to Him. Thus viewed in its Head, and in the power of the Holy Spirit on the earth, the church has a heavenly character, and as its privileges take this elevated character, so also its testimony, its difficulties, and its combats. Compare Ephesians 1:3; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12. For in the measure in which our spiritual position is raised, so, of course, do the difficulties and exercises of heart assume a character which requires greater experience and greater power. Our spiritual advance introduces us necessarily into them. But God is faithful not to suffer us to be tempted above that we are able. We could not expect a babe in Christ to be exercised as an apostle. Still the principles of all temptations are in general the same, and the experience of an apostle would render him capable of entering into the trials of an infant all the better. His more thorough knowledge of the wiles of Satan enables him to expose those wiles in their true light to the more inexperienced Christian. Because they have ceased to be wiles for himself, he can expose their wiliness to him by whom they are as yet unsuspected, or imperfectly judged. By following the word of God the simplest soul avoids danger, though it may be inexperienced in the devices of the enemy; for in that path God is found, and all is simple. One is wise concerning that which is good, and can be simple concerning evil. Still such as we are there are exercises; and the same human nature is in the oldest and in the youngest saint. The form of the trial may be different and suited to the progress made; but the principles are the same, and the means of defense too. One may, if humbler in spirit, use them better, but God's weapons do not vary in their nature. The apostle will explain their use to the young soldier; but he uses (if with greater expertness) those he explains.

But before I enter on the character of the armor, a few words as to the position of him who is called upon to use it. It will be remarked that the spiritual use of the armor is found at the close of an epistle in which all the highest spiritual privileges have been spoken of as the portion of a Christian. He is looked at, all through the epistle, as in the heavenly Canaan, “blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ”; quickened with Him, raised up, and sitting in heavenly places, in Him. He has redemption and forgiveness. The desire of the apostles that he may know the fullness and extent of his calling, of his inheritance, and the power that has brought him into it, in spirit and life, if not in body. On the earth he is looked at as builded together with all saints, for God’s habitation by the Spirit.

Hence, when the apostle treats of warfare, it is not carried on in order to enter into these privileges, but in order to maintain oneself in them, and to realize them by the power of God. When the apostle speaks of not combating with flesh and blood he refers to Joshua and Israel. Now the combats of Israel were not in Egypt, nor even in the desert as such. They were oppressed in Egypt and slaves there, as the unconverted man is a slave of sin and Satan. God sees his afflictions, comes down to deliver him. He leaves his misery (weakness he cannot escape), and is cast on God as a Savior, and through the death and resurrection of Christ, that is, through redemption, passes into a new scene, where he is forever beyond all that was his plague and sorrow before his deliverance. “Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed [says the song of Moses, Ex. 15]: thou hast guided them in thy strength unto thy holy habitation.” Not only the blood on the door-posts had sheltered them from the just judgment of God, but the active power of God had now delivered them entirely and forever from the condition in which they were lying. The only difference in the Ephesians is one we have noticed, that the previous troubles and sorrows are passed over. Man is looked at as dead in trespasses and sins, that all his privileges, and the whole work of God, may be looked at in their full extent in themselves. I pass over the desert, which represents what this world is become to the redeemed, and which is characterized by the exercise of faith and patience, not by spiritual combats in order to realize or maintain privileges given.

In order to enter fully into these, we must realize our own death and resurrection with Christ; not merely that He is dead and risen for us. We must pass the Jordan, and thus enter into the land, in spirit. The Red Sea prefigured redemption by the death and resurrection of Christ; Jordan, our being dead and risen with Him, in the power of the Spirit of God, so as to enter in spirit into that which is within the veil, according to the power of the redemption which has been wrought for us. And remark, that on the entry into Canaan, as depicted in the Book of Joshua, the portion of Israel was not rest. Their combats for the enjoyment of the land began then. Jordan was doubtless the figure of death, but properly of death with Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit; so as to be risen in spirit, in the liberty with which Christ sets us free, that we may realize and live in the heavenly things into which He is entered as our risen Head. As soon as Israel had crossed the Jordan, before a blow was struck, they ate of the old corn of the land. They were, as to title, in full possession of the country. But to possess it actually they must combat with the enemy. The principle of the Christian warfare is the same. “All things are ours.” As regards our title we are sitting in heavenly places in Christ, eating the corn of that land. But conflict then begins, to hold our ground against the enemy, and realize the sum of our privileges through every attack he makes upon us. For in holding good our ground against his attacks, there is continual progress in the

realization of that which God has given to us, though in the conflict itself we have only to hold fast faithfully. If we sit in heavenly places as to title and our place with God, as to possession we must make it good; for spiritual wickednesses are there. Having made these general remarks on the position of those engaged in this warfare, I return to the Ephesians.

In this epistle, the blessings, the saints themselves, the witness of the church, the combats of the saints—all is in heaven. The rest will be there, as in Canaan (figuratively) for Israel. The combat is there, as in Canaan under Joshua. But now the combat is not with flesh and blood, but with the prince of the power of the air, "the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." Carnal weapons and carnal wisdom are of no avail. One may be victorious over the instruments of Satan's power in our reasonings, and be overcome by himself. There is no safeguard but the armor of God; and to maintain one's ground continually all the pieces of it are needed. What should we say of one who, armed in every other point, forgot his helmet or his sword? He has forgotten his enemy and his own capability of being wounded. Thank God, we have the word and wisdom of God to tell us what is needed, that we may stand! Satan has no power to touch what is born of God. He who lives and walks in the Spirit is not reached by his weapons, nor subverted by his wiles. But the flesh has no power against him; and if this is exposed, we are exposed to be subverted by him. Hence the Spirit of God shows us what is needed.

The first thing is that we remember, what I have just remarked, that the armor is that of God; that no human power, no wisdom, is of any avail. Satan's weapons, or wiles, go clean through them at once. The use of such weapons is the foolishness of confidence in self, which is (witness Peter's case) exactly what exposes us to him. Let us remember too the foundation we have laid: that the conflict with Satan here spoken of supposes peace with God. If I am really on my feet, combating with Satan, and armed by God, I have no question with God as to whether He is for me. My combats are not with Him, my fears have not Him for their object. The anxieties of the unreconciled soul have the dread of God, the uncertainty of His thoughts, for their source. The combats of the reconciled souls are with the enemy. Remark, further, that it is not in the time of combat, in the evil day, I am to put on my armor. I enter into it armed, at least if I enter into it aright, and in the way to be victorious. The armor we wear is our abiding state as regards this world, though with God all be peace.

In the next place remark that those parts of the armor which relate to the spiritual condition of the Christian's own soul and his walk—what relates to the subjugation of flesh and self—come first; then the maintenance of practical confidence in God (and how true that order is!); and then the activity of the believer as regards others: all closed in by the expression of entire dependence. It is not the force and power of Satan which we have to resist, but his wiles. When really resisted, he has no force against us, for he is overcome by Christ; and the new nature he has nothing in or for. When the inclinations of the heart are unjudged, then he has the power to deceive us. Hence, as to receiving any truth, the state of the soul is really what is in question. When this is not right, reasonings are vain. When the eye is single, the whole body will be full of light. So when the flesh is not judged, the enemy can overthrow and trouble us. "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).

The first part then of our armor is to have the loins girt about with truth. The word first girds about my own loins before I can use it as a sword. The girding about the loins is that strengthening and giving of firmness to the whole man, which cannot be if all is left loose in his ways and mind, and which flows from the application of truth to his soul. And this application of truth to his soul, though an internal operation, has a double bearing. It is the application to the heart and conscience of all that is revealed in Christ. Now, this first judges all that is not of Christ, detects it and judges it; at the same time what is in the heart is seen in its true light as compared with what I see in Christ revealed as truth to my heart. I have judged what springs from the flesh and is adapted to it; it has lost its false appearances and deceiving power, and—as Christ is really there—its power altogether. I do not let my heart go after it; it has lost its place there, because not seen by the flesh, but judged by the Spirit. Instead of having any attractions for the heart inspired by this, it has its true hateful character. Christ, as truth, has put it into its true light, out of the affections, and into its own judged hatefulness. It is no longer myself as a moral affection at all. It is sin and flesh in my eyes. But besides this, there is what has wrought this judgment, the revelation of the truth itself of Christ in the heart. Hence what is good is loved, has power in the heart, authority there; the will and affections are bridled by what has authority over them—instead of being let loose— while they, at the same time, delight in what exercises this authority over them. They are girded up, restrained, given moral tone and firmness, by the known value of that which is an obligation, because it is in Christ; a delight because it is good. For in man obligation, where it is in grace, gives strength. That is when the thing itself is delighted in, not imposed on, as a law. It is a governed heart, not an ungoverned will. Yet it is intelligent, and delights in what it sees in Christ. It governs itself. The girding about the loins with truth then is the application of the truth to the affections, so that a man is braced up, having to do with what is right in authority over his soul, while he delights in it too.

There are two passages to which I would draw the reader's attention, in connection with the first part of the armor. Hebrews 4, "The word of God is quick, [living] and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do." Here it is, evidently, the searching character of the word; and "thy word is truth." It is divine, living, and efficacious. Nothing that is creature escapes its penetrating judgment. The declaration of scripture does not here go beyond this. But if I have an earnest desire that all things should be "of God" in me, according to the new creature (2 Cor. 5), and have learned that as to what is of the mere creature, in so far as it has a will, all the imaginations of the thoughts of his heart are only evil, and that continually. If my heart is divinely right I shall be most thankful for this detection of all that hinders my spiritual life, and comes between my soul and God, mars alike my communion and my walk, and I shall bring the hindering inclination into the all-judging and delivering presence of God.

John 17 goes somewhat farther: "Sanctify them," we read there, "through thy truth: thy word is truth. For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth" (John 17:17,19). Here we have the word bringing in its positive formative action, as well as its detective; and Christ also set apart as the perfection of that which we are to be, that the revelation of what He is to the soul may conform us to Him. It is evident that such a communication of what Christ is,

while attracting and delighting the new creature, would in everything judge the old; but it is more than merely the divine word as a sword, as the eye of God on us, discerning and detecting; there is an attractive and an assimilating power. It is a man whose nature I have (for He is my life), in whom I see all this moral perfection, love, holiness, truth, absolute purity, grace, patient kindness, devotedness beyond all measure, to us self-sacrifice, and an absolutely single eye in devotedness to God His Father's glory, and all the life-giving fullness of God in all these things. All this is in man, and in One with whom I have to do; who loves me; with whom I am one. He has sanctified Himself for our sakes. By the communication of all this, and much more than this, in the truth, we are sanctified. First of all, it is in believing, so as to have a share in it, and then by daily realization of it in detail, attaching the heart thus to Christ. "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" (2 Cor. 3:18). Blessed portion! Used, it is true, in the passage which occupies us in the Ephesians, more in its guardian power than in its delight and advantages—in its moral bracing energy, than in its joys in communion; but profitable alike for both. The truth, then, as this divine revelation to the soul by the word, detects all that gives a handle to Satan in us, and destroys its hold on the soul. It causes that we are no longer debtors to the flesh; for we have a new life with God, in which we have a right to live, and over which Satan has no right' and no power; and in which the flesh has no claim and no part; and which is freely and new—given of God, so that none else has any claim over it. Hence the absolute and exclusive claim of God is brought in, and with delight to the soul—delight, because obedience to Him is now delight. We love Him and His claims over us. It is delight, because the things He calls us to walk in are enjoyed morally by our souls. There is an intelligent nature which is of Him, and from Him, having the delights and desires of His nature, and rejoiced to have the perfect expression of its own desires in God's claims over us. For we are "partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Peter 1:4). Hence it is called the perfect law of liberty. "But whoso looketh [looked down closely] into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed" (James 1:25). There is our own delight in good thus; the authority of God in it; the rejection of evil, yet not in haughtiness, for God is there; and the authority of God over us, yet in personal delight in what is good, in a nature which loves it for its own sake: What hold has Satan there? The mind is braced up, the loins girt about with truth in the midst of the dissolution and uncertainty of the world; dissolution to which the flesh would yield itself at once. It is girding the loins.

In heaven this will not be needed. The flesh will not be there. All that attracts will be divine. We can let ourselves freely go to it. There is nothing but what God has authority over; nothing but what answers to His will, His nature, and His glory; while authority is perfect and delighted in, there is nothing to watch and guard against. We can let out all our affections there. The more we have, the better; at least all we have are rightly in exercise, for God and the fullness of Christ entirely fill the scene. Here we must have our loins girt about with truth. Blessed that we can, and have this privilege in a world of which we once were; a world of dissolution. Blessed that we have God's truth to do it with!

But when the heart is thus kept, the conduct will follow. The breastplate of righteousness will not be wanting. We must remember that in the passage we are occupied with, the subject treated of is what is needed in conflict with Satan, not what is called for that we may stand before God. Christ is

our righteousness before God, perfect and unchangeable; and without that we could in no way make head against Satan; but it cannot assume the character of a breastplate when we consider it as our righteousness before God. All is peace in this righteousness; peace is made, there is no combat there. Christ has met and overcome the enemy, and is become my righteousness; and this is the foundation of all. God is truly with me and before me.

But in my conflict with Satan, while I cannot do without this, I need something else—practical righteousness. My conscience must be without reproach, in order to combat with him. If my conscience be not purged with the blood of Christ, I have not yet peace with God; I am still in Egypt, though I may be striving to get out of it; I do not yet know the power of redemption. I cannot say that God is for me, nor that I am for God in this world. I need to be delivered and reconciled. But if I am, a conscience practically bad will make me weak before the enemy. How can he, whose conscience reproaches him, whom the world could reproach if aware of it, how can he go boldly into the combat? He is afraid the blow may reach him there; he is obliged to think of that: he is not free to think, in simplicity of heart, of nothing but the service which is before him. The Spirit of God also is grieved, and lets him, if he go on thus carelessly, feel that he has failed, as Israel before Ai. For boldness when we have failed shows rather indifference to sin, or an effort to carry on appearances, when the heart is not right. But if the conscience be good, the walk upright, there is confidence in God, and self has not to be thought of. One can do God's work freely. Thus Paul—"Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly" (Heb. 13:18).

And again, "Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offense toward God and towards man" (Acts 24:16).

The second part of the armor, then, is a righteous walk, a walk with God. Only remark that, as to confidence in service, it is not merely evil known, or easily to be known to others; it is all allowed evil. Because Satan can use this against the conscience and make it timid; and certainly the Holy Spirit will not make it hard or indifferent. A good conscience before God is acquired by one thing alone, by the blood-shedding and work of Christ. But the result of this is the presence of the Holy Spirit in us; and then a good conscience against Satan is only when the Spirit has not been grieved by anything done contrary to the light He has afforded me.

But many have not the courage to go on in God's warfare, because they hold to something which is inconsistent with the light they have received. Perhaps alas! they lose the light which they have not acted up to, and Satan is able to bring their mind under the darkness of his good reasons for staying where they are, without conquering more territory from him, though they are uneasy, perhaps bitterly hostile, when light reaches them from without, which threatens to awaken conscience again.

The existence of flesh in us, though judged as sin, does not give a bad conscience, nor interrupt communion; but the moment it is allowed, even in mind, it does both. Although the Christian who walks faithfully, clothed with the whole armor of God, enjoys the effect of its use, in the peaceful joy of communion, the difference must have, perhaps, been felt, between this state and the loss of communion, to know the immense importance of this armor, or rather of wearing it. Far better however to enjoy the confiding peace, which accompanies its use, than to know its importance by exposing oneself without it to the assaults of the enemy.

Communion with God is a real thing, in which He pours into the soul, in a greater or less degree, the deep joy of His presence—of that favor and perfect love in which He communicates with the soul, revealing Himself—and gives, by His presence, the happiness of a relationship, in which no breach is suspected, nor thought of, in which the soul lives. It is more than faith, though founded on it; other than the certainty of salvation, though the crown and seal and realization of this. The abstract certainty, the consoling certainty, that my Father loves me, and will not, nay, cannot, do otherwise, is another thing from happy intercourse with this love, with no consciousness of anything else, or of anything in the way of that enjoyment. The certainty of love in God constitutes the bitterness of the sense of the loss of the enjoyment of it, for I speak only of saints here. The Spirit's seal to the truth assures of God's love; and Christ, if we fail, intercedes for us. But the Holy Spirit being the spring of the enjoyment of it in the heart is another thing. The one—the foundation, it is true, of all—assures that God is for us: the other is God in us, filling the heart with joy, with communion with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

There are two ways, very distinct indeed in their character, in which I may fail in this communion: one negatively, where negligence has deprived me of positive and sensible intercourse with God, the heart being cold and indifferent; the other, where the conscience is concerned, and, the heart having allowed the enemy to prevail against it, the Holy Spirit becomes in us a stern reprover; and while never destroying the sense of God's love, makes us bitterly bewail the loss of the inward sense and enjoyment of it, and makes us taste, more or less, the fruits of sin, as in its nature separating the soul from God; and thus makes it horrible to us, not as feeling with God its evil morally, but as in its nature separating us from Him—not as to faith, indeed, allowing us to suppose that He will give us up at all, but to feel what it is. But this last is an extreme case, and discipline, on God's part, and very severe discipline too. The other, alas! is but too common. They are very different. Many Christians live frequently in a state analogous to the last case I have supposed; but in them it is from being yet under the law, and from their not being established in their relationship with God; and the distress, consequently, is not so great, because there has not been the same nearness to God. I have said these few words as to the result of not using the armor with which God has furnished us. I return to its character and use.

I have spoken somewhat of the loins being girt about with truth, and of the breastplate of righteousness; of the affections being governed and kept in order by the truth; the revelation of Christ, and the walk which flows from this; the godly vigilance of an unassailable conscience. Thus the soul is in practical peace—has not to occupy itself with itself—can walk in unsuspecting openness and confidence. When the heart is full of peace, and enjoys the unsuspecting sweetness of it with God, it walks in the spirit of peace. This peace characterizes all its ways and relationships with others. There is not effort or restraint, nothing to guard or keep back. The course is natural, unconstrained and unsuspecting. There is not fear of evil because there is not the consciousness of it. Not that the soul is without wisdom; that cannot be in such a world; but it is wise concerning that which is good, and simple concerning evil. It does not much fear evil befalling it, because it has a portion of peace that outward evil cannot touch; nor does it count on outward good as its resource. In this peace the heart depends on God; and, as above evil in this sense, it brings peace with it into the scene through which it passes. The expression, having the feet shod with it, is beautiful, as showing the habitual character of the walk. Such was the character, especially, of Christ. He brought in peace— rejected indeed, but not the less true—the great

Peacemaker.

He declared such should be called the children of God. These three first parts of the armor are practically expressed in the words, as far as relationship with the saints goes: “Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another” (Mark 9:50).

Thus governed within, and walking in peace without, the soul is free to trust in God. All three parts of the armor are indeed worn together, but there is a moral dependence and order. Internal condition goes before external activity; order in the affections and practical righteousness, before the spirit of peace in our ways with others; and both before that confidence in God, which shields from the assaults of the enemy. It is not that the confidence flows from this walk— it is in God only; but it is in this soil that it grows, in this state that it has its free exercise. It is as important to remark that it does not look back or calculate on any state of the soul, as that that state of the soul is that in which this confidence is found in free exercise. When we enjoy our health, all depends on the state of the body; but because it is in health its energies go out on their just object, and the health is not thought of at all.

Faith here is the full confidence in God, which counts on His goodness and faithfulness, and that He is for us—which trusts a God who is entirely for us. Without this all is despair, or near to it, in a conscience which feels that it has to do with God. Satan has got in; and to the soul which feels the need of God being for it there is left only the agonizing feeling that He is not. Hence the Savior prays for Peter, that his faith might not fail; that is, that in spite of his dreadful fall he might not be left to the thought that therefore God had abandoned him, was against him, and that there was no hope. The fiery darts of Satan are not his efforts to seduce by acting on our various lusts; but where, by any means, our hearts are turned away from God, the inroads he makes in the form of unbelief and despair. This is the force of the passage in the Corinthians, lest Satan tempt you for your incontinency. The evil was there, the incontinency was supposed, the temptation was the power of Satan over the soul, which was the result. It is evidently a different power from his seductions. There is no pleasure in despair, but deep agony. The flesh finds its pleasure in satisfying its lusts, but there is no lust of despair; it is as a consuming fire in the soul.

We may see, in the temptations of Christ, as far as He could be on the same ground as we, this same difference. There could be no lusts and no despair; but Satan sought, at the beginning of His career, to seduce Him from the path of obedience; and brought all the terror of death upon Him at the end. Only in the former case He maintained His first estate; in the second, His agony only led Him into more earnest communion with His Father. But He went through, for us, the whole pressure of Satan’s power; for us in both respects: only He was never reached within by it, so as to turn Him aside from God, in the perfect path of obedience. The fiery darts of the enemy are the power of the enemy over the soul, when it has been left exposed to his inroads, by the shield of faith (an entire confidence in the grace of God, in His favor, as that in which we dwell, and changes not) having been down.

Such, I doubt not, are his fiery darts; and terrible they are, when, from the shield of faith not having been our safeguard— having been dropped, we are exposed to them. But I would add, that I do not believe that, this is ever a simple case: that is, that it happened by itself, without some producing cause. The passage I have alluded to in the Corinthians explains what I mean: Satan tempted, for incontinency, a heart which had opened the door to him by lust; which had even

strayed out, in spirit, into his domains, forsaking God—not in will perhaps but in heart—in letting itself loose, exposed itself naturally to his power; particularly in these lusts, which a corrupt will nourishes, which, as the apostle expresses it, war against the soul, and which are so contrary to the very nature of God, to His purity and holiness. Where these are in any degree willfully indulged by one who is a Christian, it is well if the result be not this terrible power of Satan over the soul, which for a time at least darkens the light of God in it, and hides His favor; the knowledge of which only makes the loss of the sense of it more terrible to him who suffers under it: it seems to be gone forever, at least it may reach this point. At any rate it is the most terrible chastisement which can reach a human heart.

If a soul belong to God, it will surely be delivered; but who can say how long it may suffer? The great remedy against such a danger is to have the soul frequently, in a positive way, in God's presence. To walk there constantly is our privilege and supreme joy. But I speak of a positive entering into His presence, who is light, that all may be clear in our conscience, all free in our heart. In a word, that we may not only enjoy blessings from Him, but be, as He graciously permits us, before Him. I have gone through the effect of not having the shield of faith up, and particularly what is the cause of it, as a warning; but the case, blessed be God's grace, is as rare as it is terrible.

But something of an analogous nature takes place, in a different state of soul, as to what is not unfrequently called the fiery darts of the enemy. I refer to those cases where blasphemous and infidel thoughts seem to arise in the mind. They are not desired, not the effect of reasoning, but present themselves unsought, to the great distress of the soul. But this, I believe, happens when the soul is not set free in Christ. When once we are really introduced into the presence of God, in the knowledge of His favor and love—are there before Him, enjoying Himself—Satan cannot get there, cannot thus reach the mind. In the state of despair, spoken of previously, feelings of rebellion against God may and do arise, but these are the working of the mind itself, in the state it is in; whereas the suggestions of which I am now speaking are foreign to every feeling, and every acknowledged thought. But there is not, I believe, the true personal knowledge of God in grace, though that grace may be admitted as a truth, and as the only ground of hope. These thoughts distress and harass the mind; and persons assaulted by them sometimes draw dismal conclusions as to themselves; as in other such cases they think they have committed the sin against the Holy Spirit. General deliverance, and the true knowledge of God, is to be sought here. The liberty wherewith Christ sets free—for this deliverance is real—brings us, as freed from everything that was against us, to God Himself. In the case, then, of the trying suggestions, of which we now speak, the shield of faith is not dropped; it is not yet up, has not yet been borne up on the arm of faith.

The shield of faith then is that entire confidence in God, flowing from the real personal knowledge of redemption, which silences every doubt and prevents every question, by the personal knowledge of God's love, which, instead of having questions with God, reckons upon Him against everything else. If God be for us, who can be against us? It is not merely peace, as regards evil, through the blood of Christ, but confidence in God, resulting from His being thus known. "If now I have found grace in thy sight, O Lord," says Moses, "let my Lord, I pray thee, go among us; for it is a stiff necked people" (Ex. 34:9). God is our resource and help against ourselves, our security against all else. Satan may prove a thousand things against us; our knowledge of God is the

answer to them all.

Entire unwavering confidence in God Himself is the spring then and source of energy; the efforts of Satan to break and enfeeble it are quenched by the shield of faith. Maintained practically in its place by walking with God, it rests in itself on the true divinely given knowledge of God, as for us, as He revealed Himself in Christ; a knowledge sustained and fed by the grace and intercession of Jesus. But there is a further development of this condition of soul, closely allied to it, yet different—the knowledge of and possession of salvation. The difference is this: it is not abiding confidence in what God is, but the joyful certainty of what He has done, the consciousness of the position He has set us in.

Confidence is dependence, a blessed, right, and softening feeling; though emboldening in what is right, and as against the enemies of our souls. Salvation gives boldness and energy: we hold up the head, so to speak, a head covered by the strength and salvation of God Himself. “I would to God,” says Paul, “that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds” (Acts 26:29). Was he—after two years’ imprisonment and wrong, in the presence of judges, as a chained prisoner, without resource save in God—was he disheartened or fearful in spirit? The helmet of a known salvation was on his head. Yet to be possessed in glory, all was his in Christ, all was his in his own soul. He was what the love that was in his heart could wish others to be; the consciousness that it was his animated the love which expressed itself towards others, gave it its object in its own happiness. His relationship to God was known, his being in the light as God was in the light, in the blessed joy of holiness, sin and evil and all confusion outside—Jesus’ glory complete—the Father’s love, unhindered by anything in the state of the object, is rested on. This secured by the cross, so that it could fully flow in now; the possession of Jesus’ love, in whom it was all secured; salvation was a helmet to his head; he could lift it up before all. Nor is it less such to us in the day of battle: we have not to think about ourselves; that is secured, for that helmet is riven by no blow: we are free to use our wisdom and strength undisturbed by any fear for self in the conflict in which we are set. We can seek victory and blessing for others, glory for the Lord, success before Him. He has thought of us and put us into the place where we are, and have more than man’s heart knows how to desire. And secure in it we can think of serving Him. Evidently this, as all else, must be realized by the ungrieved power of the Holy Spirit to use and walk in it.

In all these parts of the armor we have found what relates to our own standing, our enjoyment (in governed affections and godliness) of our blessed relationship with God, which is given us in the new position which the second Adam has, and which we have in and by and ever with Him. This is our security, our defense, in the conflict. Thus nothing separates us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. But there is active energy, arms which we wield in the power of the Spirit of God, which silences flesh, and baffles the power of Satan, and controls those who are under his power. When fully in the power of our relationship with God we can take the sword of the Spirit, which is His word. If the soul be not in communion with God, it cannot wield His word in His name. It is not a carnal weapon to be used with carnal force or wisdom. It is the Spirit’s sword: sharp, reaching the conscience, and of the most hardened where rightly applied, and bowing and subduing the most haughty. But if the soul be not with God, there is not the thought of the right passage, nor the power of God with it. It is not spoken of here, mark, as the means of edification—it is not a sword there—but of conflict. The weapons of our warfare are spiritual, to the

pulling down of strongholds.

The word of God in conflict, when spiritually used, carries light with it to the soul as to our whole position in conflict— the light of God's mind on the whole scene and question before us—which inspires a confidence, of which he who has it not has no idea. Satan's object is to deceive; the conscious possession of the divine mind only makes the discovered deception an element of strength, in the knowledge of whom we have to do with, and of God's being in the light thrown upon his wiles. It detects and judges them appositely; and a deception laid bare is a victory over the wiles to which no answer can be found. See the Lord's use of Scripture, as an example—ever matchless—of this weapon. How were His adversaries put to silence, no man daring to put to Him any more questions. How was Satan himself reduced to leave One whom he could not touch! For this weapon repels all the attacks of Satan, as it confounds by its power all the force and wiles of the enemy. We have no other weapon; we must have skill to use it, which no practice but the power of present grace alone can give; but it is the weapon of God's own mind, and light, and truth, in the midst of the darkness by which Satan would overcloud man's mind.

An arm of a peculiar and distinct character closes the list, showing how all are used in entire and constant dependence. The first parts of the armor, we have seen, are defensive, those which hinder Satan from touching us, connected with the judgment of self and godliness: after these the active energy of the word of God, the sword of the Spirit. But the Holy Spirit, who alone can enable us to use the word, cannot do so by putting us in a position of independence; it is contrary to His nature and service, and to the moral effect of His presence with us. He puts our souls into connection with, and dependence on, the source of all power and grace. He cannot be separated from those in whose name He acts, from whom He comes forth; and by His very presence He puts us in communion with, and dependence on, them. It is thus it is said of Him, "He shall not speak of himself" (John 16:18), that is, unconnected with the Father and the Son; as it is said, Sayest thou this of thyself? as an isolated spirit might say things of which himself was the source.

But there is more than this, because the Holy Spirit acts in us morally, and makes us feel, as new creatures, our entire, and I may add, glad, dependence, on so blessed a source of activity and power, as God Himself. We know we are so. It is a creature's place; it is a godly creature's place, and his willing place; for the heart, led by the Holy Spirit, is rejoiced to receive all from God, as it knows also that it can receive nowhere else what is good. But this is exercised in confidence; we ask, we express our dependence; we supplicate, both in the sense of need, and in the earnestness of desire for the accomplishment of what we are thus enabled to succeed in or obtain for others. The mind, though in dependence, is brought into the channel of God's desires and blessing, by the operation of the Holy Spirit—given a share in this energy of divine working, though in the sense of entire dependence on God. God meets, answers, shows His concurrence in what He has put into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. We are occupied with what He works in, and works with, and for us. Not only are our desires accomplished, but we have the consciousness of God's concurrence in them, and that we stand, on His part, in our conflicts and service, while we have the joy of everything being His. Nor is this all; it is not only our own part in this divine conflict that occupies; love to others, those without that are His, and united thus indeed to us, acts in the grace of intercession.

Everything is found, in this (seemingly, to human judgment, so feeble) instrument—above all precious, because it is an unseen one. Need is there, earnest desire for others, good in love is there; desire for God's glory, confidence in His love, in His word, dependence on Him, reality of intercourse with Him; while, as a consequence, every inconsistency is brought to light in the heart by this nearness, not only as respects holiness, but as it touches confidence in this nearness. Besides this, there is a close linking of all the whole body together, in its dependence on the Head. What a place is this to use the given sword of God, His own thoughts in power, and to be with Himself in confidence for every answer of His love and strength.

It will be remarked that it is on every occasion—"always." This is one mark of our living in this state of communion, that the heart turns at once, naturally, there. It does not set about to consider when something arises, but to pray. God's answer surely comes. Next, remark, it is in Spirit, that is, in the power of the Holy Spirit working, in our communion with God. But another element is put before us here; the active exercise of a vigilant mind, so that all turns to prayer, and that we observe that as to which we have to pray. There is the active interest of love, which is awake and alive, does not sleep over the interests of the church of God, over the holiness and communion of the saints—cannot if we are near to God. For there is an active, living energy of love, which, in the desire of the blessing of the saints, thus draws near to God. This gives perseverance and earnestness; for, whatever our confidence in the love of God, affection is earnest and persevering; and here, above all, it is that divine affections, our personal participation through grace in the interest God takes in blessing, are brought out.

Here, as elsewhere, the apostle therefore brings in all saints. Compare Ephesians 1:15; 3:18. The apostle knew what it was, as all abundantly testifies, and he knew its value. It is a privilege of all saints, on which an apostle himself is dependent. All have not distinguished gifts, but all have the privilege of drawing near to God as child and priest. See 2 Corinthians 1:11. Divine power in us is the fruit of dependence on Him who gives it.

The armor of God then begins with all being inwardly right in affection; then in practice; then peacefulness of walk; and so it is, for sin is restless and impatient: then security, by unfailing confidence, from Satan's attacks; the joy and power of salvation before God; and finally, the active energy in which we can use the word in all; and behind all, dependence exercised in prayer.

Chapter 8

The Love of God

1 John 4:9

We find that God is dealing with men according to everything that He is in Himself—dealing with their hearts and consciences by presenting to them all that He is; and we know that He is holy, righteous and love, so that we may look at these things as being brought ourselves truly to God. “Without holiness no man shall see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14). This shows the necessity of separation from evil. “In him is no darkness at all.”

Again, there must not only be separation from evil, but righteousness as regards guilt. For there has not only been opposition to God, but we have failed in duty and are the subjects of defilement and guilt. He did not merely say, when they had eaten of the forbidden fruit, judgment must follow. And this proves the perfect love of God. It is not said, He is holiness: indeed mere holiness would but repel the sinner: He is holy. He is just, and therefore there must be judgment; but He is love, and love draws me. This is the spring of all His dealings until He is forced to action—not naturally forced—forced by reason of evil; for He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and therefore is forced to turn away the eye—in that sense forced to have done with evil. He may be active, calling to repentance, and He is—but no remedy. He does not execute judgment now; but the day will come when He will set aside the power of evil, and not only prove that He is the God of judgment, but that He makes those He blesses eternally happy in holiness, for He is holy love. He is light; and if I am there in the light, it shows me all that is not light, and all is judged. We delight in holiness therefore, because He is holy, but love is His nature; that is what He is. Judgment would condemn; but “now is the accepted time,” in the which He exercises grace in receiving sinners to the full blessedness of fellowship with Himself. Whatever your state may be, God is perfect in His love, and He would make us enjoy and walk in it now. It is not in heaven we shall learn it. We shall be there everlastingly in His presence; but to enjoy it, I must learn it here, or I could not have the enjoyment of it there. Our nature, selfishness, and unbelief hinder down here: still they, after all, only magnify the grace that exercises love in spite of all. He will bring us to the knowledge of perfect love. “Perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment” (1 John 4:18). It may be very reasonable that it should be so, but still it is torment.

Do any of you fear when thinking of God? You have torment, for “fear hath torment,” when it is connected with the conscience, however man may seek to bury his conscience (and he does succeed in hardening it). Now Satan may even use truth to alarm and make one despair and think there is no love and forgiveness. But where God awakens the conscience, it is always to teach something about His goodness. As in the prodigal son, whatever may be the character of the alarm, the reason for it is in God Himself; and God would have us to know it. If I could get my pardon from any other source than God, I do not learn His love. For instance, if I seek peace in ordinances, it is not love but fear. The effect of true ministry is to put the soul in direct contact with God. False ministry is the bringing in of something between the soul and God. There having been a revelation of God to the soul, it can never get rest until received from God, and until then there is

no rest. And you will discern what is of God from what is not of God by this test, that it turns to God. He blesses by the revelation of His love. This delivers from the corruption of the truth—secures the soul from error until there is perfect peace. If I have that, I know Him. What else do I want? The soul, however quickened and secured, must have the blessed consciousness of perfect peace with God. I must, of course, seek to do His will and seek fellowship with Him, and prayer, but neither as satisfying God, nor quieting myself, or it ceases to be prayer. What God does for your souls is, He is bringing you into the joy of His perfect love in His presence; and oh! what a spring of joy does this bring into the soul. “Who shall separate us”? “More than conquerors” (Rom. 8:37).

Now in this epistle and in this chapter, remarkably, it is what the divine nature is. “God is love.”Whatever might occur in the history of the church of God, He is unchangeable, and if only one soul were to remain true, and all the rest were gone astray, and the whole nominal church to go another way (if they say God is not love, is not truth), Christ is the image of the invisible God. He has been here—light and love, and that is what God was, manifest in the flesh, and you will find these in the children. It is the family character of the children of God, light and love; God’s nature, both in Christ and in all the children. All through this epistle it is the essential nature of Christ that is dwelt on—what is essentially divine. That makes it more remarkable how when He has brought the soul to peace, He makes it to rest not in anything in self, but in Christ’s work. We must have the divine nature, but how do I get this nature? I find a perfect manifestation of His love. “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us.”

I must have the new nature first to know this, and the soul is brought into the perfect light and joy of it without a cloud, daily and hourly finding the joy in which we can go on in the grace He has towards us. Where is this found? In Jesus Christ Himself. “No man hath seen God at any time.” He found us “dead in trespasses and sins.” What was God to us when thus “we were by nature?” The effect and consequence of our condition was “wrath”; “but God, who is rich in mercy.” Here is no mention of anything required of us, but the simple fact of what we were—“dead in trespasses and sins,” and it at once turns to what God is: “but God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love,” bringing out the contrast of what we were and what God is. We were dead in sins. God brought out the means of our approaching to Himself, though a God of judgment, through Christ’s sacrifice. From Abel downwards God was showing mercy; so Abel’s faith testified how man was to approach to God. “And as Moses lifted up the serpent,” etc. (John 3). That changed all God’s dealings. God was to be approached before, but when Christ comes, it is another thing. Man is clearly proved to be a child of wrath. If man is dealt with as man, he refuses to come to God—“none righteous.” When Christ comes, it is altogether another thing. God now approaches man, which is grace; not man the means for man to come to God; but God coming to man. He visited men in their sins, that they “might live through him.” All was darkness, degradation, and idolatry. God takes them out of that condition that they might live through Christ. “God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son,” and thus we are brought into His presence. The life I have as a saint is the fruit of the love of God—life communicated by grace; not creation putting me in a position and sustaining me, but when I have failed, His grace has abounded over it, and given me this life in Christ, when I was dead and enmity against Him; and the very truth that I have life is the proof of His love. We live through His only begotten Son. He is bringing us into His presence, and putting before us His beloved Son, in whom all His delight was from eternity. And is this the God for whom I wrought?

And the soul adores the wondrousness of His love, for it is no longer the thought of how I must get to God. God has come to me in His grace. If I take the righteousness of God without this, there would be the appearance that God is harsh. Now if I get this life—love known and holiness known—my conscience becomes not only as a natural conscience, judging sin, but I learn to judge it according to God, because I am brought into the light. “If we say we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.”

“Herein is love, not that we loved God.” The first thing, legal commandment, disappears; though we ought to love God, it is true, as the commandment demands. “Not that we loved God.” It is the fruit but never the ground of my fellowship with Him, because I learn God has loved me in my sins; and I learn, though excellent, it is a thing not required of a sinner. If it is required, I am lost! I now am showing another thing—that the sinner is loved when he does not love God. It is the sinner’s need that draws out His love. We may say, I do not find I live through Him. In one sense, it is right it should be felt; but when it is only that, the effect is to turn our eyes in on ourselves, and so to dishearten. Grace is working and can be seen by others, though not visible to the one who feels it. But I say, I do not find I love. You mistake the whole matter. “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us.” Well, I admit it, but I do not see I have a share in it, for I do not feel its effects. But we see, He sent His Son to be a propitiation for our sins, and that is the proof of His love. It is the eternal enjoyment of it to know eternal life in the Son; but down here we often question it, because we do not see this love in us. He is “the propitiation for our sins.”

Ah! now I can see, when I believe that. In Him, in His death, is the ground of my rest. Therein I learn what love is towards such a sinner as I am. I turn to look at it, not in myself, but in Him; and I rest in God. What my soul rests in is what He is, and what He has done. He hath “sent his Son to be the propitiation.” God has loved me not only when I wanted it, but according to His sense of my want. He has not mistaken my case; the propitiation is made for my sins— Christ on the cross—and we can say, “Herein is love,” etc. I have found God. My soul rests there. The cloud is taken away forever. God has given His Son. If you say, but there is such and such a sin, I answer, that it is for the sins you had or have that Christ died; for He died for your sins. You ought to hate them. He has the man and his sins before Him. He does not put away the man but his sins. Indeed He cannot bear sin, and therefore He must put the sinner in his sins away, because He cannot bear the sins, if they are not put away. The love of God has wrought a work to bring the sinner without his sins into His presence. “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever…” (John 3:14-15).

First, there is Christ meeting the need of all who come unto God; and then we learn why it is—for “God so loved the world.”. It is important we should know not only our need of Christ in approaching God, but that God in His love gave His Son that we might approach Him. “And we have known and believed the love.” Faith is always certain, and so I set to my seal that God is true. Thus believing and looking to God, my soul is certain. “He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God.” My soul rests in His love. And now I have communion—seeing the work He has done to cleanse my sin, as I learn it in Christ, and am perfectly happy. Why should such an one murmur or be cross? “We have known and believed the love.” “God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.” He connects it with Christ. God does not expect fruit from man, but His grace produces fruit. Man had no life from which God could expect anything, and so He gives a new nature in Christ, that He may produce it. When the divine nature is communicated, we

look for it then in ourselves, and that always works in a soul quickened of God.

Do I find many sins in myself? He is the propitiation for our sins. I believe this, and I enter into communion. Why do you find fear and torment when you find sin in yourself? Cannot you trust that love? Have you not believed the love God has towards you? Have you not had the Father on your neck in your rags? You must know the love God has to you, and then you know God. “Herein is love with us made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment.” It is Christ all through who is spoken of as He and Him, without reference to His name, the apostle’s mind being so full of Christ as not to deem it needful to mention it. God’s love was manifested to us in His sending His Son, that we might have life and righteousness; now it is perfected that we may have boldness in the day of judgment. I am in Him who is judging. He is my righteousness: why should I not be bold? “As he is, so are we in this world.”

The effect of grace is the cause that we should feel sin, and know it blotted out, as well as live through Him. “The glory which thou givest me I have given them….that the world may know that thou sent me, and hast hast loved them, as thou hast loved me” (John 17:22-23). “There is no fear in love.” It is a matter of communion. “Perfect love casteth out fear.” We are called to learn God’s love by the communication of what Christ is for us; and then we are in Him before God as Christ is. If so, I find rest to the heart: it rests in God—knows God is perfect—knows He has met all its need and all its sin put away, and that He is perfect love. Thus we “joy in God.” “We love him, because he first loved us”; and we pass through this sorrowful wilderness, leaning on Him who is bringing us through it. Do your souls rest in the love of God? Granted that He ought to be loved; but you are not honoring God, if you do not trust what His love has been in the work of Christ on the cross. The whole is perfected. He Himself has done it, that you might trust Him, giving His Son to die as well as life in Him, which also the believer has.

And you who would come to Him must come just as you are, and then you will know God, and He will enable you to trust in the perfectness of the work which put away sin—the blood of Jesus Christ His Son.

Chapter 9

Divine Perfectness of Love

1 John 4:17

The love of God is presented in two very distinct ways in this chapter. First, in verse 9 as manifested in giving His Son for us, and then in verse 17, in its double fruit of love and light in us.

God's love in contrast to man's love is distinguished by this, that while man must have something to draw out his love, as it is said, "For a good man some would even dare to die; but God commendeth his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:7-8). God's love is without motive, there being nothing attractive in the object that calls it out. "In due time Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom. 5:6). God's love sees no good in us. The brightest proof of God's love and man's enmity was seen in the cross. They met there, and the superiority of God's love was manifested; as Jethro says, "In the thing wherein they dealt proudly he was above them" (Ex. 18:11).

Having shown out the first fruit in verse 9, that is, the open manifestation of His love to us while we were yet sinners, we learn His purposes and counsels about us as saints; in the second place, in verse 17, "Herein is love with us made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, because as he is so are we in this world." This is a very different thing from His first visiting us in our sins. "Herein is love with us made perfect." The perfectness of God's love toward His saints is seen in the bringing them to be like Himself. The sovereign grace of God puts the saint into the same place as Christ, that we may have the same kind of fellowship with the Father that Christ had. So in John 14 the Lord says, "My peace I give unto you"—that is, the peace He had with the Father—"not as the world giveth, give I unto you." The world has a character of a benefactor, and that it sometimes gives generously I do not deny, but then it is by helping a man, as he is, out of the resources which it has, which may be all very well, because by helping him it is only taking care of itself; but it is evidently a different thing here, for Christ takes us clean out of our condition, putting us into the same relationship with the Father as Himself.

The world cannot give in this way; there is no guarding anything for self in Christ's unjealous love, but in us there is.

Therefore He could say, "Not as the world giveth, give I unto you" (John 14:27). His delight was to show that the Father loved them as He loved Him. "The glory which thou hast given me, I have given them…that the world may know that thou sent me, and hast hast loved them, as thou hast loved me" (John 17:22-23). Jesus not only loves them Himself, but He will have it known by the world that they are loved by the Father, as He Himself is loved. Can there be anything more disinterested than this? (Though the word "disinterested" fails to give the full meaning.) Still all this is guarded, for Christ ever keeps His place as the eternal Son of God. As at the mount of transfiguration, the moment there is the question of putting Moses and Elias on an equality with Jesus, they both disappear: for when Peter said, "Let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias, while he yet spake behold a cloud overshadowed

them," and instantly they vanished. "And behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son." It is not said, "hear them," but "hear ye him." And when the voice was past Jesus was found alone.

If Christ in His wondrous grace reveals Moses and Elias as His companions and associates in glory, the moment Peter in his foolishness gives utterance to the thought that would place them on an equality with Christ, they must both vanish from the scene. It does not say, "as the Father loves me," but "as he loved me" (as a man), for however Christ may bring us into the same place with Himself, if we elevate ourselves to an equality with Christ, immediately we shall be above Him; and it is ever the case that the more a saint enters into his elevation as being brought into the same place with Christ, the more he adores Christ as God over all, blessed for evermore.

This is ever to be borne in mind. The thought in verse 17, "As he is so are we," is of putting the saints in the same place as Christ. If I have righteousness, it is a divine righteousness, "We might be made the righteousness of God in him"; if eternal life, it is a divine life, "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear"; if glory, it is the same glory, "The glory which thou givest me I have given them"; if it is the inheritance, we are "joint-heirs with Christ"; if love, it is the same love wherewith the Father loved Christ, Thou "hast loved them, as thou hast loved me" (John 17:23). The love is the most difficult thing for us to enter into, but the Lord would have our hearts enjoying it.

All that we have in Christ is brought out in this passage, in this general expression of God's grace to bless us, not only by Christ but with Christ. Christ could not be satisfied unless it was so, we being the fruit of the travail of His soul. "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me." Again, "I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:3). The Father's love is seen in giving His Son to die for us, and thus bringing us into the perfect place. Some Christians do not give verse 17 all its power. They refer it simply to our position before God, respecting the day of judgment. Whatever judgment may come, the saint has nothing to do with it, for where there is a question about judgment, there can be no boldness.

There is nothing more comforting than the perfect confidence of having God as my Father. I cannot get the affections in full play if I think God is going to judge me. But if I have the Spirit of adoption, and I sin or do wrong, I run to my Father directly, because I know my Father is not going to judge me for it; for God is my Father and not my Judge. Therefore boldness is needed for the exercise of spiritual affections in me. And we ought to remember this, for Christians often shrink from it, but it is evident that if I am hesitating whether God is going to bless me or to judge me, I cannot love Him.

Then observe another thing. There is a great difference between spiritual desires and spiritual affections, though both have the same root. Spiritual desires, if the relationship which would meet them be not known, only produce sorrow. Take an orphan, for instance, in a family where the parents' love to the children is witnessed every day; the sorrowful experience would be, Oh, that I had a father! The child who has its parents has the same desires, but the relationship exists of parent and child, and it knows the joy and gladness. As the children of God we must have the consciousness of the relationship in which we stand to God. It is not merely that we have a divine nature, which gives us spiritual desires, but we must also have a consciousness of the relationship into which we are brought by the power of what Christ has done.

It is clear there never could be a question between Christ and His Father, as He daily and hourly enjoyed the consciousness of His Father's love. "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17). So also He says, "My peace I give unto you." Again He says, "That they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves" (John 17:13). The Father's delight was in Christ, and He knew it in the daily enjoyment of it. Well, "as he is, so are we." While Christ lays the ground of our relationship by being the propitiation for our sins and the source of our life, yet it is not by Christ's righteousness that I get boldness. I must be righteous, of course; I cannot have boldness without it, but besides this there is another character God has toward me, that of a Father; and I have another character towards God, that of a child. I have not only righteousness, but I am a son.

And here I would notice the defectiveness of some of our hymns, which call Christ our brother. We never find in Scripture that Christ is called our brother. In the fullness of His grace He is not ashamed to call us brethren. My father is a man, but I do not call him a man. It would show a want of filial reverence in me if I did.

In nothing is the power of the Spirit of God more shown in the child of God than in the suitableness of his expressions and feelings towards God. If we are really enjoying the place of infinite privilege, the source and giver of these privileges will maintain His own proper place in our hearts. Theorizing about it will not do. A common expression is, We cannot be always on the mount. So far this is true, because we all have our place of service down here; but I would observe, that being in the mount of God's presence always humbles, though when a saint gets down again he may be proud of having been there. Paul was not puffed up when he was in God's presence caught up to the third heavens; but, after he had been there, he needed a thorn in the flesh lest he should be exalted above measure. The heart is never proud in God's presence, and, only when it is really there, is it really in its right place, for when out of it the flesh turns everything into mischief. "As he is, so are we," not only in the same standing and acceptance as Christ, but brought by the communication of His life into the same relationship as Himself. While in the beginning of the epistle the foundation is laid deep and wide in the cleansing blood, still the grand subject of the epistle is the place into which we are brought. "Herein is love with us made perfect." If my heart has seized the truth that God as a Father is acting in grace towards me, there is no place for fear. In all my need, and even in that with which I ought to have nothing to do, in all my sin, I fly to Him. I could not in my sin fly to my judge, but I have confidence in my Father's love and I fly to Him without fear; for "perfect love casteth out fear" (1 John 4:18).

In all sins and follies I can always look to Him who gave His Son for me. That is where grace puts me. The proof of God's love is, He has given His Son; the perfection of His love is, that He has brought us into His presence.

Chapter 10

The Capacity for Knowing Divine Love, and How We Know It

1 John 4:7-19

I would add to the paper on 1 John 4 some observations of a somewhat different character, though partly referring to the same truths. The verses which I would seek in a measure to unfold are from verse 7 to 19. There are two subjects in these verses—the capacity for knowing divine love, and the manifestation or proof of it, or more generally how we know it. First, as regards the capacity of the saints, that in them by which the blessedness of God's love is known and enjoyed, it is twofold: first, participating in the divine nature (vs. 7); secondly, God's dwelling in us (vs. 12). This gives it its full and perfect character and forms the link with the manifestations of this love, for this reason, that we cannot then separate the capacity to enjoy God and the manifestation of God, because as dwelling in us the manifestation of Himself becomes power to enjoy Him.

Hence, though for convenience sake, I have separated the two points, capacity to enjoy and the manifestations of divine love which reveal it to us to be enjoyed, and this division for other objects is exceedingly important and never lost sight of in Scripture, yet as regards God's dwelling in us it is imperfect. We cannot here separate the capacity and the means. Next, then, as regards the means of knowing the divine love, it is first manifested to us in its true nature in Christ's coming into the world to save in love, that had no motive in us; secondly, it is perfect in us in that God dwells in us and sheds it abroad in our heart; thirdly, it is perfected with us in that, even while we are in this world, we are as Christ is with God, so that we have boldness in the day of judgment.

The whole is connected with the subject of the entire epistle as displaying the traits of the divine nature in us by the communication of that eternal life which came down from the Father, so that these things should be true in Him (Christ) and in us, as had been shown as to righteousness (1 John 2:29; 1 John 3:1-24). Only the communication of life is completed here (love being the very nature of God and not an attribute) by the perfect manifestation of that love, and even by the dwelling of God in us. Righteousness and love are the two great characteristic traits of the divine life, but the latter is what God is. I do not say God is righteousness, though He is righteous; but I do say He is love. Righteousness refers to others. Love is what He is in Himself.

But to proceed now to the examination of the verses, and first our capacity to enjoy the love of God. The apostle exhorts the saints to love one another, "for," says he, "love is of God." It is so in its nature, for it is what He is. Hence when a man loves with these divine affections, he is certainly born of God, for he participates in His nature and he knows Him, for he knows what that nature is, for he participates in it. A mere animal cannot enter into my thoughts as a man, for it has not my nature so as to be able to do so. If we have the elements of this nature as ours, we are clearly born of God and know Him, for that is His nature. This is the first essential principle of our capacity for the knowledge of God as love, the participation in this nature, and a most blessed one it is. Our being born of God, our receiving life is a real thing. It is our being made partakers of the divine nature. But for the full completing of this power of knowing God we must bring in not only the divine nature as communicated to us, but God Himself. This is still connected with its manifestation

in loving one another. No man has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwells in us and His love is perfected in us. Thus the divine presence becomes the power of knowing God, of His love being perfected in us. We know that we dwell in God and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. Paul (though, as he is wont, in a more dispensational way) tells us the same truth: “the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us” (Rom. 5:5).

It is here said, remark “of” His Spirit, because it is not a display of power—as it might be when it is simply said His Spirit, as in chapter 3: 24, where consequently it is not said we dwell in Him—but such a working of the Spirit in the power of divine life that there is communion in the elements of the divine nature. We love, for He loves. “He hath given us of his Spirit.” Our being partakers then of the divine nature and God dwelling in us form our capacity for enjoying God in love.

I turn now to those things in which that love is manifested and proved. First, we have verses 9-10. In speaking of him that loves being born of God and knowing God, the soul might have been thrown quite back on itself to search the love there and fall into mysticism. But the Spirit of God at once, while clearly laying down this partaking of the divine nature, turns the eye of faith to what is wholly outside us, in order to have the proof and learn the character of divine love. “In this was manifested the love of God toward us.” This comes out in the fullest and most blessed way. He sent His only-begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him. I was dead then—I live through another. It was pure and perfect love in the mind of God Himself—the expression of what He is in this love, for there was nothing in me to attract or awaken it. I was dead. But God gave the one blessed object of His undistracted and undisturbed love—His only-begotten Son—for me when I was dead. Herein, then, was love, not that we loved God (this was law work), but that He loved us.

But this leads to another aspect of the state of the sinner. He was guilty as well as dead, but Christ came to be the propitiation for our sins. That is the pure love of God without a motive, but what was in Himself took us up when our state was one of death and guilt through sin. It was in this state and as being in it we were loved; and the love applied itself to this. I look for it therefore in God and know its absolute completeness in Him. There was only a needy undeserving object in me. It was to my state of sin this love applied. If I look at the cross where it was displayed, I have no part in it but my sin. The love of God there was manifested in this that we, dead in sin and guilty, might live through Him, and know that propitiation was made for our sins.

I now turn to the last of the three points I mentioned—love perfected with us. It is in this: that as Christ is, so are we. Love was manifested to us in that He came to us in love when we were in our sins. It is perfected in that, as Christ is, so are we. We can say “in this world,” for it is here that we learn to know we are, in Him, the righteousness of God in unclouded light. How can I but have boldness in the day of judgment, when I am as the judge before whom I appear? And so it is with us. He comes and fetches us Himself and changes our bodies into glorious bodies by the way; so that, when we appear before Him, we are like Himself in glory. But this comes about by a real communication of life. We say we are dead, and our life is hid with Christ in God. “When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory” (Col. 3:4). Paul, as I have said, treats it more dispensationally, but it is the same truth. I know I am as Christ is, now that He is gone to my Father and His Father, my God and His God. Risen, after He had completely put away our sins, He has taken us in the power of resurrection out of the whole case we were in and

put us in a new one before God, even that in which He is. To be as Christ the Son, before God our Father, is all that love could do. Thus love was manifested in visiting us in our sins; it is perfected in putting us in Christ's position before God, and that livingly.

But there is more. I have reserved for the last what comes second in the chapter, because it speaks of our present enjoyment of this blessing. I have already referred to it in speaking on the point of our capacity to enjoy. It is said (vs. 12), "No man hath seen God at any time." What is the remedy for this seeming impossibility of knowing Him? The answer here is, If we love one another, God dwelleth in us and His love is perfected in us. Here is a wonderful way of knowing God, of enjoying in the most perfect way His love. How great is the intimacy when He dwells in us and gives us to feel immediately the sweetness of His present love! No intermediate means to assure us of it merely, precious as we have seen these are and absolutely necessary to found our souls in the certainty that He does love us: we know it because we enjoy it directly with Himself. He has been pleased to come and fill our hearts with the consciousness of His love and to abide there. He becomes the home and object of confidence for our hearts, because He dwells in our hearts. He can dwell in us because of Christ's work and our cleanness and righteousness in Him.

Here, we can say, is rest—here is peace, the spring of joy, and the intelligence and pledge of what we shall enjoy with God above. This passage is the more remarkable through its correspondence with John 10:18. The same difficulty is raised. "No man hath seen God at any time." And how is it met there? "The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (John 1:18). Not who was, mark: He who is the one object in whom the Father's love concentrated itself in the most immediate enjoyment and delight— He has declared Him as He Himself knew Him. So he that hath seen Him hath seen the Father. Thus by the Son's coming into the world, we may, through grace, know God. This, along with the consequent promise of the Spirit on His departure, is the great subject of John's gospel: God made known as the Father by His revelation in the Son. But how is the same difficulty met here? God dwells in us. We know it by this great result of Christ's work that cleansed and justified. God dwells in us, and makes us enjoy by His presence a love which has allowed nothing to hinder its making itself our own, and has communicated itself to our hearts by dwelling in us, so that we know that nothing hindered its communicating itself to us. We know it because it is communicated, and God is nearer to us than any other object in the world. He dwells in us. Wonderful place given to us!— not an earnest of God's love (there is of the glory), but that love itself perfected in us, because He is there, and whom would we wish but He, and where He is, who shall compete with Him?

One sentence remains in the passage which I would notice. Some may say, This is too high for me, I cannot pretend to enter into all this, must have something simpler. Friend, nothing is simpler than the presence and love of God, where it is enjoyed. That is what is wanting. And now, to show you how without excuse you are, it is written, "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God." Do you confess that Jesus is the Son of God? God dwells in you then. How are you treating such a guest?

Allow me to add one correction of a thought fundamentally just, and one correction of an error of expression or copy. Read, It does not say, "As the Father loves me," but, "as he loved me." That is, it is not the infinite and eternal delight, but the Father's love to Christ as one walking down here.

The other remark I would make is this, that, while the contrast between knowing God as a father and as a judge is most just and most important, it is well for the Christian to remember that in a certain sense it is just as father that He is judge. As regards final judgment, or the imputation of sin, the Father judges no man, but has committed all judgment to the Son. The perfect work of Christ, which has put away our sins and thus secured us from the judgment of them as guilt, brings us to call on the Father, who, without respect of persons, judges according to every man's work. That is what delivers us from judgment as to guilt, brings us into that holy and gracious care which never overlooks anything in the children, and judges it according to the Father's own nature, in the privilege of communion with which the child is fully brought. The word of Christ was, "Holy Father, keep through thine own name" (John 17:11). That perfect love of God which has brought us into the enjoyment of itself has not changed Him into whose communion it has brought us, so that He should allow any evil. Indeed it would not be love. He deals with us in grace; He warns, chastens, and if He chastises, it is that we should not be condemned with the world; but He allows no evil in His government of His children more than finally in the government of the world.

Chapter 11

What Is Death?

For the unbeliever nothing can be more terrible than death. It is justly and scripturally called “the king of terrors” (Job. 18:14). It is the judicial close of the life of the first Adam. What is beyond? It is not merely so for the animal nature, though that be true, but the more it is considered in connection with man’s moral nature, the more terrible does it become. Everything in which man has had his home, his thoughts, his whole being employed, is closed and perished forever. “His breath goeth forth….his thoughts perish” (Psa. 146:4). Man finds in it an end to every hope, every project, to all his thoughts and plans. The spring of them all is broken. The being in which he moved is gone: he can count upon nothing more. The busy scene in which his whole life has been, knows him no more. He himself fails and is extinct. None have to do with him any more as belonging to it. His nature has given way, powerless to resist this master to which it belongs, and who now assert his dreadful rights. But this is far from being all. Man indeed, as man alive in this world, sinks down into nothing. But why? Sin has come in; with sin, conscience; with sin, Satan’s power: still more with sin, God’s judgment. Death is the expression and witness of all this. It is the wages of sin, terror to the conscience, Satan’s power over us, for he has the power of death. Can God help here? Alas, it is His own judgment on sin. Death seems but as the proof that sin does not pass unnoticed, and is the terror and plague of the conscience, as witness of God’s judgment, the officer of justice to the criminal, and the proof of his guilt in the presence of coming judgment. How can it but be terrible? It is the seal upon the fall and ruin and condemnation of the first Adam. And he has nothing but this old nature. He cannot subsist as a living man before God. Death is written on him, for he is a sinner, he cannot deliver himself. He is guilty withal and condemned. The judgment comes. But Christ has come in. He has come into death—O wondrous truth, the Prince of life! What is death now for the believer?

Now mark, reader, the full force of this wonderful, unspeakable, intervention of God. We have seen death to be man’s weakness, the break-up of his being, Satan’s power, God’s judgment, the wages of sin. But all this is in connection with the first Adam, whose portion, because of sin, death and judgment are. We have seen the double character of death; the failure of life, or living power, in man, and the witness of and conductor into the judgment of God. Christ has been made sin for us; He has undergone death, passed through it as Satan’s power and as God’s judgment. Death with its causes, has been met in its every character by Christ.

The judgment of God has been fully borne by Him before the day of judgment comes. Death, as the wages of sin, has been passed through. It has, as a cause of terror to the soul, in every sense, wholly lost its power for the believer. The physical fact may take place; for so wholly has Christ put away its power that that is not necessarily the case. We shall not all sleep, though we shall all be changed. Desiring, says the apostle, not to “be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life” (2 Cor. 5:4). Such is the power of life in Christ.

But death has much more than passed away. Death is ours, says the apostle, as all things are. By the blessed Lord’s entering into it for me, death and judgment too is become my salvation. The sin,

of which it was the wages, has been put away by death itself. The judgment has been borne for me there. Death is not terror to my soul; it is not the sign of anger, but the blessedest and fullest proof of love, because Christ came into it. The very power of the law against me, I am freed from, for it has power over a man only as long as he lives; but in Christ I am dead to the law already. God has, by death, met sin and judgment already. In a word, Christ, the sinless One, having come in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, my whole condition, as in the first Adam, has been dealt with—dealt with so that all its consequences have been righteously undergone; and by death the old man, Satan's power, sin, judgment, mortality itself, which are connected with the old (or sinful) man, are passed and done with forever. I live before God now in the One who is risen, after enduring all that belonged to the old for me. God has dealt with the old man, and all its fruits and consequences for me, in the new, who has taken even the natural consequences attached to it, and gone through its power as in the hand of Satan. Death has freed me forever from everything that belonged to, and awaited the old man, as alive.

First, condemnation and judgment are entirely over, as a question of the soul's acceptance. The dreadful ordeal is passed; but by another—so that it is my deliverance from it according to the righteousness of God. The floods which destroyed the Egyptians were a wall to Israel on the right hand and on the left, the path of safety out of Egypt. The salvation of God was there. Egypt and its oppressive power were left behind them. Death is deliverance and salvation to us.

Secondly, what is it become in practice? In the power of Christ's resurrection, I am quickened. He is become my life. I can dispense, if I may venture so to speak, with the life of the old man; I have that of the new. But He who, now risen, is my life, passed through death. I reckon myself dead. Hence it is never said that we are to die to sin. The old man does not and would not; the new man has no sin to die to. We are said to be dead, and commanded to reckon ourselves dead. Romans 6:11—"Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Colossians 3:3—"For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God"; and then we are directed to mortify our members which are on the earth, in the power of this new life, and of the Holy Spirit which dwells in us. I have the title, then, to reckon myself dead.

What a gain is death to me in this respect, if really the desires of the new man are in me! yea, what deliverance and power! What is dead for faith is the old, hindering, harassing, sinful man; in which, if responsible to God, I was lost, and unable to meet Him. "When," says the apostle, "we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death" (Rom. 7:5). But, "Ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you" (Rom. 8:9). The flesh is not our place of standing before God. We have acknowledged ourselves lost and ruined in it. That was the standing of the first Adam, and we were in it. Law applied death to it, judgment, but I am not in it, now, but in the last Adam.

So as regards ordinances, the apostle says, "If ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living [or alive] in the world, are ye subject to ordinances?" (Col. 2:20). For faith, we are dead, not alive, in the world. Hence, also, everything that practically makes us realize this—trial, suffering, sorrow—is gain. It makes morally true and real in our souls that we are dead, and thus delivers from the old man. "In all these things is the life of my spirit." It is disengaged and delivered from the obscuring and deadening influence of the old man. These sorrows and breaches in life are the details of death morally. But of the death of what? Of the old man. All is

gain.

Thirdly, if death comes in fact—the death of what? Of what is mortal, of the old man. Does the new risen life die? It has passed through death in Christ, and this has been realized in us. It cannot die. It is Christ. Hence, in dying, it simply leaves death behind. It quits what is mortal. We are absent from the body and present with the Lord. It was previously outwardly connected with what is mortal; it is no longer so. We are absent from the body, and present with the Lord. We depart and are with Christ. It is true faith that looks for a greater triumph—we shall be “clothed upon”: still this is God’s power. The old man, thank God, never revives. God, because of His Spirit that dwells in us, will quicken even our mortal bodies. The life of Christ will be displayed in a glorious body. We shall be conformed to the image of God’s Son, that He may be the first-born among many brethren. This is the fruit of divine power. But meanwhile death itself is always deliverance, because, having a new life, it is our being disencumbered from the old man which hinders and hems in our way. It is our being with Christ. How sweet and refreshing is the thought! When once we have seized the difference of the old and new man, the reality of the new life we have received in Christ, the death of the old will be known and felt to be true and real gain. No doubt, God’s time is best, because He alone knows what is needed in the way of discipline and exercise to form our souls for Himself, and He may preserve us to know the power of this life in Christ, so that mortality should be swallowed up without our dying.

But if death is the ceasing of the old man, it is but the ceasing of sin, hindrance, trouble. We have done with the old man, in which we are guilty before God—righteously done with it, because Christ has died for us—forever done with it, because we live in the power of the new. Such is death to the believer. “To depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better” (Phil. 1:23). As judgment, Christ has taken it; as to the power of sin, it is the death of the very nature it lives in. As actual mortality, it is deliverance from it to be with Christ in the new man which enjoys Him. Who as to the proper gain of it, would not die?

If we live to serve Christ, the sorrow of this world is worth while; but it is not the less sorrow in itself, whatever blessing may cheer us through it. To us to live, is Christ; to die, gain. It is but the old man that dies; our misery first, our enemy afterward. Of course this supposes divine life, and in practice the heart to be elsewhere than in the things the old man lives in.

Chapter 12

What Is the Responsibility of the Saints?

It is an unhappy circumstance that many Christians have an idea that responsibility and grace are incompatible (and by grace I mean full saving grace), and if strongly impressed with the necessary truth of the one, they reject the other. This arises partly from the groundless supposition that responsibility and uncertainty, as to the result, necessarily go together; partly from a confusion between the responsibility of man, sinful man, and the saint's responsibility; and partly from the supposition that responsibility and power must necessarily go together. All these suppositions are founded on human reasonings, and are all alike groundless. When a Roman cut off his thumb, so that he could not hold a spear, his responsibility to the State to be a soldier had not ceased, although he had not the power to fulfill his responsibility. The responsibility flowed from another course, namely, his being a Roman subject or citizen. If I command my child to come, and it will not, alleged incapacity to come, if true, is not an excuse, if it willed not to come. Had the will been there, the incapacity might have been removed.

Again, the elect angels are bound to do God's will, but there is no uncertainty. God sustains them in will and deed they delight to do His will, and there is no question at all about the result. Such a question cannot be raised. Their delight to do God's will is a part of their existence, in which they are sustained by infinite power, and thus they do it by the strength given to them. Even Christ Himself was responsible to do His Father's will when He had undertaken it; but there could be no question for a moment as to failure. His moral being was perfectness, was never anything else, nor could be. But every created being is responsible; that is, he ought always to do God's will, not his own. It flows from the necessary and immutable relation of the creature to the Creator. The creature ought to be, in all its thoughts and ways, what suits the relationship in which it subsists. All relationships as such have duties in the including thoughts and feelings which correspond to and express the relationship. Husband and wife, father and child, master and servant, brother and sister, by virtue of the relationship in which they are, ought to be what the word expresses, and all that is implied in it. The husband is bound to be a husband: that is, he is bound to be what the word means; and so the wife; and the rest. The relationship is not the duty; but the duty is inseparable from the thought of it. It will be found that this is not the idea that men have of their responsibility to God (and in part they are right, but that they are so is the consequence of the fall), and in practical result they are wholly wrong.

The idea men generally have of responsibility is, that they must live in a certain way to escape judgment, and to gain eternal life. Now there is a fundamental truth in this, as in every testimony of conscience. "To them who by patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life" (Rom. 2:7). They who are contentious, and do not obey the truth, will have "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil."

As a general principle, we have the knowledge of good and evil (which in itself is a divine perfection, though we have acquired it through the fall), and we know that God approves good and hates evil. So far as the fact of a natural conscience, thus judging, goes, men are right. But they do

not really believe, till taught of God, that we are in this state as fallen. Yet all their life betrays it—I do not merely mean betrays the fact that they are sinners, but the thought that they must gain eternal life, find God's favor, and as they hope in the end come to God, and be happy. They have not yet found Him then, nor know His thoughts concerning them. They are in no relationship with God, from which duties flow, save that in which they have already failed; but while they look at God as a Judge, they hope to win a place of safety in a happy relationship, by doing their best, and with God's help, and the like.

This may have a more or less religious coloring, but the general idea remains the same; that man has to win the happy relationship to God by his conduct; that he is responsible to please God in his conduct, and by this means inherit (really at bottom, merit, whatever makeweight they may throw in) eternal life and happiness. God's goodness, Christ's merits, religious duties and ceremonies, come in to help the account, and make up for failures; but account it is, to be decided by the day of judgment, and uncertain till then. There is no present subsisting relationship with God. There is no real consciousness of being either saved or lost. Man, perhaps, is admitted to have been lost, but in some vague way. Christianity, it is thought, has put an end to this (without, after all, saving him), at least provided men behave themselves properly. The result is, a man's responsibility is to maintain a conduct required in order to inherit eternal life, and a real present relationship to God is unknown. It is to be acquired. Some indeed pretend by ceremonies to place you in a perfect relationship with God; but it is lost before it is found or known, so that it has nothing moral in it, and the result is, man has to make it out, after all, by his own conduct.

Now, though there is an abstract principle of truth in the groundwork of this idea, the real truth of man's condition and Christianity is wholly set aside by it.

God does love good and hate evil. There must be a life in true purpose of what is good, to be with Him in bliss; and natural conscience gives a true, if not an adequate sense of good and evil, and of its result. But these general principles say nothing of my actual state, be I in or out of Christ. They are true, but they say nothing of me, nor do they tell me what responsibility is, nor what my actual relationship to God is, if I am in one. Responsibility there is. The maintenance of responsibility is the maintenance of the rights of God—of His authority over us. Where it is objected to, there lies always at the bottom of the objection either the notion that man must have power of his own to be responsible, or that the result is uncertain, which is only another form of the same idea. But if God creates any being, He creates it in and for the position it is in, whatever be His ultimate purpose, and cannot mean it to abide in inconsistency with the position He has placed it in. It would be a kind of blasphemy against Him and deny judgment. No, the angels that kept not their first estate are reserved in chains of darkness. Man, who kept not his first estate, is passed under death, and excluded from paradise, awaiting also the judgment of God, except as delivered and saved in Christ. "So he drove out the man" (Gen. 3:24).

But then the notion man has of responsibility—that of conduct by which eternal life may be won—is a mere consequence of our fallen state, of our alienation from God. It is a laboring, working, to win what we have not, and to gain by our conduct a position in which we are not. Yet, though this is consequent on the fall, on our distance from God, that distance is not really known. What man is, as fallen is not really acknowledged: for if such be our position, we are already lost. We need to be saved.

But responsibility to pursue a course of conduct by which we gain a position or a reward is not the only character of responsibility: nay, it is an unnatural one—one which flows from disordered relationships. True, genuine responsibility is the walking according to a position in which we are, and which carries its obligations with it. The impossibility of losing the position does not alter the responsibility, but makes it perpetual. A child is always a child to its parent, be he a good child or a disobedient one. We must get the thought well fixed in our minds, that responsibility connected with labor for the yet uncertain attainment of a relationship in which we are not yet, is an extraordinary, and, so to speak, an unnatural, kind of responsibility.

When we come to the real fact of what a creature is, we shall find that uncertainty does not characterize responsibility so much as we suppose. If not sustained of God by divine strength, we shall fail; if sustained, we shall not. Our sense of this dependence is our daily safety. “Without me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5). The angels that fell, and Adam, are witnesses of the path of a creature left to his responsibility, untempted or tempted. The elect angels and renewed men are examples of beings sustained of God in responsibility. But man is not of this mind. He is, he says, in a state of probation; he thinks that, though fallen, he may (doubtless, he will say, with God’s help) make out the leading a life which will adequately satisfy his responsibility. Many, of course, will add the goodness of God (as they will feel their path imperfect) and the merits of Christ, to make up what fails.

It is not my purpose to dwell on this point; but the truth is, what is here called goodness is merely a hope that God will think as lightly of our sins as we do, and as we, for safety’s sake, should like Him to do, which is a sure proof of not being converted. As to the merits of Christ, they are not meant to make sin excusable, but righteousness perfect before God. His blood cleanses from sin, because God will have none before Him. He is our righteousness, and it is a divine and perfect one: but He is not to make up ours, so that our failures are forgotten.

But, for man, out of God’s presence, with the thought of having to do with God, this question must arise—how to have His favor, how to have life. And God has met it. Man is responsible to live before God according to the position he is in as man. He has got wholly out of this. Morally he is a sinner. But the character of the responsibility depends on the relationship between man and God, and man and man. He has to act according to the relationship in which he is as man toward each. That is abstractedly what he ought to be. He pretends to be or to will it, and takes his position on this ground to seek God’s favor and life. God takes him up on this ground: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself” (Luke 10:27). Or, if man will, He presents to him the duties even of the second table, as it is called—”this do, and thou shalt live” (Luke 10:28). This is written in the law, and sanctioned by the Lord as the answer to the question, What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? Let man, away from God, do that, and he shall live.

Promises had been given unconditionally, which center all in Christ, the Seed of the woman, and of Abraham, and of David. Here no question of righteousness was raised: none of responsibility. It was the free gift of God, His promise. If we dare to say so, He was responsible alone; His accomplishment of the promise therefore sure. But, with a creature knowing good and evil, and with a God who judges it, the question of righteousness must come. God could not be indifferent to evil. The question of responsibility and righteousness was raised in the law, There the promises

were taken on condition of obedience, and “this do and live” became the rule for man. Responsibility took partially the character of a position to be acquired by conduct, and the fulfillment of the duties of a position in which man already was. I speak of course as between him and God. In that conduct relative duties are contained, but the accomplishment of them was to be the means of possessing life. The real result was the discovery that the righteousness was not to be had, that the condition which had made it necessary made it impossible. Man was a sinner away from God. Therefore he had to seek life; but therefore he had not the righteousness needed to acquire it. As the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda, the disease of which he had to be cured disabled him from doing that by which he was to acquire health.

The law was given, as Scripture expressly declares, that this state of things might be made plain to the conscience of man. It entered that the offense might abound. By it was the knowledge of sin. Sin, by it, became exceeding sinful; and it proved not only that sin was there but a harder lesson, namely, that we were slaves to it—”without strength”—that the law was weak through the flesh, and that flesh could not be subject to it. As many as were of the works of the law were under the curse. The responsibility was undertaken, not fulfilled; and what was ordained for life was found to be for death. This is not all that man has done, but I confine myself to my subject, namely, what was done as to inheriting eternal life, by meeting our responsibility as men. It is closed. We have lost our created position in innocence; we cannot gain another by our conduct. We are, as men, lost! The responsibility was there in paradise, and man failed. He places himself under it when really already ruined, under the law, and makes his ruin evident. Such is the only result, as to our relationship with God, of our being on the ground of responsibility as men. What is needed for us is the distinct discovery of it. We are under sin, death, and condemnation already, looked at as in ourselves.

But God’s salvation is another thing That is not our responsibility. Christ comes in grace and love into the state in which we were by sin, Himself sinless; and the object of divine favor in doing it; but He came and died, and drank the cup of wrath. He has closed for all who believe on Him, and in the Father’s love in Him, the whole question relative to the first Adam and our sinful life. We own that we were in enmity against God, condemned, guilty: this He has taken upon Himself as bearing it before God; that is, the whole consequence of our responsibility as men, and it is closed. He has died as bearing it; He has died to sin once: and he that is dead is freed from sin. Thus, in our representative, all whose work is available to us, the whole question of our responsibility as men has closed in judgment and death for me, as I had discovered it had as to myself: the life has passed away in which I lived and was responsible to God. I exist no more, as living, as a child of the first Adam. “If ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world why as though living in the world?” says Paul. “Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3). “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I” etc. “Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin” (Rom. 6:11). Christ has perfectly glorified God’s righteousness in respect of all the evil; but all has passed away in His death judicially as to which God had to be glorified. The nature, being, sins, guilt, existence in which he was responsible and subsisted before Him, are, as regards the believer, gone before God. “When we were in the flesh,” says Paul, “the motions of sin which were by the law.” “But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you.”

The whole question of our responsibility, as living in the life of man before God, is settled by Christ's judicially bearing the consequences before God, and by the death of the life in which we stood as sinners. But then Christ is now in a new life. He is risen, and we are alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me. I am quickened together with Christ, and raised up together. God has quickened us together with Him, having forgiven us all trespasses. They are buried in His grave, and I am alive anew and without them.

But more than this. There is a divine righteousness in which Christ stands before God, as risen; that is, in which I stand in the power of a new life as risen with Him. I am made the righteousness of God in Him. As He is, so am I in this world. This is in the reality of a life in which we live, which is Christ: and of a divine righteousness in which we stand before God, which is Christ. "Not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20). It is a real, living, certain position before God, in which I through grace and Christ are one, though all flows from, and, thank God, is dependent on Him. God has given us eternal life, and that life is in His Son. "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (1 John 5:12): but then it is perfect righteousness already before God.

More than this, I am a child, a son. Such is my relationship with God. I have eternal life. I am in a known blessed fixed relationship with God, where grace has placed me through the working of the same power in which Christ was raised from the dead, and set at God's right hand. I am not only in it, but it is my relationship with God, and there is none but this. The old one is passed; the new one, founded on divine righteousness, flows from my being really born of God, made partaker of the divine nature. I cannot be in any other. It is my being, my existence, before God—the life and relationship in which He has placed me, and in which I live from Him. The old one is gone in Christ's grave.

What is now my responsibility? To make all efforts to obtain eternal life by my conduct? I have it. To make out righteousness? I am the righteousness of God in Christ: He is my righteousness. To seek to win God's favor? He has loved me so as to give His Son for me, and accepted me in the Beloved. To win a position with God? He has made me His child and son. "Now are we the sons of God" (1 John 3:2). What can I seek other, or more, than to say, "as he is, so are we in this world"? (1 John 4:17). Here my soul is at peace—a precious thing! At peace with my God and Father, in known relationship with Him. Christ is gone to His Father and my Father, His God and my God. Blessed thought! What a place of peace and love, according to the very nature of God, and the revelation of Him by the Son, it sets me in.

Here then I enter into the true kind of responsibility, in contrast with the hopeless and sin—convincing one into which I got by the fall; a responsibility which was really according to a lost position, that I might find out my ruin and condemnation. My responsibility now is a responsibility flowing from the position in which I am; which belongs in peace to it, not one by which it is to be attained—a responsibility such as all our responsibilities are according to God, that of walking according to the position in which I am already. He that says he abides in Christ ought to walk as He walked. A child of God, and such forever, ought to walk as a child of God, "as dear children." My responsibility is that of a Christian. I am to walk as one, because I am one, not that I may be one. The fact that I am a child forever is not a reason for not walking like one. It is only the baseness of a morally ruined being, that he could suppose that he was not to be consistent with the relationship he was in because it was an unchangeable one. As we are in our Christian

position in virtue of a new life, such a thought cannot at bottom be that of a Christian. This is the reasoning of the apostle in Romans 6 —not that I ought not, but that I cannot, if dead, live to what I am dead to.

My responsibility then is not as a man in the first Adam, but as a Christian in the Last. On the first ground I am wholly lost already; it is vain to talk of responsibility, unless to convince of sin. On the second, because I am saved, and a child of God in the family, I am become responsible for walking as such, like the example of the Firstborn of many brethren. It is not connected with the possibility of losing my position more than of my gaining one. It flows from the position I am in. I am to walk like a child of God since I am one. It is a responsibility of peace and joy—what James calls “the perfect law of liberty” (James 1:25), because my new nature finds its delight in what God wills and commands, and in obeying Him. It finds delight in Him, but therefore in obeying Him, and also in what He wills. The nature I have received is that divine nature which expresses itself in the commands given to me; only there is also authority in them. But the commands are morally the expression of the nature which I have, and which delights in them, and finds the comfort of perfect light and guidance in them. And here is the immense and total difference of the commands of the law and Christ’s commands. The law says, “This do and thou shalt live.” Christ’s commands are the expression of the life which He had, and the guide of that which I have. The life was the light of men. The perfect expression of the will and nature of God in man, which His words and commands expressed; and now we can say, “Which thing is true in him and in you” (1 John 2:8), because He is our life in the power of the Holy Spirit. Christ was the real expression of divine life in man; that eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested to us.

Hence it was the light of men. It was in the place, condition, and state of men, and hence obedient also dependent. Thus was it brought out in His temptation. This life is ours, since His exaltation on high, when He had presented a perfect righteousness to the Father. In that I have a perfect peace and perfect favor, and now the only thing I have to do is to glorify Him, “that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh” (2 Cor. 4:11). I can say, “I abide in him”—placed with the Father in His perfectness before Him—a place of joy and peace, and witness of eternal love. I ought then so to walk as He walked. Christian responsibility is the responsibility of being a Christian; that is, of walking because we are in Christ, as Christ walked, through Christ dwelling in us.

Our place before God is Christ—our part to exhibit Christ before men. This, while the flesh is still in us, and the world around us, needs the daily cross: “always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body” (2 Cor. 4:10). Our responsibility is not to attain unto life, but to manifest it, in spite of hindrance, yea, through hindrances, and in the midst of the world. Two things have to be noticed here. First, the manifestation of the divine life, in which, through the Holy Spirit, we are united to Christ, has to be carried on in the midst of temptation, and in spite of the existence of the old nature, the flesh, in us, by which all that is in the world can become a temptation to us. Communion with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ, and the manifestation of the divine life, can only have place so far as the flesh is practically held—as we have the title to hold it—for dead, always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus may be made manifest in our mortal body.

Here is the daily exercise of the life we have got, in which we learn what we are practically; and the faithfulness, graciousness, and tenderness of God are daily experienced, and to be felt by us; in which we have our senses exercised to discern good and evil, the contrast between God and the flesh is deeply learned, what is mere nature discerned through what is spiritual; while the effect of all is, that one is emptied of self, and Christ acquires, in a certain sense, an exclusive place, and becomes all in all. The soul is satisfied with Him, and hence in lowliness and singleness of eye can discern what is flesh, and either avoid it, or content itself without the false support its efforts or objects give to the natural heart, which leans on them.

Two means are employed of God to carry the redeemed through the desert, the word of God, and priestly intercession. They may be found in Hebrews 4:11-15. The word is the weapon of God to discern between that which is of the Spirit, and everything in which the will of the flesh works. All that is mere nature, which is ever a snare, and positive sin where the will is at work, gets often so closely allied to what God Himself has created and owned, that the close application of the word in the power of the Spirit, is needed to distinguish. Yet morally they are most different and opposed, because God is not in the one, but human will, and is in the other, as affections, for example, which become idolatrous (though legitimate and in themselves right) or passions. In these, and in all cases, the word, sharper than any two-edged sword, the true sword of the Spirit, the truth, the bringing home of the living Word, who has sanctified Himself for us, is the means by which God first of all judges in us all that would tend to make us fall in the desert.

Then for all weakness and even failure comes the priesthood; for it is to the course of this exercise, in which above all our entire dependence on God is brought to light, and the heart is practically purified, that the priesthood of Christ also applies. It is not exercised to obtain justice for us, nor to bring us to God. It is founded on perfect righteousness, and the propitiation made for our sins, and is exercised to maintain or restore the communion of the saint, while walking in weakness, with the perfect light into which he is brought, through the rent veil, by that righteousness and propitiation.. Nor do we go to Christ in repentance that He may intercede for us: this would be distrust of the perfect love of the Father, into whose presence He has brought us as children, nor would any one do so really; but He intercedes for us that we may repent. Our souls are thus restored through grace to communion, or maintained in it. Intercession is for the saints. For will, the word is used; for weakness and for failure, the grace of priesthood.

The other point to which I allude is our encouragement in the course we have to run. This is afforded us in promises and rewards, to which is annexed the careful and faithful government of the Father, who chastens where needed. God is sovereign in the revelation of His goodness to the heart, and knows when to grant it; but He has revealed principles of government. “He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.” “If a man love me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.” It is evident that God cannot have communion even with an idle thought. Christ does not say as to salvation, If a man love Me, God will love him. “We love him, because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). The very characteristic of God’s love is, that He loved us when we were sinners. But though God can visit and restore in grace, His communion is in holiness, and with the obedient; while we are dependent on His grace for both.

Here comes too the scripture doctrine of rewards. As regards righteousness and salvation, reward can have no possible place. These privileges are in Christ, and perfect. They are the reward, so to speak, of His labors and work. So, if one takes reward as the motive for work, he is wholly on false ground. Love and obedience are the only true motives, as they were in Christ Himself. “That the world may know,” He says, “that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do” (John 14:31). And again, “My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.” But rewards are presented as encouragements in the difficulties which are on the road into which love and obedience bring us. Thus it could be said of Christ, “Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:2). So Moses is approved by the Holy Spirit, saying, “He had respect unto the recompense of the reward”; and of all, “Every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour” (1 Cor. 3:8). The Thessalonians are a crown, a glory, to Paul, as they are not to us.

Yet the word keeps steadily before us, that it is of grace, and that, in rewarding His laborers, God does what He will with His own: but in overabounding grace, to sit on Christ’s right hand and on His left is given to them for whom it is prepared of His Father. But as to righteousness and salvation all are alike. We shall be conformed to the image of God’s Son. But, though sovereign as to the place God gives us, in connection with the Holy Spirit’s work in and by us (for it is in connection with this that reward is; it has nothing to do with our righteousness, which is Christ Himself), this sovereignty is exercised in giving the reward according to the labor in gift and calling; so that God’s government and the saint’s responsibility may be displayed; yet so as that the saint is brought more clearly to say, “Not I, but the grace of God which was in me” (1 Cor. 15:10). It is exactly he who has the deepest sense of his responsibility who will the most deeply feel his entire dependence upon grace. If these questions are mixed up with that of salvation, all is legal and false; but when clear on this, the exercise of the heart in them is most useful, as leading to the sense of dependence, confiding in Him who is able to bless, and delights to do it—the sense that there is a living God, that we can do nothing of ourselves, nothing without Christ. It humbles and leads to daily confiding dependence upon God.

The principle I have alluded to above will be found to be universal, namely, that reward is in Scripture never the motive of action, always the encouragement of him who is active from other motives. Thus, we well know, it was love, eternal, divine love, and thence obedience to His Father, which led Christ in the path of sorrow. In that path, for the joy that was set before Him, He endured. Moses visited his brethren because God put it into his heart to prefer suffering with the people of God to a life of ungodly ease in a court. He endured as seeing Him who is invisible, for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward.

“In due season we shall reap,” says the apostle, “if we faint not” (Gal. 6:9). The love of Christ constrained him too, the excellency of the knowledge of Christ; but he knew that a crown of righteousness was laid up for him, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, would give to him in that day. Where reward is the motive, all is wrong; but the gracious Lord encourages us in our labor with His approbation, and His promise of reward at the end. We believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them who diligently seek Him.

Thus our relationship with God is founded on a perfect and divine righteousness, so that it is divine, and His perfect love enjoyed in a known relationship, and in a divine way. Hence holy affections are free, and God is glorified. All is from Him, and according to Him. No question of righteousness can be raised outside Christ. Blessed be God, such a relationship is ineffably sweet, and sure as divine perfection can make it. At the same time, the active moral energies of a life which pursues its object under the hand of God are maintained. “One thing I do,” says the apostle, “I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God.” “If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection from among the dead” (Phil. 3:11).

The whole Epistle to the Philippians goes on this ground, and hence speaks of attaining, working out salvation, and the like. The moral development which is connected with personal responsibility under grace takes place, and under the eye of a gracious and holy Father and holy God. We are set in the path in which Christ walked, to follow His steps. Sweet to be allowed to do it, and that His servant, walking in this path, shall be where his master is. The word, “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matt. 25:23), sounds sweet in the ears, and most so in his who knows that by His grace alone can we be one or the other. If we were not His, we could not serve; His, by a new life; His, by the purchase of His blood! And in the service all hangs upon His daily grace; and the place He has given to us, and the special glory in which each faithful servant will be set, is part of the purpose and operation of God. But all our responsible moral exercises, once we are free, are connected with it, the lively energies of hope, the watchfulness and keeping under of the body. We fight the good fight of faith and lay hold on eternal life.

What has secured us as salvation, has set before us, as this salvation, a hope of glory which sets in play the whole energy of the new man through the Holy Spirit. Paul saw Christ glorified. There was an end of legal righteousness, and the certainty of divine. There was the glory to be attained. All was dross and dung that he might win Christ; and if it cost him his life, good! on the road to a resurrection from among the dead. It was not a responsibility in which he labored alone, so to speak, as obliged under law to fulfill his tasks or fail. It was closely allied with the attachment of his heart to Christ—that he might win Christ. Christ had laid hold of him for it; but he longed to lay hold therefore of the blessed prize.

This is carried on as under the moral government of God. The flesh cannot serve Christ—it can only hinder. To be vessels made to honor, we must be clean. Hence the apostle kept his body under. Hence Peter tells us, “If ye call on the Father, who, without respect of persons judgeth according to every man’s work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear” (1 Peter 1:17). The Father judges no man as regards final definitive judgment; so the apostle says, “the time of your sojourning here in fear.” Is it fear of not having part in redemption? On the contrary, it is founded on the solemn greatness and excellency of it, the moral depth of God’s judgment of good and evil. “Forasmuch,” he continues, “as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation….but with the precious blood of Christ” (1 Peter 1:18-19). Thus the bright energies of hope, the joy of communion, the sweetness of dependence, the holy watchfulness of fear as engaged in this great conflict with evil and on God’s side—all unite to bring out through known grace, and as founded in grace, every moral development of which a human being, as quickened of God, is capable, so as to connect him with the perfection of God, in communion with whom it is all wrought; and to make him like Christ, who is the perfect model of it, as His communion with His Father was perfect—to grow up to the measure of the stature of the

fullness of Christ.

For the need in which this service and path sets us inwardly and outwardly—the path in which Christ walked—sets us in communion with God, in all that is in Him to meet it in grace to our souls. It is not only help for the circumstances, but what God is for the soul, in all that is discovered in it by its passing through the circumstances. The wilderness makes the heart of man known; but it makes God known to the heart too. The full joy of it will be hereafter. In the type, as in the reality, it was founded on a perfect redemption; and as Israel at the Red Sea chanted the salvation which had brought them to God, so at the close Balaam must testify that no divination was of any avail. God had not seen perverseness in Israel, nor iniquity in Jacob. He would treat him for his faults in wisdom Himself, as His; but no accusations were of avail. It is beautiful to see God thus answering for Israel on high, while poor foolish Israel was ignorantly murmuring and disobeying below.

Finally, grace is such, that what God gives as the ground of destruction in judgment, “for thou art a stiffnecked people; lest I consume thee in the way,” once grace is known, Moses can give as a reason for God’s going with them: “If now I have found grace in thy sight, O Lord, let my Lord, I pray thee, go among us; for it is a stiff-necked people.”

Chapter 13

The Saints' Praise As Taught and Led by Christ

There is much more method in the Psalms than is generally supposed; but I cannot enter at present into so large a subject. I would draw the reader's attention only to four of them, and in particular to some points in the character of the last of the four, a psalm with which every reader of Scripture is familiar— the 22nd.

In Psalm 19 we have two great witnesses of the power and thoughts of God. First, from verses 1 to 6, the witness creation affords, and especially the heavens: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork." From verse 6 to the end, the perfection of the law is spoken of—the question of man's keeping it is not here introduced, it is the perfectness of the law itself which is insisted on, and its value for the soul of man, wherever it brings its light, and the moral power of its instructions. These witnesses have their own unchangeable character. Man has been able to corrupt and change the face of the earth, and judgment and destruction have come upon it, death and misery. What is reached by man is alas! corrupted by man. But the heavens, and the sun in its course, proclaim with bright and unvarying witness (blessed be God, beyond the reach of man's corrupting hand), the glory of Him that made them, and

"Soon as the evening shades prevail,

The moon takes up the wondrous tale,

And nightly to the list'ning earth

Repeats the story of her birth;

Whilst all the stars that round her burn,

And all the planets in their turn,

Confirm the tidings as they roll,

And spread the truth from pole to pole.

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Forever singing as they shine,

'The hand that made us is divine.'"

Man may have indeed perverted these witnesses of power to idolatry; but, where man does not reach, all creation still proclaims the glory of God its Creator. So with the law; flesh under it is disobedient and perverse; the law itself, of course, changes not. It bears witness to the mind of God about man, though man under it may not keep it; and it gives no life that he may, and so obtain righteousness by it. But another witness of deeper and fuller character, One who was a witness to the nature as well as to the power of God; One who manifested the righteousness which the law claimed and taught, and, besides that, revealed and displayed God's love in the

midst of the sin and corruption in which man was, appeared amongst those who were guilty of the sin, and under the bondage of the corruption.

Christ was amongst men. It was not merely creative glory displayed in the heavens, the work of God's hands, the moon and the stars which He had ordained, shining above, and unreached by man's corruption; nor the law, the rule of right in man, which he could not corrupt, but which condemned him because he was disobedient to it. It was love itself; God, who is love, manifested as man in the midst of corruption; man, perfect in love to God and to his neighbor; in a word, the witness of divine love and human perfectness in the midst of corruption, passing through it, meeting it in grace, to show that the love of God could, and did, reach to these corrupt ones; passing through it in perfect holiness and righteousness, to show that it was God's love which did thus visit them as indeed it alone had a title to do so. But this blessed One came in a peculiar manner. He came according to prophecies and promises, in the midst of a people whom God had prepared for this purpose—a people to whom the promises had been given according to the flesh, amongst whom, after their redemption out of Egypt, all the prophets had appeared; who had the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the public worship, and the revelation of Jehovah, the one true God, whose law it was, and by whom the prophets were sent.

How was the promised Messiah, the Christ, received? We all know He was despised and rejected of men, a scorn of men and an outcast of the people. They saw in Him no beauty that they should desire Him. "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not" (John 1:10-11). The perfection of the witness He bore caused His rejection, and for His love He found hatred. The Christ found a day of trouble; scorned and rejected by the people to whom He came in love, and according to promise and prophecy.

In this state He is seen in Psalm 20, and prophetically addressed as by the little remnant whose hearts were under the influence of the Spirit of God. It is of course in Jewish terms and thoughts, but the comparison with Psalm 21 shows clearly to whom it applies. Indeed in verse 6 the person who is the subject of the psalm is said to be Jehovah's anointed, that is, His Christ. The little residue of those who favored His righteous cause, seeing Him rejected of men, desire in the prophetic testimony of the Psalms earnestly His acceptance of God, help and deliverance from the sanctuary. They see the perfectness of the desire of His heart, and their own would fain behold the fulfillment of His counsels. Helpless themselves, and not here reaching to the height of God's counsels in redemption, these witnesses of Christ's sufferings (as Peter calls himself), as observers of His trouble, and penetrated with love to Himself, look to One who is their only resource, to look on the righteous One, and hear and grant the deliverance a Jew expected from the sanctuary in Zion.

In Psalm 21 we get the inspired answer to this godly desire, already anticipated in Psalm 20:3,6. Hence here they celebrate, prophetically, the triumph of the Christ. He has been heard. Compare Psalm 20:4; 21:2. But now we have His desires explained, His earthly sorrows opened out.

Death was before Him. Compare here Hebrews 5:7. He asked life of Jehovah, and He is heard. But how, after all? In length of days (as man) forever and ever. "His glory," they say to Jehovah, "is great in thy salvation: honor and majesty thou hast laid upon him. For thou hast made him most blessed for ever: thou hast made him exceeding glad with thy countenance" (Psa. 21:5-6).

Compare Psalm 16:10, 11. He was prevented with the blessings of goodness, a crown of pure gold set on His head. In a word, the rejected Messiah is exalted by the right hand of God, and set in glory and majesty above.

In these two psalms, therefore, we have the rejected Messiah exalted by God, honor and majesty put upon Him, and length of days given Him forever and ever. He had suffered from men, been despised and rejected by them, and God has glorified Him as man. Mark the result. His hand finds out all His enemies, His right hand those that hate Him. He makes them as a fiery oven in the day of His anger. For they intended mischief against Him, which they were not able to perform. As He said by parable Himself: “Those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me” (Luke 19:27). In the day of His anger the glorified Christ will execute judgment on His enemies. Man had despised and rejected Him, imagined mischief against Him, and judgment will be the consequence for men.

But the sufferings of Christ had a far deeper character. He suffered from the hand of God. He suffered for sin. From man He had suffered for righteousness’ sake, and had hatred for His love. From God He suffers for sin, being made sin for us. Here He is alone, none to sympathize—none to stand by, and with true, though feeble, interest, at least in spirit, take an interest in His sorrow. In Psalm 20 we have seen this. In the gospels we may find Mary anointing Him for His burial, those whom the Lord owns having continued with Him in His temptations, who, in spirit, would take up the words of the psalm, if trouble came on Him: “Jehovah hear thee in the day of trouble; the name of the God of Jacob defend thee.” But when He comes to suffer from God for sin, to pass through death its wages, who could go with Him there? Who could pass these waters of Jordan, when they overflowed all their banks? “As I said to the Jews….so now say I to you,” declares the Lord to His disciples, “whither I go, thou canst not follow me now” (John 13:36). This was true of the power of death itself as the path to glory.

But more than this, in atonement what place could the sinner have? Christ drank that cup that we might never drink it. Hence, while in Psalm 20 the saints in spirit are looking at Christ suffering with deep interest and affection, whilst they can look on and observe Him, and love Him in the midst of rejecting scorners; in Psalm 22 Christ speaks Himself and alone. None could observe with sympathy, or fathom, or express, what the suffering He there underwent was. The words are in the mouth of the sufferer who was alone, and alone could express them. He was there, no doubt, suffering from man as man. Dogs and bulls of Bashan had closed Him round, but His cry was to Jehovah, that He at least would not be far from Him. But no, the fathers had trusted and were delivered; but this blessed One must drink the cup to the dregs. Perfect and sinless, He could say, “Why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34). We have learned and can say why. It was for us. He was bearing our sins in His own body on the tree; made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.

Here then the Lord was suffering from God, the forsaking of God, that dreadful cup from the holy One, in His soul. He was suffering for sin, not as He did from man for righteousness. And now mark the blessed result. Is it judgment? He was bearing it for us. Was sin to be brought on any? It was Jehovah Himself who was bruising Him, and who put Him to grief. Sin was put away there. What is the result then? Unmingled, unhindered grace. The bar to the full outflowing of love was taken away in the putting away of sin. Till Jesus was baptized with that baptism, how was He

straitened? Not surely in His own bowels of love; but God, consistently with His glory, could not exercise His love and make light of unrighteousness. Surely this was no making light of it. God could now give the fullest scope to the highest and divinest exercise of love shown in, and indeed in its results founded on, the redemption that was there accomplished. God was glorified there, and the glory of God was the result for Him that had accomplished it, and that glory is now to us the hope of righteousness by faith. God could not endure sin, but He could put it away perfectly in grace as that which He could not endure, instead of putting the sinner away in his sins from before His face, because He could not endure them. But there is more than this: Christ was heard because He feared. His appeal was not unlistened to, though it was impossible, if we were to be saved, and God fully glorified, and man fully glorified in Christ, that the cup should not be drunk, that Christ should not undergo, not merely the fact of death, but the forsaking of God.

Now, though we see the Lord giving up His Spirit to His Father in perfect peace, yet the resurrection was the great answer of God to His demand of life. That was the power of God entering into the place and seat of death, and taking the man of His delights out from among the dead in the power of an endless life, declaring Him His Son with power, and giving Him His place according to the counsels of God. It was man set up by the power and according to the counsels of God, and by the love and glory of the Father, where, as regards Christ, He deserved to be, and the Father's delight was to place Him.

He was placed before God and the Father as the One whom He delighted in, and as His Son in blessedness (sin being put away). This was the relationship in which Christ stood as man before God and His Father. This was the name of God towards Him. A Deliverer from death and all the consequences of sin which He had borne, and a placing Him in righteous glory and infinite delight in His presence as Son. This is the name, which as heard from the horns of the unicorns, He declares to His brethren. Such was His first thought. How sweet is it to see this! The moment He has entered into the enjoyment of this name, of this relationship with God, He must bring His brethren into the same relationship and the same joy. Previously indeed (unless in the very vague expression, "my brother, and sister, and mother") He had never called them brethren. The corn of wheat abode alone. Now redemption was wrought out, and He could bring them into the same place of blessing as Himself: His precious love does it at once. "Thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns. I will declare thy name unto my brethren" (Psa. 22:21-22).

And such we find to be historically the case. Speaking to Mary Magdalene, to whom He first appeared, He says, "Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend up to my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God" (John 20:17). He declares to them the name in which He rejoiced with His Father and God, saluting them as His brethren. God is our Father as well as His, our God as well as His. This is most blessed. If indeed taught by the Spirit, we enter into this love. But the place the Lord then takes shows how thoroughly He sets us in this place of perfect blessing where He is Himself. "In the midst of the congregation will I praise thee" (Psa. 22:22). How sweet to see the Lord leading the praises of the congregation, the poor remnant whom He has gathered by His death and quickened unto joy by His resurrection. Alone, when it was suffering and death for sin, He gathers them all to Himself for the joy He has wrought by it.

And mark the result as to the true character of our praise. Christ, as thus risen into blessedness, having declared to His brethren the name of His God and Father, His praise must be the perfect

answer and reflex of this blessing, of this blessed relationship as He enjoys it as man. And after toil and pain, after death and anguish, after wrath and the righteous forsaking of God, oh, what to Him must have been His entering, as risen from the dead, into the ineffable light and joy of God's countenance, in the perfect place into which He had come by that path of life. "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there pleasures for evermore" (Psa. 16:10-11). Into this He now brings His brethren. He leads the chorus of praise. Thus our praise must be according to the fullness with which Christ knows and enjoys the blessedness of the fruit of His work, and the relationship into which He is entered as man in virtue of it. It must answer to the name He declares to us as heard from the horns of the unicorn and risen, that we may join Him in praising His Father and our Father, His God and our God, or it is out of tune with Him, who leads so blessedly these praises. We must praise with Him on the ground of that blessedness in which He praises, or it is discord.

O for a heart to know and, in some measure, to rise to that place and praise, which such touching and infinite grace gives us! Nothing can give a deeper, more subduing idea of the grace, the perfect grace, into which we are brought, and of the grace of Him who brought us there; of the complete deliverance and sure relationship which we enjoy, than Christ Himself leading our praises as heard and entering into this place. What must His be? But it is in the midst of the congregation He praises. O that indeed by the Spirit our voices may be attuned to follow that praise, that leading inspiring voice of Him, who has loved and not been ashamed to call us brethren; and is gone to His Father and our Father, His God and our God! The degree of realization of joy, the sweetness and loudness of our joining note, depends of course on our spiritual state; but no note that is not founded on the perfect peace and joy of redemption is at all in tune there.

But we have seen that Christ's sufferings from man for righteousness brought judgment on man. His hand will find out all His enemies. But His sufferings from the hand of God for sin bring only blessing, the outflowing of grace alone. This is remarkably shown in Psalm 22 We have seen its character in the remnant of Israel, gathered by His grace, and who formed the nucleus of the church, be they Jew or Gentile. Next, as it will be accomplished in the latter days, He turns to all Israel, that His praise may be in the great congregation (vss. 23-26). Next, the word goes forth to all the ends of the world, to bring them in to this blessed circle of praise. Are they the fat of the earth? they eat and worship.

Are they, be they who they may, those on whom death lies, who go down into the dust (and no man can keep alive his own soul) they must be witnesses of this mighty deliverance by the dying and risen Savior—that is, when the kingdom is Jehovah's, and He is governor among the nations. The seed that shall then have been spared shall serve Him, and then it shall flow down to other generations. "They shall come, and shall declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born" this great and wondrous work of redemption; that that blessed, lowly, afflicted One "had done this" (Psa. 22:31). All is the fruit of redemption and victory. Judgment has stilled its voice. That great deed of atonement, of love and righteousness upon the cross, has left it silent and gone, to make room for the voice of unmingled praise. It is not promise merely now. It is not that they shall be filled who hunger after righteousness; that the meek shall inherit. They that fear the Lord are to praise Him, the meek shall eat and be satisfied; they shall praise the Lord that fear him,

their hearts will live forever. Such is the blessed fruit of the perfect atonement for sin which that blessed One, forsaken of Jehovah—awful thought!—has accomplished for us; never so acceptable to Jehovah, never so perfect in obedience, as when, as to His soul, He suffered for us the forsaking of His wrath. Now the fruit, in unclouded light, is unmingled and unhindered praise, which He who had tasted and drunk that dreadful cup of ours first teaches us in the name of Father and God, in which He delights in righteousness and love, and then leads in the blessed chorus of praise, in which we shall adore forever and ever, His Father and our Father, His God and our God, in, and through, and with Him.

Now, it is for our hearts, through faith; hereafter Israel's and the world's, and the people to be born, the universal witnesses of the power of that work to reconcile and bless, when the kingdom is Jehovah's, and He is governor among the nations—for us, though now in suffering, in a better and heavenly way, but to His just praise then in all the earth.

Psalm 69

There are three states of suffering in which souls may be: first, that which is their portion as sinners under judgment; second, the sufferings of a saint for righteousness or love's sake; third, suffering as the consequence of sin under the government of God.

This last is not judgment and condemnation for sin, nor is it properly the chastening of a saint, though it may be used as such, and brings exercise of soul in such an one. Thus the consequence of Adam's transgression was to eat bread in the sweat of his brow, and the woman was to have sorrow in childbearing, both connected with the government of God. The suffering of the Jews in the latter day will be connected with this kind of suffering, though it will seem as chastening too. It is more difficult to get hold of this third kind of suffering. In it God is dealing with a man about his sins without his coming under condemnation.

No doubt the Lord Jesus went through all these kinds of suffering; of course the first and last as saving or sympathizing with others. In representing God bearing His reproaches, He suffered for righteousness' sake. For His love He had hatred. This was one character of His suffering. The next was that of suffering for the expiation of our sins. Of this, though it is not my purpose now to speak, we can never think enough. We can never get peace until we know it. "He was bruised for our iniquities" (Isa. 53:5). "He bore our sins in his own body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24).

The third class of sufferings He did not go through, except anticipatively, just at the close of His life, when He said, "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened til it be accomplished!" (Luke 12:50). If He had been in it all the time, He would not have spoken of going through it afterward.

At the close He enters into a new scene, not only in the way of expiation, but Satan comes back after he had departed for a season (Luke 4:13). He said, "Hereafter I will not talk much with you; for the prince of this world cometh." The character of suffering is not the present forsaking of God. However, as from Him, Satan stirred up the whole world against Him; but, besides that, He brought the terribleness of distress from a broken law, the power of death, and an angry God to distress His soul.

We get the same character of suffering in the remnant. They go through all the consequences of their conduct in the government of God, though the condemnation they have deserved will not come upon them. Satan will have come down, knowing that he has but a little time. All his violence will be directed against Israel in that day. We have a picture of it in Job. Satan was let loose against him: his friends were against him, and, what was worse, the terrors of God were drinking up his spirit. So with them: Satan will use all his power to bring his terribleness into their hearts. To Peter the Lord said, "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not" (Luke 22;32), when the same occasion for exercise was coming upon him. The remnant will be sustained by the High Priest during all the exercises and trials of heart they will go through.

All through the life of Christ, He never calls God God. We never find Him do so in the gospels until the cross. It would not have been walking in the power of the relationship which was always unhindered. When on the cross, which was expiation, He does not say, “Father,” until all being over, He was commending His spirit to Him, but “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34). All that was against us was there coming out against Him. The favor of God was hidden from Him. Righteousness was coming forth in the execution of judgment for sin. Never was there a moment of the Father’s more perfect delight in Him; but if God was dealing according to His nature and being, it must be against sin, and therefore all was against Him, for He was made sin for us. As soon as He has gone through it, He uses both terms, “Father” and “God.” He comes out as having done the work, and when He has wrought the atonement, He can bring us into the blessed fruit of it. Not only are we brought to the Father but to God, and all that was against us before is for us now. Righteousness, love, etc., are all made for us. The very same things He is in His nature that were against the sinner are for the saint.

Christ, risen out of death, and having entered (sin being put away) into the unclouded joy of God His Father’s countenance, when He had perfectly glorified Him, says to His disciples, “Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God and your God” (John 20:17). All that is connected with these names of God and Father flow out to us. We are holy and without blame before Him in love. “I have manifested thy name,” He says of the Father; but now He could reveal God to them.

This would have been condemnation except through the cross. This is the effect of expiation on our position before God, besides bringing us into the place of children through adoption. Christ then never addressed God as God during His life. When Christ is made sin, then this relationship comes out directly: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” God in His nature was there dealing with that which was contrary to it, that is, with sin. The sin is fully dealt with here, according to the nature of God; Christ has revealed God to us, after He has gone through it. All the revelation of God against sin was wrath; God’s face was hidden. In His suffering then Christ was quite alone. It stood by itself, it was expiation. Chastening for sin is quite another thing. There is love in that; in the other it was wrath, and the effect of it is, not a single cloud is left between us and God.

The suffering of Christ for righteousness’ sake is intelligible enough in its nature, though its depth be hard to fathom. Our place in connection with it is also simple, filling up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ, suffering for love’s sake; and this may go very deep into the soul too; still there is joy with it if not in it, as we find Christ Himself having meat to eat. Going through the world, His heart was refreshed by the thought of souls getting blessing, and yet there was suffering with it. He had consolation from His Father according to His perfect faithfulness, and we may feel with Him, as well as He feels with us. When souls reject the gospel, or the church is going on badly, or saints are losing their own blessing; all this will affect us if we are not insensible, but we shall have balm in suffering in this way.

Psalm 69 expresses this kind of suffering. Christ says, “I was the song of the drunkards.” “In the multitude of thy mercy hear me.” He has access to His Father, getting refreshment from Him. “My prayer is unto thee, O Lord, in an acceptable time.” These sufferings of Christ were deeper, I believe, than we have any idea of. He had all kinds of suffering on the cross; still that from man disappeared in comparison with that for sin from God.

There is often in God's ways with men suffering for righteousness' sake, and suffering for sin, or to prevent it, at the same time (See 2 Cor. 12; Heb. 12). This often causes perplexity. For the Jews, under a sense of a broken law, there will be terrible trial of faith. They will see the ungodly in prosperity, while it is promised to the godly that "they shall flourish like the palm tree." The consequence of following in the way of righteousness brings dreadful trial on them, and yet what they go through is also in consequence of their sins, yet not condemnation. The nation has received Antichrist, because they would not have the Lord Jesus. At the same time the terrors of the law enter the soul of the righteous, and Satan uses it all against them, urging that they have broken the law. Death is the judgment of God for sin. Who has the power of it? Satan. They cry out in their distress, and God delivers them; but Satan presents death as a terror, and as the judgment of God, to bring their sins to remembrance. They suffer from their sins, but yet they have integrity, and are in the place of exercising integrity. They are brought so low that, though faith is not extinct, they scarcely have any. "Shall he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8). They cry, "How long!" There is faith in the word, but it is near coming to an end. They are like a teil-tree in winter, with no signs of life in it, their leaves all cast. Yet this remnant is the sap of life in the midst of death, and the prophet says, "How long?" The expression "how long?" implies some faith left. They are as though they were cast off, yet hold to God's promise. It cannot be forever. There is the integrity of heart which will not willfully break the law, and a terror of judgment, knowing what sin has deserved. The weapon Satan will use in that day is the truth of God; not the grace but the truth.

Many souls are in this state now, because of integrity of heart, and their sins are all brought up to the conscience. Satan is there, and the Lord allows him to sift the soul, because He has to lay the sins on the conscience, and it is a very terrible exercise when the grace which meets the need is not known. The sorrow of this Christ went through, when He was going indeed to bear the sins. He went through it for them. If they feel the terror of judgment for their own sins, which they will ultimately escape, that they may morally learn their state and need, and God display His righteous government, Christ went through the wrath, and did not escape, and at the close of His path went through the anticipation of it, which Satan, as the prince of darkness, pressed upon His soul, perfect in looking to God there as everywhere, and the spring by His Spirit to them for right feelings, when they pass through the shadow of it as an exercise of heart. This suffering of the remnant is not suffering with Christ. They get a little comfort by an influx of hope, and they are down again in the mire. It is an alternation of almost despairing and hoping. Christ never went through this in His life, but He did go through it in death, Gethsemane, and drawing near to it, only that He was perfect in His feelings in it.

A redeemed soul may be going through many exercises of conflict between self and Satan to learn that there is no good in itself. We are cast on a good out of ourselves. There must be practically the knowledge of good and evil in the conscience. Different characters need different experience. If there be pride of nature, where there is much levity of soul, or where dangers and temptations are before us, great exercises may be needed to make the value of Christ known. You cannot prescribe to God a form of experience, but the soul must learn from Christ good and evil; all the good as coming from Him, and the evil as in our will and nature where it lives. Some often go through great exercise that they may be used to others. But this solemn question of what good and evil is must be learned under the government of God and with Satan against us. Christ went through the trial of this. No evil indeed was in Him, and perfect good was; but His perfect

obedience as a man was put to the test and He was tempted in all points like as we are, except sin. Would He stop in obedience because of what it cost? Would He allow the entrance of evil into His soul? Blessed be God, we know His obedience was perfect even unto death and the drinking of that bitter cup, and not the smallest thought of evil could ever find an entrance into His soul. The question of good and evil was tried to the uttermost, but only to show the utter exclusion of all evil by One who was always good, and walking in perfect good kept the evil always at a distance as such; that is, He was perfect as man, perfect with God.

In us the conflict and trial ends in the full acknowledgment of evil in ourselves and of perfect good in Him, and the victory too of good received from Him in life and maintained by Him in grace in our hearts. His soul then was to go through the conflict—not as though He had the evil, but as tested by Satan and doing it for God's glory and our sakes—whether in the presence of good and evil He will go through all and glorify God; and He says, "As the Father gave me commandment, even so I do" (John 14:31). Then He was to go through it as a real man. He says to His disciples, "Tarry ye here"; but all that man is was used by Satan. Then His own forsake Him. He is left without comfort, which yet His soul would seek and did, and left exposed to Satan without any and alone. "This is your hour, and the power of darkness" (Luke 22:53). Angels, indeed, came and ministered unto Him. This loneliness the remnant will not be tried by. "They that feared the Lord spake often one to another" (Mal. 3:16). No sorrow was like His. All that man was is turned against Him. He looked for comforters but found none. Then He goes through the power of death. (I am not speaking of expiation now, but of death as an evil pressing on man and Satan's power in it, yet as terror looking forward.) Was He to give way? Was He to take it from Satan and so enter into the temptation and shrink from it, or fall into despair, or go through in obedience and drink this cup of wrath, taking all this evil and bearing the judgment of God for it? He went through "with strong crying and tears" (Heb. 5:7). He went through as none other could.

The remnant will, in their measure, go through this exercise as an exercise of heart. Christ takes up language for them, "Thou knowest my foolishness," etc. That was not His own; He takes up the language with Israel that He may go through with them and sympathize with them (not in the way of yet actually working out expiation). He will come to them in it, but not to take them out of it, because they must learn what sin is—learn it in integrity and in the presence of Satan, fearing lest they should not get from under it, though indeed they will be delivered. He can come and sustain the soul under the trial and inspire faith under it, and show them how to bear it. They are to be sifted as wheat, the grain not falling through, though the chaff does. He can minister faith to them, as to Peter, with a look at the right moment. They will see there is something to hope for. They may say, After all there is grace for a poor sinner, and then be sinking down in the mire again as bad as ever, while learning what sin is morally before God and under the power of Satan, appealing to God against the thing He has pronounced judgment upon.

Thus they will learn the evil of Satan and the flesh, and bless. God for deliverance. They will be walking in darkness while hearing the word. There is no praise nor liberty in that state. See Isaiah 50:10. In Christ there was no inward darkness, but the whole: power of it, as He says, was pressed upon His soul. "This is your hour, and the power of darkness" (Luke 22:53), and His soul was sorrowful, even unto death. We should not be in that condition. The path of obedience is not the path of darkness to us, though there may be darkness in getting into it., They are told to trust. There is something for faith to lay hold of, a rope to cling to in the waters; until they come to know

the full redemption accomplished.

It is important for us not to miss a perception of all these different sufferings of Christ. We should not go into it in a mere critical spirit—that is ruinous—but with the heart. It is most important also to remember that in expiation He was alone, without a ray of comfort, all light hidden. Besides, men being all against Him, He has all the power of Satan to meet, and then the wrath of God. Perfect absolute obedience, came but when put to the test. He went through everything. He was left alone in His own perfectness with evil there, made sin—and wrath came upon it—for God to be glorified. What the sufferings of Christ were, none can fathom; what this grand solution of the question of ‘good and evil: We shall reap, the blessedness in perfect good, blessed be the name of our God, where no evil can enter.

Chapter 15

Promise Fulfilled and God Revealed in Grace

Luke 4 and 5

I hardly know whether the thoughts I send you suit your little journal, but trust that all that unfolds the way the blessed Lord presented Himself on the earth, the connection of the Old Testament with the New, and the revealing of God in man upon the earth, will be profitable to some of your readers at least.

I forward to you therefore some remarks on the Gospel of Luke, flowing from thoughts which have arisen in my mind while lately reading it. There are two great subjects in the life of the blessed Lord which Luke brings out: the fulfillment of promise, and the revelation of God in grace in the “Son of man.” These are presented to us in the history in a very interesting way. I will notice this as displayed in chapters 4 and 5.

In chapter 4 the Spirit of God has shown us the blessed One led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil, victorious in trial, as the first man had failed in it. He returns in the power of the Spirit into Galilee, having first bound the strong man. Let me remark here, in passing, how faithfulness in trial and temptation shows the power of the Spirit as much as the energy of action. Jesus was led by the Spirit to be tempted, overcame Satan by the word through the Spirit, and returned in its power, working miracles and casting out devils. But the power has been exercised all through the temptation, only in standing fast. See Ephesians 6. Therein He had overcome Satan, baffled his power, really bound the strong man, and then had only to spoil his goods. He used, too, the weapon we have to use, the word of God; only we must remark that we learn from Ephesians 6, that to use the word we must first have all the defensive armor, that is, the state of the soul must be right. Christ, of course, was perfect and used it perfectly.

In the measure of our spirituality and uprightness we shall be able to wield this blessed weapon. But here even the sword was a defensive weapon. He met the wiles of Satan by it. Whatever reasonings or scriptures Satan may use, if we are spiritual enough to use it, the word of God suffices to confound him.

But to turn to my more direct subject. The Lord now stood as man, anointed of the Holy Spirit, having overcome Satan, to make good the grace and goodness of God amongst men, and specially first amongst the Jews; but the glory of His divine Person was not to be hid. But first He presents Himself as the anointed Man, fulfilling all that had been promised in grace.

I must remark another point. The Lord looks for rejection: and this it will be seen is the case in both the characters in which He presents Himself. First, then, as the anointed Man. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.” Thus He presents Himself as the fulfiller of promise, announcing the favorable and gracious time of God’s mercy in His own person. “This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.” But at the same time He

tells them that He will be rejected. A prophet has not honor in his own country. But He adds that grace, as grace, passed beyond the limits of the Jews; that God was sovereign in His goodness, and of old had sent help to two Gentiles, while many remained in sorrow in rebellious Israel. This the haughty Jews would not bear, and, gracious as His words had been, they are now ready to destroy Him for preaching a grace which Israel might lose all part in, as rejecting Him, and the Gentile get blessing by. They are ready to destroy Him, but it was not the time, and He passed through the midst of them.

Now see the character in which the devils own Him; how it meets this character in which He was really come. How sad a picture! Devils perforce own Him; men reject Him with hatred. It is remarkable how these evil spirits own Him according to the truth (as we may remember the spirit of divination did Paul), but surely only as dreading, and, if they could have done so, avoiding His power. “Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art; the holy One of God.” It was the reluctant owning of a power they could not avoid. The time was not come to cast them into the pit, but to deliver man. They came out of the man at Jesus’s word.

But this title (the holy One) was a prophetic one of Jesus; and this title as summing up all the mercies of God. It is unfolded in Psalm 89. The word “mercies” in the first verse of that psalm is the same as “holy One” in verse 19. “Holy One” in verse 18 is quite different. Mercy was to be built up forever, the psalm declares. How? “Thou spakest in vision of [not ‘to,’ I think, but about, as we see that of the prophecy, Psalm 72, ‘A psalm about Solomon’] thy holy One,” thy gracious One, in whom help and mercy are summed up. “I have laid help upon one that is mighty; I have exalted one chosen out of the people. I have found David my servant,” etc. Here, no doubt, the immediate subject is David; but in the mind of God a greater, even Christ, is here. The evil spirit owns that this holy One is there in the Person of Jesus of Nazareth. Help was indeed laid upon the mighty One, who having overcome Satan wholly, could have delivered man from all the miserable fruits of his power, even death itself; but man would have none of Him. He must be redeemed or lost.

Next, in chapter 4, when healing many, the devils who are cast out own Him as the Christ the Son of God. This was owning His title as promised to Israel in Psalm 2; but which also witnessed to His rejection. Thus the power of present delivering goodness, in the promised One, was there. He is owned the holy One of God in whom mercies came to Israel, as the Christ and Son of God spoken of in Psalm 2 But in His own country He is not received. The prejudices and passions of man rise up against grace and this gracious One, while the devils own Him, but through dread; a strange but solemn picture! They could not but know Him. But what is knowledge when only such? Those He really came to would not receive Him.

In chapter 5 He is seen in another character. He reveals, and is, Jehovah. In the miraculous draft of fishes He makes Himself known to the conscience of Peter. He sees the Lord in it, and acknowledges himself a sinful man, unfit for His presence. This is always the effect of the revelation of God to us, and indeed of nothing else. Jesus speaks words of grace, “Fear not.” From henceforth he should catch men. In what follows He heals the leper, which was Jehovah’s work alone. But there was a special circumstance connected with this, full of blessed significance. The leper recognized His power, but was not sure of His goodness or willingness to help him. “Lord [he says], if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.” The Lord does not merely say He is willing, He puts

forth His hand and touches him. Now, if a man touched a leper he too was unclean, and must be put out of the camp. But here was a divine Person come down, Jehovah, who could cleanse; One who could say, “I will”; “be”; One who could not be defiled, but had for that very reason come down to touch the defiled one, and remove the defilement. He was Jehovah, come as man, to touch, so to speak, the sinner in grace.

Jesus was One whose holiness was so perfect, as God become man, that He could carry divine love to the vilest; carry it wherever a need or a sorrow was, and as love touch the defiled, not to become so, but to heal. It is a wonderful picture of what Christ, Jehovah, present to heal was in this world. This revealing Himself to the conscience, and doing a divine work in love, in what was a figure of cleansing from sin, mark Him out as Jehovah in the world in grace.

He withdraws Himself into the wilderness and prays; ever the dependent, as the obedient and victorious Man. But other elements of divine grace are yet to be observed here. He was sitting with doctors of the law, ready to object to grace, and ignorant of how the Son of God had in manhood visited this sinful world in the power and title of divine grace. One sick of the palsy is brought to Him by faith. He goes to the root of all sorrow, and says, “Thy sins be forgiven thee.” The question is not here how through the precious death of Christ forgiveness was consistent with divine righteousness and glorified it. What is here revealed, is Jehovah present in full unmingled grace. As the testimony and witness of this, the Lord does what is ascribed to Jehovah in Psalm 103, along with the forgiveness of sins. “Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases.”

Lastly, the Lord shows, as the friend of publicans and sinners, that He had come in sovereign grace to gather in the power of good, not looking for it in man. But thus also He must be rejected. This new wine, for it was so, could not be put into old bottles; Judaism could not receive and be the vessel of sovereign grace; nor could those who were used to Judaism easily receive the new wine of the gospel and spirit of God. And so it ever is in all ages.

Chapter 16

The Resurrection

1 Corinthians 15

The resurrection after all is that which is the full and perfect deliverance from the whole effect and consequence of sin. At the same time it shows that what God has predestinated us to is an entirely new estate and condition of things altogether. Nothing is more important than that we should clearly apprehend what it is God is about; whether He is correcting the old thing, or setting up an entirely new thing. Now the resurrection shows that God is not bringing about a modification of the scene in which we are, but that He is bringing in a totally new power. The discernment of this has the most important effect upon the way of life, the modes of seeking to do good, the objects and efforts of Christians. Christ went about doing good, and we are of course to follow His example; but what of the state of things around did Christ correct or set right when down here? Nothing! The very result of the Lord's coming into the midst of the Jewish nation was just this, that they rejected, hated, and crucified the Prince of life and Lord of glory. The Lord Jesus went about doing good, but seemingly in vain. Still none of God's counsels have failed; but as to the outward result, the Lord said, "I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for naught" (Isaiah 49:4). And so far as the outward scene went, in which He labored, there was no kind of restoration; for the more love Christ manifested, it only brought out more fully man's hatred to Him. "For my love they are my adversaries" (Psa. 109:4).

The resurrection introduces an entirely new scene, so that Paul says, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17). Now it is a very difficult thing for men to submit their minds to this truth, because it plainly tells man that, in himself as man, he is totally and utterly ruined. It is quite true, and I fully admit, that naturally man has great and wonderful faculties; and faculties which, it may be, will be much more developed than they now are. But still, with all this, man morally is utterly ruined and lost. Paul opens out in this chapter what the character and power of resurrection is, the resurrection of the just being the subject of it, although that of the unjust is also glanced at. It is not merely God acting in sovereign power, which can take a dead thing out of the state of death; but by virtue of association with the life of Christ we have participation in Christ's resurrection. It is not only that we are blessed, but blessed with Christ. If He lives, we also live together with Him. "Because I live, ye shall live also" (John 14:19). If He is the righteousness of God, "we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Cor. 5:21). If He is heir of glory, we are "joint-heirs with Christ," and "where I am, there shall also my servant be" (John 12:26). If He is the Son, we are sons also. "I ascend to my Father and your Father." We are put, through grace, into this wonderful place of sons; so that it is a real thing; and having thus been brought by adoption from a state of sin to that of sons, the Holy Spirit is given to us as the power of our enjoyment of it. Such is the marvelous place into which we are brought, even that of everlasting companionship with Christ, "members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones" (Eph. 5:30). Man down here on the earth "disquieteth himself in vain"; for wonderful as his natural faculties may be, as soon as his "breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish" (Psa. 146:4). What then

becomes of his wondrous faculties? All is gone; for there is no fruit whatever reaped by himself. The man may have directed the world, but what of that, if death comes in and writes nothingness on all his powers? Another may come after him and improve upon what he has done, but it is all gone as regards himself forever, although the man has a moral responsibility in connection with it all.

In this chapter the apostle was meeting the minds of those who had cast doubts on the resurrection, but not on immortality. A man will cast doubts on the resurrection, while he will speak of his immortality and magnify himself in it because it is me. It is I that am immortal. But if I am the dead thing God raises from the dead, what then—where am I? Why my pride is brought down, and God's power is brought in and exalted. Therefore if I am talking of immortality, I am talking of myself; but if talking of resurrection, I am wholly cast on God.

Resurrection is connected with death (I now speak of believers), but it is the coming in of God's power to deliver from the power of death; not merely an escape from my sins, but a full and perfect deliverance from all the consequences of my sins, so that even the very dust of my body will be raised in divine glory. In Christ's death I also get another truth, which is, that my resurrection is consequent on Christ's death and resurrection. I share in it as forgiven; for Christ quickens me, in virtue of having put away my sins. "And you, being dead in your sins…hath he quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses" (Col. 2:13). We are partakers of the life in which Christ is risen; so that I have a life totally discharged from all question of sin; for I cannot have life without having forgiveness, and hence rest and peace.

Christ had an unchangeable life as Son of God; but He died as a man; for there was complete evidence given through many incontrovertible proofs that He was really a dead man, and that He was raised from the dead and seen of "witnesses chosen before of God." How entirely Christ, by the grace of God, tasted death for every man is seen by His being raised from the dead. All the gospel rests on the resurrection of Christ. There is no gospel at all, unless there is the resurrection. This is a point of the deepest interest, showing how really Christ entered into the case. So truly was Christ dead in consequence of our sins, that if He did not rise from the dead, then all is utterly gone forever. But so completely was Christ a dead man for us, that if He is not raised from the dead, no man can ever be raised. And if dead people are not raised, then is Christ not raised. Yet we know He could not be holden of death; that were impossible. It is most important for us clearly to see and understand this, that our faith and hope may be "in God which raiseth the dead" (2 Cor. 1:9). Thus everything that could possibly come between the sinner and God has been entirely removed—the burden of sin on the soul— God's wrath against sin—Satan's power—the weakness of man in death. Christ put Himself under all this. "He bore our sins," for He cried "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34). By grace Christ put Himself entirely in our place. He who knew no sin was made sin for us. All my sins are therefore entirely gone: He bore them all on the cross, and went down under the power of death, and rose again without them. Has death any more power over Him? No, for He is risen in the power of an endless life. But still He has been there on account of our sins, and has entirely put away the sin that took Him there, having risen without them. What then can there be between me and God which Christ has not entirely put away? Nothing. Seeing then that Christ has so completely acted out this condition before God, death is no longer death to me; it has lost its power and its terror too; for now death to me is simply departing "to be with Christ." It is to be "absent from the body, and to be

present with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:8); it is but the getting rid of a mortal body.

The power of the resurrection is distinctive; and it is of great importance to see this. God’s eye rested on the blessed One who had glorified Him about man’s sin; so that He takes Him from amongst the dead up to Himself. We see a whole course of sin had gone on to the full accomplishment even of putting God’s Son to death on the cross. But over all this evil Christ gained so complete a victory, and so thoroughly glorified every attribute of God about man’s sin, that God’s eye rested on this blessed and righteous One with complete satisfaction. And thus, as He said, was the world convinced of righteousness, “because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more” (John 16:10). But now, we who believe see Him—that is, by faith; being quickened together with Him, having all trespasses forgiven us. For God does not raise a saint to condemn him—no; but to make him a partaker of all Christ is. For Christ has accomplished a righteousness on which God has set His seal, in that He raised Him from the dead. God’s eye being fixed on this accomplished righteousness, this object of His love, He took Him up to Himself; and having quickened us together with Christ, we are made partakers of it. Were there no resurrection, it would be complete abandonment by God; for He is not the God of the dead but of the living. And “if in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.” For if Christ be not raised, our preaching is vain; we have not been preaching the truth of the gospel, but preaching a lie: and your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins.

But now comes a full burst of testimony to this accomplished work: “Now is Christ risen from the dead.” Thus the righteous and beloved One is raised out of this scene into an entirely new one, even that of becoming the first-fruits of them that slept. For if Christ be raised, His saints must be raised, as a Head cannot be raised without a body: it would be monstrous. There is then the broad statement in John 17, “Thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.” The resurrection comes in, not by the power of God only, but also by man. “For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.” It is the Man Christ Jesus coming in, in power. Every created thing, the whole universe, is to be wholly put under this righteous Man, this now glorified Man, the second Adam. He only is excepted which did put all things under Him—that is, God the Father.

As spiritual men, we now belong to the Last Adam, being content now to suffer with Him, that we may be glorified together with Him. “As we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.” Christ had the heart to come down to us. He did not throw down the blessing to us from heaven, but He came Himself to bring it. Such was His wondrous love—a love which was stronger than death. Now He is set down at the right hand of God, expecting till His enemies be made His footstool. Meanwhile He is gathering out His joint-heirs—His friends. Christ came in grace, and took our place as sinners; and now takes us up to His place of righteousness: for to sit with Him on His throne is to be our place; and this through a real living association with Himself. He is the First-born among many brethren. He wrought the work alone, but He takes His power with the many. We may be burdened, groaning in conflict: still we have certainty. The Holy Spirit is the witness of what Christ has done for us; we are “made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor. 5:21). What a thought, that I have this standing before God, though vile in myself! In virtue of this I hate sin, because it is so different from what I actually am there.

All power in heaven and earth is given to Christ. All are to be brought under His power. Not only will His saints bow before Him—who do it now with delight, in the power of a new life; but His enemies must bow before Him. He is gathering His friends now, but His enemies will be dealt with by-and-by. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. The wicked dead are glanced at here; for when death's power is destroyed, the wicked dead must all rise, as being no longer holden of it. What a different resurrection will this be to the resurrection of the saints, in virtue of their association with Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit! (Rom. 8:11) Then, when all things are made subject, and Christ shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father, the mediatorial reign will be at an end, because God will be all in all. Therefore Christ will not be ruling as the mediatorial man then; but Christ the man will never cease to be "the first born among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29). Subjection is man's perfection. Therefore Christ's subjection as man results from His perfection. "Then shall the Son also himself be subject." This is most blessed, that forever and forever He will be in our midst—He whose heart is love—He who, as the Man of sorrows here, brought down God's love to us! He will take His place in our midst as the second Adam, as the Head and Source and Channel of every blessing.

If I am now joying in God, it is in virtue of being risen with Christ, God's perfect delight. Why is it that God has given us so full a revelation of these things as He has by His word and Spirit, but that we might know and enjoy them now in our souls? as David says, "For thy word's sake, and according to thine own heart, hast thou done all these great things, to make thy servant know them" (2 Sam. 7:21). God has given us intelligence of these things, that knowing and enjoying them we may be sanctified by them. The simple child who loves his father knows more about the relationship than the philosopher who might write volumes on the subject. The child would be astonished that one should be unable to understand that love of the father which he as an affectionate child was living in the enjoyment of, but still he might not be able to explain it. Unless we are in the relationship, we can never enter into the feelings which result from it. The relationship is not formed in heaven. The fruits of it will be enjoyed there, but the relationship is formed here on the earth; while the one who is known and loved as a father, being in heaven, the child wishes to be there, as it is very natural for the child to be with the father. Fellowship is more than inheritance. It is most blessed to have the inheritance beneath our feet, but it is much more blessed to have fellowship with God as our Father above us. We have poor foolish hearts needing to be exercised; but still we have accomplished glory, accomplished righteousness, and all in virtue of the accomplished work of Christ, so that our hearts bow before Him. The reason of all this blessedness is—"That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:7). The more faithfulness there is in us, the more sorrows doubtless; but then there will be consolations abounding. Only let us take up the cross, and if it be really the cross, we shall find Jesus with it, and the earnest and spring of glory in our hearts.

The power then which delivers us from wrath, from sin, and from Satan, is the resurrection of Christ in virtue of His accomplished righteousness, and thus we are brought into fellowship with Him. Our portion, whether in suffering down here or in glory up there, is all in Christ, as the One risen from the dead. The Lord keep our hearts full of rejoicing, crucifying the flesh, and as being dead to law, sin, and the world. We live to God in the same power in which Christ lives. The Lord give us thankful hearts for His unspeakable mercy.

Chapter 17

To Him That Overcometh

Revelation 2

The failure of man, of the church, even, does not touch the source of divine grace—the goodness of God. From Adam downwards everything placed in the hand of man has failed; but this very failure and evil of man has been made the opportunity by God of showing our more and richer grace.

He judges the failure, and then presents an object of hope. When Adam sinned, “the seed of the woman” was promised. When the law was broken and Israel failed, prophetic testimony came in and all the promises of the Messiah. Promise is that on which faith can rest when everything else fails.

Times of declension and unfaithfulness in the body give occasion for brighter manifestations of grace in individuals, who under such circumstances are brought into the enjoyment of close and blessed communion with God. See Elijah, Moses. Moses had to leave the camp (Ex. 33), because the golden calf was there, and to go outside: but in so doing he got into a place of greater nearness to God than he had ever known before—”And the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend.”

At the beginning of the gospel dispensation the energy of the Holy Spirit was so plainly manifested in the church, that man was nothing, God everything. This is of course true to faith all through the dispensation. But then, even after these epistles to the churches were given, things had become sadly changed. The Lord, in this and the following chapter, turns His eye to that which should have been “the place of righteousness,” and behold “iniquity is there”; therefore it is necessary that judgment begin at the house of God, as it is said, “The Lord shall judge his people” (Heb. 10:30). At first this is in the way of testimony against the evil; for the Lord ever warns before He executes judgment, and in judgment He remembers mercy.

The Lord takes notice of every circumstance, every shade of difference, in these churches, as also in individuals in them; thus showing that He is not indifferent as to the state of His people by the way—their daily steps, because He has secured blessing to them at the end. 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 be sure eventually to inherit his father’s property, but then what parent would be satisfied (if he loved his child) without 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 the Lord’s love with His children! This is for our comfort and blessing—there is wonderful comfort in seeing it to be the spring of all God’s dealings with us; but at the same time it is intended to act strongly on our conscience in the way of warning.

We have to remember that the church, and indeed every individual saint, is set in the place of direct conflict with Satan, the more so because of the high standing and privilege given us in Christ. Now it may be in triumphant victory, as it is said, “the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly” (Rom 16:20). To effect the purpose of God’s glory, coming in as it will by-and-by when He shall establish His kingdom, we know that Satan must be really fully dethroned; but in order, even now (before that time comes), that we realize our blessings in heavenly places (Eph. 1:3), it is needful he should be practically dethroned from the heart through the power of the Holy Spirit. Although it is quite certain that he shall be bruised under our feet “shortly” (there is no doubt, of course, about the power of the Lord Jesus to do it), yet the certainty of Christ’s final victory with the church should not lessen our sense of the power of the enemy in the meantime. This is so great as to make constant watchfulness necessary, for without it we shall be giving him a direct handle against ourselves. The flesh, by which Satan works, is still present, and it needs to be “mortified.” Perhaps we have often been surprised at grievous falls in ourselves or others; but if we fail to watch against the flesh, it is not really at all surprising such should be the result. Habitual faithfulness in judging the flesh in little things is —the secret of not falling.

The promise at the close of each of these messages to the churches is addressed to “him that overcometh.” As stated above, it has ever been in times of general failure that the promises of God have been most graciously brought out, and that His faithful ones have had increased communion, being thrown thereby more entirely upon Himself. If, through any measure of faithfulness, we find ourselves in trial and exercise of soul because of corporate general declension, that is just the very time we should look for more intimate revelation of the grace of God and of His love to our hearts. And this will be not only in giving us clear and firm apprehension of the promises of God, but also in a fuller knowledge of all that in Christ which is suited to be drawn upon by our need. He that is faithful may ever count on this. The principle is clearly seen in these epistles, both in the promises, and also in the different character in which the Lord Jesus presents Himself according to the circumstances of each “church.” It is very sad to see man (whether it be in Israel, the church, or any other place) always failing; but still the faithful ones in the midst of failure find a fuller, deeper revelation of the grace of God, even through it, than when all is going on well. This is most blessed!

From the message to “the church of Ephesus” (vss. 1-7), we see that there had already been failure there—failure in its “first love.” And therefore, instead of being spoken to (as Paul’s Epistle to the same church) of the high and holy things connected with the church at large, or of being addressed as occupying the place of witness and testimony to others, the eye has to be turned inward to its own state, a clear proof how far it had declined. When a church or an individual Christian is walking in the light, and not grieving the Spirit, there can then be entrance into the privileges belonging to the whole church of God; but when the Spirit is grieved, there can no longer be this revelation: each is shut up in its own particular state and judged. The message is from Him “that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks” (vs. 1), the Lord taking the place of examination and judgment.

The overcoming spoken of (vs. 7), and indeed throughout the chapter, is not so much the overcoming of the world and that which was without, as of all the evil discovered to be within. There had been a leaving of the “first love”; and when there is diminution of this in the smallest degree, the Lord says, “I have somewhat against thee” (vs. 4). He takes notice of the least failure.

Whenever it has begun He speaks of excision, and inflicts it too unless there be repentance. We always find that in judging God goes back to the original sin. When Stephen charges the Jews (Acts 7), although they had crucified the Lord Jesus, that which he goes back to is their first sin, of making the golden calf.

And thus with an individual Christian. There is often failure when the first glow of zeal is gone off. At such a time, we have not only to see where the failure is manifested, but when it was we first went away from the Lord, and we shall very generally find it to have been in getting out of communion, this leaving of the “first love.” Well, this should not be and is not necessary; but even when it is the case, the grace of the Lord will still be found greater than all the evil that is discovered to be within.

We see peculiarity of blessing (vs. 7). It is to the eye and ear of faith that the Lord brings out the promise of “the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.” He sees the church failing in fellowship with God, and therefore sets before it “the tree of life,” and “the paradise of God.” It is God’s paradise: blessed security! there can be no declension there. It was man’s paradise first; failure came in, and lest he should take of the fruit of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever, “He drove out the man” (Gen 3:24): but now the promise to “him that overcometh” is to eat of the tree of life freely, and in security in “the paradise of God.”

Whilst we feed on the fruit of it, “the leaves of the tree” will be “for the healing of the nations” (Rev. 22:2). When the church is in glory, it will not lose the character of grace. God gives us now to feed on the bread of life; our first delight must be in God, but then, secondarily, we have the joy of love in being made ministers of blessing unto others. Well, so also in glory our portion will be grace, but we shall be able likewise to minister in grace to others.

In the case of “the church in Smyrna” (vss. 8-11), they had begun the downward course; but the Lord had come in most graciously, and arrested the decay by tribulation. I say most graciously, for one goes wonderfully quickly down hill unless a strong hand stop us.

The souls were in tribulation, poverty, and persecution, and how does the Lord reveal Himself? As the One whom nothing can touch, not all the clouds and storms, the difficulties and trials affect (like the sun, bright before the storm and bright after it) “the FIRST and the LAST” (vs. 8). “Yes,” it may be said, “this is true of Him; but then the storm rolls over us, and threatens to overwhelm: we have no power against it.” But He reveals Himself not only as “the First and the Last”—the One therefore on whom we may lean for eternal strength—but also as He who “was dead, and is alive.” He says, as it were, I have gone through it all, I have entered into the weakness of man, and undergone all the power that could come against it, all the trials even unto death—I have entered into everything, for I have died, and yet I am alive.

There is nothing that the Lord has not gone through: death is the last effort of Satan’s power; it ends there for the sinner, as well as for the saint. The unconverted even are out of Satan’s power when they die: if they die in their sins, of course they come under the judgment of God, but Satan has no power in hell. He may have pre-eminence in misery, but no power there (his reigning is some poet’s dream, it is here he reigns, and that by means of the pride and vanity, the evil passions and idleness, of men); he is “the ruler of the darkness of this world” (Eph. 6:12); not of the next.

But whatever may be the extent of power which he seeks now to exercise against the children of God, the Lord says, I have been under it—I have been dead. Therefore, it is impossible for us to be in any circumstance of difficulty or of trial through which Jesus has not been. He has met the power of Satan there; and yet He is alive. And now He is “alive for evermore,” not only to sustain us while passing through the storm, but to feel for, to sympathize, as having experienced more than all the heaviness of the circumstances in which we are. He can pity with the utmost tenderness, for He came into the very center of our misery. But the weakness of God is stronger than man, and though Christ was dead, yet he is alive.

“I know thy works” (vs. 9). The Lord recognizes all that He can in us. We may say our works are not what we could desire them to be: and it is very true they are not, but then the Lord knows them. Though it is a right and useful thing for us to judge ourselves in order to detect the evil and correct it, yet it is very bad and unhealthy to be always occupied in considering whether our works will be approved of by God. The answer to all our thoughts and estimate about ourselves is, “I know your works”: your business is to know Me. He presents Himself as our object, not our own works. “And poverty.” Certainly riches never entered into the church of God without producing more trial and difficulty. You may see rich men giving their riches to relieve the poverty of others, and this is very blessed; but wherever the character of riches continues it enfeebles the energies of the church of God.

There were all sorts of opposition to the faithful in this church, but what does the Lord say to them? “Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer” (vs. 10). It is the constant effort of Satan to produce in us fear and discouragement when passing through trial; but the Lord says, “fear none of those things.” In like manner the Philippians are told to be “in nothing terrified by their adversaries”; again in Peter we read, “be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled” (1 Peter 3:14). Our wisdom is ever to rest confidently in Him who is “the First and the Last,” who rises up in as great power at the end as at the beginning. The Lord does not say to this church, “I will save you from suffering,” for suffering was needful in order to prevent it from tumbling headlong into decay; just as Israel was obliged in consequence of its sin to go a long way round the desert, and yet the Lord says, as it were, to some among them who were faithful, Do not be the least uneasy. So here His word is “fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer.”

In the beginning of the failure in “the churches” the promise to the “overcomer” in the midst of the decay was, that he should eat, in security and peace, of the “tree of life”; so again here, in a time of especial suffering and trial, there is held out, as a stimulus (to the new man of course), a recompense of reward. If they lost everything, they should gain everything. The Lord’s own voice encourages—“be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; he that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death” (Rev. 2:10-11). He may be hurt of the first death, but not of the second—the only real exclusion from the presence of God.

In the message to “the church in Pergamos” (vss. 12-17) the Lord is seen exercising a special form of judicial power, as “He which hath the sharp sword with two edges” (vs. 12). We read (Heb. 4) “the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart”: and the Lord is here presented as having this thoroughly

piercing power, which judges and discerns the secret workings of the heart and conscience.

“I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan’s seat is” (vs. 13). That is where the church now found itself, “where Satan’s throne is” (for he is the prince of it) —in the world. And the faithful may find themselves there too, if the church be there (Caleb and Joshua had to go the whole round of the wilderness with the rest, though not sharers in their unbelief); we have to separate ourselves from the evil around, though we may not be separate from its results. We may find ourselves to be in feebleness and weakness, as the faithful in this church did; but our comfort like theirs is that the Lord says, “I know thy works, and where thou dwellest.”

God in His grace takes full knowledge of all that concerns us; not only of our conduct, our ways and condition, but also of the circumstances in which we are, saying as it were, I know that you are where Satan’s seat is, and this, even when He may still have “somewhat against” us. There is great comfort in knowing this. We might be placed, by means over which we had no control, in a very trying position, but in one which it might not be at all the mind of the Lord that we should quit, where Christian conduct would be very difficult; as, for instance, a converted child in an ungodly worldly family, where there is nothing of the Spirit of Christ. The Lord would not merely in such a case judge His child’s conduct, as to those things in which she might have failed. He would do that indeed, but He would also take the most thorough knowledge and notice of the circumstances in which she was, yes, of every little circumstance that rendered it trying. He just as well knew the power of Pharaoh, and the detail of his tyranny, as He did the crying and groans of the Israelites. “I know,” He says, “that he will not let you go.” There is indeed great comfort in thus seeing the Lord’s perfect knowledge as to where we dwell, because it may not be always His will to take us out of the place, nor yet to change the circumstances in which we are. He may choose to have us glorify Him there, and learn through them what, perhaps, we could not learn elsewhere.

We are too apt to think we must do great works in the Lord’s name, in order to glorify Him; there may not always be opportunity for this (there does not appear to have been opportunity for great works in service without to this church). He takes notice if we do but hold fast His name amidst circumstances which make even that measure of faithfulness difficult “Thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith” (vs. 13).

The Lord gives His people all this encouragement, and yet says, “I have a few things against thee” (vss. 14-15). In the first place, they were slipping back into the world, some of them, having already fallen into the habits of it, “eating and drinking with the drunken” Matt. 11:19). And secondarily, they were beginning to allow of evil in the church, through pretense of liberty. He therefore warns—”Repent, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth” (vs. 16). Worldliness characterized the danger of this church, and it required the sword with two edges to cut between their evil and the circumstances in which they were; if this were not effected, it is I “will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.”

But at the same time that He thus warns, there is plenty of encouragement given—promises suited to counteract their temptations (vs. 17). Were they tempted “to eat things sacrificed unto idols” with the world? the promise to “him that overcometh” is, I “will give to eat of the hidden manna.” If they had grace to separate themselves from the open evil, He would reward them with the unseen blessing of the heavenly places, there should be this feeding on “the hidden manna.” Again: were they tempted to deny the name and faith of Christ? the promise given is “a white stone, and in the

stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it": to keep them from slipping back into the world, to strengthen them in incurring, as must needs be, in separation, the disapprobation of so many, He promises them inward blessings to cheer their hearts.

The "white stone" seems to mark the individual approbation of Christ; the "new name," peculiar intercourse between Christ and the individual, different from that which all shall share alike, different from the public joy. There is a public joy. There is a public joy. All saints will together enjoy the comforts of Christ's love, will enter into the "joy of their Lord," and with one heart and one voice will sound His praise. There will also be joy in seeing the fruits of our labors, as it is said, "What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?" (1 Thess. 2:19).

And again there will be another joy in seeing the company of the redeemed, all according to Christ's heart in holiness and glory. But besides this public joy, there will be Christ's peculiar private individual recognition and approval—the "white stone," and the "new name written which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it."

Christ speaks elsewhere of His own new name as Head of the new creation. There are old names belonging to the Lord Jesus, but His new name is connected with that into which His Father brings Him, when all things which have failed in the hands of man will be established and developed in Him; and having thus Himself a new name He gives us also a promise of a new name. We are not only to know Jesus and be known if Him according to present circumstances, but to have a special knowledge of Him in glory according to the glory.

Our souls must value this personal approval of Christ, as well as think of the public approval. The latter will be great blessedness; but there is no peculiar affection in it, nothing that stamps peculiar love on the individual. Glory will be common to all, but glory is not affection. This "new name" is a different thing; it is the proof of Christ's value for a person who had been faithful in difficult and trying circumstances, for one who has acted on the knowledge of His mind and overcome through communion with Him. This will be met by special individual approbation. There is the public joy and approval in various ways, and the manifestation of our being loved by the Father as Jesus is loved. But this is not all that is given for our encouragement in individual conduct through trial, failure, and difficulty; there is also this special private joy of love.

When the common course of the church is not straight, not in the full energy of the Holy Spirit, though there may be a great deal of faithfulness, yet there is danger of disorder. We find that the Lord then applies Himself more to the walk of individual saints, and suits His promises to the peculiar state in which they are. There is a peculiar value in this. It takes out of all fancied walking (the especial danger which belongs to such a state of things)—each according to his own will, chalking out a path for himself because of the unfaithfulness and disobedient walk of the professing body. What faith has to do in such circumstances is to lay hold intelligently, soberly, and solemnly on the Lord's mind, and to walk according to it, strengthened by the promises which He has attached to such a path as He can own.

This at once refers the heart and conscience to Jesus, whilst full of encouragement to the feeblest saint. And it is very precious to have thus the guidance of the Lord, and the promise of His own peculiar approbation! so peculiar, that it is known only to him who receives it, when the course of

the church is such that one is thrown greatly on individual responsibility of conduct. But then, whilst it gives us strength for walk, it puts the soul in direct responsibility to the Lord and breaks down human will. When the professing church has become mingled with the world, “eating and drinking” with the drunken, those who seek to be faithful must often have to walk alone, incurring the charge of folly and self-will (and that too even from their brethren), because they refuse to follow the beaten path. And indeed it is quite a real danger, a natural consequence that, when the common course is broken up, individual will should work. The natural tendency would ever be towards self-will. Our only safety is in having the soul brought under the sense of direct responsibility to the Lord by such warnings and promises as these, which both guide and supply strength to stand free from all around, whilst the consciousness that Christ marks and owns our ways will sanctify as well as encourage our hearts. For it must be joy to any one who loves the Lord Jesus, to think of having His individual peculiar approbation and love, to find that He has approved of our conduct in such and such circumstances, though none know this but ourselves who receive the approval. But, beloved, are we really content to have an approval which Christ only knows? Let us try ourselves a little. Are we not too desirous of man’s commendation of our conduct? or, at least, that he should know and give us credit for the motives which actuate it? Are we content, so long as good is done, that nobody should know anything about us?—even in the church to be thought nothing of?—that Christ alone should give us the “white stone” of His approval, and the “new name written which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it?” Are we content, I say, to seek nothing else? Oh, think what the terrible evil and treachery of that heart must be that is not satisfied with Christ’s special favor but seeks honor (as we do) one of another instead! I ask you, beloved, which would be most precious to you, which would you prefer—the Lord’s public owning of you are a good and faithful servant, or the private individual love of Christ resting upon you, the secret knowledge of His love and approval? He whose heart is specially attached to Christ will respond—the latter. Both will be ours, if faithful, but we shall value this most, and there is nothing that will carry us so straight on our course as the anticipation of it.

In the address to the following church, “the church in Thyatira” (vss. 18-29), it is more the external glory which is brought before us, as the portion of “him that overcometh” (vss. 26-28). It is a public testimony of His approval, and so far it must be precious to us; but after all, the great blessing and joy of the promise is, that it identifies us with Christ “even as I received of my Father.” Poor, wretched, and feeble as we are now, the Lord will put us in the very same glory with Himself. We never shall have right thoughts about our privileges and blessings, until we see our union with the Lord Jesus in everything. The way to judge of ourselves, is to look directly at Him. It is not only seeing that we have been cleansed by His blood from our sins, and thus have peace with God: the thing that gives the true character to our hopes is living union (not a mystical union, though there is truth in this, for we have been crucified with Christ) with the Lord Jesus.

We thus come in hope and practice into identity of circumstances with Him. Being united to Him, everything that belongs to Him belongs to us, as it is said, “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:17). All our conduct should flow from this. Whatever glorifies the Lord Jesus becomes us, we have to do with. This is the proper measure of our conduct, whatever does not savor of it is wrong conduct in a Christian. We are united to One who is “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens” (Heb. 7:26), and we therefore are so too. Most sublime truth! Yet how simple and practical! When realized it must tell in every way and

detail of life. How could one made higher than the heavens be seeking earthly things? how could he, for instance, desire riches here? As another has said, If an angel were to come down here, he would be just as willing to sweep the streets as to be a king; much more then one who has this personal, intimate consciousness of union with Christ. Nay, the more of a servant, the happier he will be. Love necessarily made Jesus a servant when here below.

But in acting thus, we must remember there is much of difficulty. We have Satan always to resist us. We have to overcome him in a variety of circumstances and trials; not only to contend with, but to overcome; and this too with a flesh, that, if not mortified, will always be ready to lend a hand to him. So that it is not all joy, although we are set in so blessed a place.

This keeping the flesh mortified is the great thing, the secret of all strength in practical difficulties; and nothing will do it but living in communion and fellowship with the Lord. We must watch against its first strivings and desires, or, before we are aware, it will be giving a handle to the temptations of Satan. If we are holding fast (as the faithful ones in Thyatira were commanded) that which we have in the Lord, we shall gain the victory over Satan, he will lose his power, and then all is joy; even suffering (for we shall suffer in consequence of our union with Christ, for His name's sake), all will be joy. But if there is not the everyday common-place diligence to break the power of the everyday difficulties and keep down everyday evil, we shall have to contend with the flesh instead of Satan (with whom our conflict ought to be), while it will give him power to come in when we are not ready to meet him; we shall have to get the armor in order, at the time the fight should begin.

I pray you take heed to what I say, beloved friends, for if we fail in this daily judging and keeping down the flesh, we lose the power of victory over Satan; in conflict he will gain the advantage over us, or at least we shall only stand our ground, instead of gaining ground on him, and triumphing in victory over him. If it be so, we are unfaithful to Christ; we owe it to Him to gain ground upon the world where Satan reigns—to stand in such a position as to be able to go forward and deliver individual souls from his power in every shape. There is not the looking to His grace, and the holding fast His name, if it is not so.

I ask you, in the name of the Lord's love to you, and because of the privileges that are yours, to judge yourselves, and see whether you are ready for the battle, or whether Satan would not find that in you, the flesh—so alive—which would serve as a handle he might use. But whilst thus judging yourselves remember that your souls, in the midst of whatever failure and humiliation, are to rest on the joy of Christ's perfect righteousness, though to have overcome will add to our joy in the day of His appearing, and bring more glory to Him now.

The Lord enable us so to walk in the Spirit, that we may discover and know more and more the grace and suitability which is in Him for our every necessity, and understand in our own souls the fitness and power of His promises.

Chapter 18

Philippians 2 and 3

If it suits your little publication, I send you some brief thoughts on Philippians 2 and 3. The whole epistle is a very remarkable one, and raises the Christian to his highest condition of matured experience; but on this I will say a few words before I close.

I turn now to the above chapters. The former gives us Christian character, as men speak—Christian grace; the latter, the energy which carries the Christian above present things. The former speaks of Christ coming down and humbling Himself; the latter, of His being on high, and of the prize of our calling above.

A little careful attention will show that chapter 2 throughout presents the gracious fruits connected with the heart's study of the blessed Lord's humiliation, and of its imbibing the spirit of it; and that chapter 3 gives the picture of that blessed energy which counts the world as dross, overcomes on the way, and looks forward to the time when the Lord's power shall have subdued even the power of death in us and all its effects, and change us into glory. We need both these principles and the motives connected with them. We may see much of the energy of Christianity in a believer, and rejoice in it; while another displays much graciousness of character but no energy that overcomes the world. Where the flesh, or mere natural energy, mixes itself in our path with the divine energy, the way of the sincere and devoted Christian requires to be corrected by the former; more inward communion and gracious likeness to Christ, more feeding on the bread which came down from heaven. Besides displaying Christ, it would give weight and seriousness to his activity—make it more real and divine. On the other hand, one who maintains a gracious deportment and judges, perhaps, what he sees to be fleshly in the energy of another fails himself in that energy, and casts a slur on that which is really of God in his brother.

Oh that we knew how to be a little self-judging and complete in our Christian path; that we had nearness enough to Christ to draw from Him all grace and all devotedness, and correct in ourselves whatever tends to mar the one or the other!

Not that I expect that all Christians will ever have alike all qualities. I do not think it is the mind of God they should have. They have to keep humbly in their place. The eye cannot—it is not meant it should—say to the hand, I have no need of thee; nor the hand to the feet. Completeness is in Christ alone. Mutual dependence and completing one another under His grace is the order of His body. It is hard for some active minds to think so; but it is true humility and contentedness to be nothing and to serve, and to esteem others more excellent than ourselves—an easy practical way to arrive at it. They have the thing in which we are deficient. Our part is to do what the Lord has set us to do, to serve and count Him all, for in truth He does it; and to be glad to be nothing when we have quietly done His will, that He may be all.

But to return to my chapters: that chapter 2 gives us the humiliation of Christ is evident. We are to pursue its application. But the way it is introduced is very beautiful. The Philippians, who had already early in the gospel history shown grace in this respect, had thought of Paul in his distant

prison; and Epaphroditus, giving effect to their love, and full of gracious zeal, had not regarded his life to accomplish this service, and minister to the apostle's wants. The apostle makes a touching use of this love of the Philippians, while owning it as the refreshings of Christ. He had found "consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies," in the renewed testimony of the affection of the Philippians. His heart was drawn out also toward them. If they would make him perfectly happy, they must be thoroughly united and happy amongst themselves. How graciously, with what delicate feeling, he turns to note their faults and dangers here in association with their expressions of love to him! How calculated to win and to make any Euodiases and Syntyches ashamed of disputes where grace is thus at work! Then he speaks of the means of walking in this spirit. Every one should think of the spiritual gifts and advantages of his brother as well as of his own. To do this he must have the mind that was in Christ. This leads us to the great principle of the chapter.

Christ is set forth in full contrast with the first Adam. The first when in the form of man set up by robbery to be equal with God: "Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:5). And he became disobedient unto death. But the blessed One, being in the form of God, made Himself of no reputation, and in the form of a servant was obedient unto death. He was really God, as Adam was really man; but the point here is to note the condition and status each was in respectively, and out of which, in ambition or grace, he came. For Christ was truly God still, when He had taken the form of a man; but He had taken the form of a servant, and was too really a man and a servant in grace. Christ in love humbled Himself; Adam in selfishness sought to be exalted and was abased. Christ humbled Himself, and was as man exalted. It was not merely that He bore patiently the insults of men, but He humbled Himself. This was love. There were two great steps in it. Being in the form of God, He took the form of man; and as man He humbled Himself, and was obedient unto death, and that, the death of the cross. This is the mind which is to be in us—love making itself nothing to serve others. Love delights to serve; self likes to be served. Thus the true glory of a divine character is in lowliness, human pride in selfishness. In the former, in us, both gracious affections and devotedness and counting on gracious affections in others are developed, a source of genuine joy and blessing to the church.

In following the chapter, we shall see this taught in general, and produced unconsciously, as it were, in details. First, after stating the exaltation and glory of Christ as Lord, he presses obedience (perfectly shown in Christ), than which nothing is more lowly, for we have no will in it; and having directly to do with the power of the enemy, without the shelter of the apostle's energy, they were to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling. For, if Paul, who had so labored for them, was now in prison, and could not, it was, after all God [not Paul] who worked in them, to will and to do of his own good pleasure.

Salvation is always in the Philippians the great result of final deliverance from evil and entrance into glory. Everything is looked at at the end, though the blessing shines down on the way. See then the result: "That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; holding forth the word of life." Is there a word in this that could not be said of Christ? Only He was the Model, and we are to follow His steps as partakers of life in Him. It is just what Christ was, and so it is Christian character. We study it with delight and adoration in Him. It is formed in us.

Now see the gracious affections which flow out from this lowliness, in which self disappears by love. “Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all.” He makes the faith of the Philippians the principal thing. It was the offering to God. His part was only supplementary towards it, though it went to death. For the Philippians were Christ’s, the fruit of the travail of Christ’s soul, Christ’s crown and joy as Redeemer. So the apostle saw them and rejoiced in them. His service had ministered to this. If it went on to give up his life for it, he rejoiced in the service, so much the more evidently self-sacrificing love, for love delights in this. And they, for this reason, were to rejoice with him, for it was really his glory thus to give himself up for Christ.

But more. He was thinking of their happiness, and would send Timotheus and learn how they were getting on. But he counted on their love, and he would not send him till he would be able to say to them how his affairs were going on at Rome, where he had to appear before the emperor, perhaps so to close his life. All this is very sweet. There is the confidence of love, the reckoning on it in others, which produces its free flow, mutually felt and known to be so. Nor was it in the apostle alone, as we shall see. Moreover, it was in the midst of the coldness of the saints, which trial (and for the flesh the discrediting opposition of the world) had produced, to which the apostle alludes in this epistle. But the apostle’s love did not grow cold nor distrustful by it, and God had given him the comforting testimony of love in the distant Philippians, as he notices in the beginning of the chapter; and love was springing up into courage in others too by a little patience, as we see in chapter 1:14.

But these same fruits of love are found in Epaphroditus and his relations with the Philippians. Paul sends him back with affectionate witness of what he was; for Epaphroditus was longing after them all. He had undertaken his commission heartily—came probably along the great Egnation high road nearly a thousand miles, and, in his refusal of relaxation, had been sick, nigh unto death. But it was the work of Christ. Did Paul appreciate it the less as to himself because it was for Christ? In no way. Had Epaphroditus fallen a victim to his service for him, it would have been to the apostle a deep blow and sorrow, and that he had his cup full of, though sustained of God. God had mercy on Epaphroditus, and on Paul in him. See here how the heart, free in grace, can estimate present mercies! It was not natural affection in relationship, just and fitting as that may be in its place, but divine affections. Epaphroditus would have gone to heaven surely. But the spirit of the apostle would taste present goodness—God’s goodness in circumstances; it would know a “God, that comforteth those that are cast down” (2 Cor. 1:6). And he blesses God that the beloved Epaphroditus did not fall a sacrifice to his zeal in accomplishing his mission.

Nor was this all. What made Epaphroditus anxious was, that the Philippians had heard he had been sick, and he knew this. He reckoned on their love. They will be anxious, he thought, and will not be at rest until they know how I am; I must set off to them. How a son, who knew a mother’s love, who had heard he was ill, would reckon on her uneasiness and her desire for news, and would be anxious she should know he was well. Such was the affection among Christians, and among Christians where devotedness and love had alas! already sadly waned—where all sought their own, as a general state, such were the consolation in Christ, the comfort of love, the fellowship of the Spirit, the bowels and mercies. How refreshing it is! Nor is the blessed source ever wanting in Christ, however low all may be; for faith knows no difficulties, nothing between us and Christ. There is no lack in Him to produce fruits of grace.

If we look at ourselves, we could never speak of humbling ourselves: for we are nothing. But practically in Christ, the mind which was in Him is to be in us, and in grace we have to humble ourselves, to have the mind that was in Him, to have done with ourselves and serve. Then these lovely fruits of grace will flow out unhindered, whatever be the state even of Christendom around us. Working out lowlily our own salvation with fear and trembling in the midst of the spiritual dangers of the Christian life, and of pretensions to greatness and spiritual distinction, because true greatness has disappeared as it had when the apostle was put in prison; not with the fear of uncertainty, but because God works in us, and that gives the sense of the seriousness and reality of the conflict in which we are engaged; obedience, the humblest thing of all, for there is no will in it, characterizing our path, we shall seek the mind of Christ, and be clothed with His character. Blessed privilege! Be more jealous to keep it than our human rights and importance, and the blessed graces of heavenly love will flow forth and bind together, in a love which has primarily Christ for its object, the hearts of the saints. In such a state it is easy to count others better than themselves; as Paul saw the value of the Philippians to Christ, he was but offered on their faith—easy, because when we are near Christ we see the value of others to and in Christ, and we see our own nothingness, perhaps our actual short—comings in love too.

I have lengthened out my communication on this chapter so much that I reserve what I have to say on the third chapter, and the character of the whole epistle for another opportunity. I think, on the whole, that this gives the higher, though not the most readily striking and energetic, side of Christian life. But, as I said at the beginning, both have fully their place. If it suit your publication, I may afterward, if the Lord will, take up some practical subjects which have connected themselves with these in my mind.

May the Lord bless your various communications to the edification of His saints, and make that blessing flow in those too who contribute them.

Chapter 19

Philippians 3 and 4

I follow up a previous paper by sending you some remarks on Philippians 3, to which I will now add some on chapter 4, which has occupied my mind a little since.

Salvation in this epistle is looked at as before the Christian; not as an uncertainty, but as a thing not yet attained. It is the actual possession of glory, the new estate of man in actual glory, in Christ ascended on high, which alone is in view. Christ has laid hold of the believer for it, but he is looking to lay hold on it. Christ, seen in that glory (and the apostle had so seen Him, in fact) is everything. Being thus found in Him is what Paul looks for, for righteousness, as all else, in that day. When he gets actually before God, laying aside everything Jewish that might exalt him, everything human, his only thought is to be found in Christ. This puts the new estate of man in a very striking position. The whole Christian estate is looked at as future, because in resurrection, its being actually attained being the whole matter in hand. Hence justification, righteousness itself, is seen as actual acceptance in Christ, when we arrive before God. We come before God in Christ. The apostle unequivocally looks for a resurrection-state and glory. Till he has that, he has never attained, is not yet perfect.

The present state of man, even supposing he has been quickened of God, is his state as born of the first Adam; not simply because of sin, for the apostle supposes here the Christian to be walking above it, always walking in the Spirit, making progress towards glory, but in no way occupied with sin. But he sees the Christian needing to be brought into this new state identified with Christ in glory. If he had the whole righteousness which the flesh or the first Adam was capable of, and of which the law was the rule, this was only the first man, not the Second: he would not have it. It was not Christ, God's righteousness by faith.

He had seen Christ, the second Man, the last Adam, accepted in glory. He has been laid hold of to be conformed to this, this wholly new state and condition of man according to God's righteousness. It had displaced all else in his mind. He could not be content with anything else or less. The two were incompatible; and he could not have the old man's place, even if it were righteous, and the new man's too. He counts all these things which honored and accredited the first man, the self, Paul, as loss and dung. The risen glorified Man is before us. It is not however here considered as that which has justified us; that inasmuch as we have died with Christ, who made atonement for us, and that we are risen with Him according to the value of that work in virtue of which as of His person He is risen, we are justified, and our acceptance witnessed before God. It is not with this view of judicial acceptance the resurrection is viewed here; but as a new state, into which in its full result, we are to enter, including of course divine righteousness, but the whole new state of glory. This puts the new estate into which Christianity brings us in a very strong light.

The old man, the whole old estate is done within the apostle's mind, righteousness and all; and his mind is fixed on the new, that is, on Christ Himself; but this as involving his own place in glory, in having part hereafter, in "the resurrection from among the dead," as Christ was: "That I may win Christ." "If by any means I may attain to the resurrection from among the dead"; it is "from among"

them.

This leads us directly to the great principle of the chapter: the earnest undistracted following after this glory, after Christ Himself, and heeding nothing else, counting all as worthless for its attainment. The former chapter, we have seen, presented Christ in His humiliation, leading the heart to the like manifestation of graciousness in our path and ways with others here below. This gives that energy of spiritual pursuit, from the second glorified Man being set before our eyes, which sets us above the world and every motive in it, and everything which added importance to the old self, so as to give its just and heart-enlarging object to the new man; and it makes us heavenly-minded, and withal undistracted in our Christian course.

It is one of the beauties of Christianity, that it gives, through our perfect reconciliation in Christ, the pure peacefulness of affections perfectly happy in an existing relationship, and with it the highest object of hope, which urges to unceasing activity. These are the two forming elements of human nature for good; both in the highest and a divine way are found in Christ.

But to pursue our chapter, which takes up the latter of these principles. We have the fullest element of satisfying glory for ourselves, the prize of our calling above, the resurrection from among the dead; yet all selfishness is taken out of it. What clothed self with honor is, as we have seen, all loss. It helped to set up the old man. The Christian's object is Christ, which implies getting rid of the first altogether. It exalts man but not self. When modern infidelity would exalt man, it simply exalts self. Christianity exalts man, even to divine glory and divine excellency, but it sets aside self wholly. "What was gain to me," says the apostle, "I counted loss for Christ." Learning is gain for self—to be English, French, etc.: to have mine own righteousness as a reputation in the world, or a title with God, is self. I am what others are not. The world wants these motives—of course it does; it has no other. Energy is produced by them, but there is no moral advance. Self remains the spring, the center, of human activity. We are told

"Self-love but serves the virtuous mind to wake,

As the small pebble stirs the peaceful lake."

A larger circle may be produced round self, but self remains the center still. Master, that thou shouldest give us to "sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom" (Matt. 20:21). This was self—a good place which others would not have. None of this is found here. "That I may win Christ" is the highest blessing, the blessedest affections, but all transferring the heart from self to Christ.

But see further. It transferred the affections to what in itself was supremely excellent, to an object which was the adequate object of the delight to God the Father. God has given to us to delight in what He finds His sufficient object of delight in too. What a tale this tells of our true reconciliation to God! Not merely judicial reconciliation to God, which was needed, but the elevation of our moral nature to the measure of divine delights and fellowship with Him; though, of course, ever recipient, and glad to be so from love, He ever the divine Giver; but in Christ the one Object of delight. In the creature, though there may be a suited nature, as evidently there must, yet the moral state of the soul is formed and characterized by its objects. Here we are made partakers of the divine nature and have divine objects. But this is not now in rest. That will be our heavenly state. We are living in the midst of a world by which Satan seeks to seduce us by acting on the old man.

While there is thankfulness and courage because Christ has laid hold on us, yet Christ before us in hope leads out the affections in energy; and, while it has begun by delivering us from selfish recurrence to our own importance, leads us now in superiority to worldly objects by the absorbing attraction of Christ. We are kept humble by the consciousness that we have not attained, energetic in sanctified affections because we have Christ to attain, delivered from the world by the absorbing power of a divine object acting on the new man. This gives singleness of purpose, and thus undistracted power, while the judgment is formed solely on the way things bear on Christ. Everything is thus estimated in the highest way by a perfect criterion, and that in the affections, though indeed in moral things true judgment cannot exist without this.

Further, though it be in no way the chief or highest element, there is, when the world does come before us, the power of contrast. For all this surely the action of the Holy Spirit is needed; but I speak of the way it operates, not of its gracious source. This gives, moreover, superiority to difficulties. This is the force of “by any means”—not a doubt, but whatever it may cost, whatever road I may have to take, so as I attain, I am content; yea, I can rejoice in suffering and death—I shall be so much the more like the Christ I am desirous of attaining.

Note here, he seeks the power of resurrection first; that, knowing the divine energy of this new life, which takes him in spirit out of the present one, the sufferings or death of the first, as the fruit of devotedness to Christ, were only conformity to Him. And thus, even if it were by such means as death itself, he should attain to the glory of the new state into which Christ had risen. (Not new indeed to Him personally, but to man, to the human nature, which in grace He had taken and carried back with Him into glory.) This gave its full character to his walk as to its daily energy. Having this state of resurrection from among the dead in view, he never could count himself to have attained in this life, nor to be perfect; for, for him to be perfect was to be like Christ in glory. He followed after that he might attain and apprehend that (lay hold upon and possess it) for which Christ had apprehended him. Two things ensued; he followed nothing else—had no other object.

But this was not all. He did follow this earnestly and undividedly. It was not merely that he disapproved of certain things and was inert, but the absorbing power of One had delivered him from all else. But this, while it took his heart off the others, fixed it on this. But this object on which his mind was fixed was always before him, not attained, every day brighter to his spirit, but not possessed.

This kept him looking straight forward, and never occupied with the ground he had passed over. He forgot the things which were behind, and reached forward to those things which were before, pressing towards those things which were before. The man who would stop to contemplate the ground gone over in a race would not get on in it, would soon be passed in it. Self would come in; the manna would breed worms; the heart be off its object.

This gives another marked effect of this energy of the single eye. It looks exclusively at what is heavenly. Its calling is on high, its hopes and thoughts fixed on that; not looking, says the apostle, on what is seen, but on what is not seen. This gives a heavenly temperament and habit to the whole man. His conversation is in heaven; his relationships of life are all up there. There is thankfulness and elevation in this. It is God’s calling, His calling us above and in Christ Jesus. The heart is intelligent as to its source and way.

I do not dwell on what the apostle puts in contrast. Minding earthly things, men are fixed on what can cause no progress, on what takes them off what is heavenly, what is pure and divine. But it goes further; they are enemies of the cross. The cross was death to this world. It marked the place of what was divine and heavenly in this world. The saint glories in dying to the world. He who lives in it, in spirit, is the enemy of that. The end is destruction.

One thing remains, to carry out this hope of the Christian to completion—Christ's coming. We have these hopes, "this treasure in earthen vessels." Christ shall come and change the body of our humiliation and fashion it like to His glorious body. Then what we have had in hope, in desire forming our souls after it, will be actually accomplished in glory. We shall be like Christ and with Him.

Such is the character of energy which delivers from and gives the victory over all that is in the world, setting our affections on things above, not on things on the earth, making Christ Himself, as He is on high, the bright and blessed object of our souls. Chapter 4, as this has run to some length, I reserve for another paper.

It tells us of the calmness and superiority to circumstances which characterizes the Christian in this world through faith in Christ.

Chapter 20

On the Philippians

The Epistle to the Philippians looks at the Christian as on a journey with an object before him, and that object the actual winning of Christ, the laying hold of that for which he had been laid hold of by Christ; and therefore salvation is looked at as a thing to be attained—the Christian reaching in result what he had laid hold on before by faith.

Chapter 1 is an introduction. Chapters 2, 3 and 4, present to us three aspects of Christian life. In chapter 2 we see the gracious mind that was in Christ illustrated in the servants and the saints also: in chapter 3 the energy of the apostle in running after the prize: and in chapter 4 his complete superiority over all circumstances. In all of it the experience which is the result of the power of the Spirit of God acting in the Christian—no idea of failure.

We do not get sin mentioned throughout the epistle. There were a few things that needed setting right: for instance, the two women in chapter 4 needed exhorting to be of the same mind, they were in a little discord; but what is described is the effect of the Spirit's power. Sin is not mentioned. Nevertheless I suppose the Thessalonian saints were in the freshest condition of any we read of, as we find the first epistle was written to them only about two months or the like after their conversion, so that their first love was in activity.

There was real devotedness in the gospel amongst the Philippians, which the apostle does not omit noticing, nor forget their kindness now renewed. (See chapter 4:15-16 and 1:3,7 where read "ye have me," not "I have you.") And this gave him confidence as to them, as well as regarded himself, that He who had begun the good work would accomplish it unto the day of Christ. There the work is still viewed as one reaching on to its great result. As to himself this confidence was most blessed, and accompanied by, and in some respects the fruit of, a conscience kept in the full light of God's countenance by the Spirit of God. "As always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body." Self is always shut out when grace is really known and enjoyed.

Then a word as to verse 6. It is a great comfort to know that what God has begun He is going to complete; and it was Paul's confidence towards the Philippian saints, because they had him in their heart, as verse 7 tells us. This made it but just for him to judge the divine life was working in them; but then there was this deep comfort for the love that was in his heart, and freshly awakened in it; but then that was God's work and He would complete it. This verse should be read according to the margin, and not as translated in the text. The apostle was in their hearts, and it was a proof to him of divine life.

Paul was not occupied at all with his outward life, but with the inward life. He had Christ always before him, and when it was a question of which he would choose, whether to go to be with Christ or to remain on the earth, he is in a strait; if he dies, it is to be with Christ; and if he remains, it is worth while, for here he can labor for the church's good: and through the blessedness of both paths he knows not which to choose, so that self is done away as a motive. Blessed state! And then the blessing of the saints is his motive under Christ, and so he remains as more needful for

them. You see it is Christ that decides thus the result, and he decides his own case; for if it be better for the church he should remain, Christ was over all—he would remain. It is not the reckless Nero nor any one else; it is a question with Paul what most pleases Christ. He never thinks of the circumstances which he was in: nigh unto death, he has got his eye only on Christ. To die would be gain to any Christian, and so would to live be Christ. But there is a difference between an abstract truth and the practical realization of that truth; like Paul, in the Acts, when before Agrippa, he could say, “I would that... all that hear me this day were... altogether such I am, except these bonds.” We know any Christian could say that, for it would be better that all were saved; but it is a very different thing to be in Paul’s condition, and say it with his spirit.

In Philippians 1:10, where the expression “the day of Christ” occurs, it means the day when He comes to judge; it is always so when it refers to our responsibility; it never means the rapture of the church when it speaks of saints’ responsibility, as in 1 Timothy 6:13-14, “I give thee charge... that thou keep this commandment without spot unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.” We could not connect the rapture with responsibility. We are all alike caught up together, and alike conformed to the image of God’s Son. It is the result of grace for every saint; but the rewards will be according to the fruits and works, as in John 15, “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit.” And the Christian is not merely called on to avoid open evil, but to have spiritual discernment, so as to understand what is excellent—more conformed to the divine mind. This makes verse 10 of chapter 1 a very important one. Verse 12 brings out the power over circumstances. It did not matter what position Paul was in; he always reckoned on the power of Christ.

It is beautiful to see how Christ is the sole object before the apostle. He is glad though it be in contention that Christ is preached, so that He was preached. “I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.” A person who is converted may walk in a manner that does not dishonor Christ, but it is a different thing to have Christ as the motive for everything; and if the latter condition be that of the soul, it always raises the mind above sorrow. For the thought that Christ was preached of contention might cause sorrow in the apostle’s heart, but he is above that because Christ is preached.

Where there is not real spiritual energy, the thought of prison cows people; and when Satan managed to get the preacher of Christ there, he thought he had gained his end; but they got courage as to his bonds. Paul was so identified with the gospel that, when the gospel succeeded, it was to him success; and in that day the gospel was not made to suit people as in this day. Paul was nothing terrified by his adversaries; as Peter also says, “As long as ye do well and are not afraid with any amazement” (1 Peter 1:6). Satan tried to alarm people and make them shy. When the apostle speaks of the gospel or the vocation, as in chapter 1:27, he means the whole thing (Christianity). The word “conversation” in this verse refers to one’s walk.

“To them an evident token of perdition.” For when Satan’s power is fully exercised, and it is seen that it has no power over Paul or any servant of Christ, it is manifested that it has met One which is superior to itself, that is, a divine One, and that they who oppose are its adversaries; and thus it is a token of perdition to them, and for the same reason, of salvation to those helped by divine power; for still salvation in the epistle is the result in victory. Then in verse 29 we see that “it is given…not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for his sake.” And now we come to the end of

chapter 1, which is a kind of introduction to the epistle.

Chapter 2 is full of instruction. It is very touching the way the apostle speaks in this chapter. They had sent him help from a long way, and sought to minister to his wants; but he says, if they want to make him truly happy—to fulfill his joy, they must be walking like Christ; they must be of one mind. How gently and courteous a way of dealing with them is this, in the presence of their love and kindness to him! He could not harshly reprove, but love would not have the evil uncorrected, and deals thus delicately as to it. “If there be any consolation in Christ,” “fulfill ye my joy, that ye be likeminded.” He sets Christ before them as an example; and he could say too, “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ,” not ‘as far as I follow Christ’; but I am following Christ, and I want you to copy my example and follow Him too.

Then in verses 3, 4, of this chapter, each is exhorted to “let each esteem other better than themselves.” Now there will be no difficulty in this if we are really walking before God; we shall be occupied with each other’s good, and the one will esteem the other better than himself, because when the soul is really before the Lord, it will see its own shortcomings and imperfections, and will be in self-judgment; and according to the love and spirit of Christ see all the good that is from Him in a brother and one dear to him, and will therefore look upon his fellow-Christian as better than himself, and so all would be in beautiful harmony; and we should be looking after each other’s interests too. As I have often remarked, love likes to be a servant, and selfishness likes to be served.

Then, in verses 5-8, we get the humiliation of Jesus even unto death, though not in the sense of atonement, nor of patience of suffering put upon Him, but in voluntary humiliation, the way and pattern of lowliness for our souls, producing the graciousness which becomes the Christian and adorns his life. This is in contrast with the first Adam. He sought to be exalted when in the form of man, and that by robbery he ate that which was forbidden, to become equal with God; but the last Adam, when in the form of God (though He thought it not robbery to be equal with God as to His dignity) left all and came down here to be a man, and in the form of a servant; and then as a man humbled Himself, and became obedient to death.

God looks for us to walk in the character of the last Adam, and not of the first—that of humbling and not of exalting.

“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ” (vs. 5). Thus a self-humbling Christ, the mind that was in Him, is the source of Christian graciousness and consideration for others; and this will be found exemplified in Paul’s way of dealing with them, and all that follows as to Timothy and Epaphroditus, where Christian love is so sweetly insisted on as well as shown.

In chapter 3, on the other hand, Paul sees Christ up in the glory, and is running after Him, giving its energy to the Christian life, as in chapter 2 he sees Him on the earth as the brightest example of lowliness; and as the result of that lowliness God gives Him a name which is above every name: this is given to Him as Son of man. The mind that was in Christ was the mind of coming down, and that is what the apostle wants to see in us.

There is no place where Christ is so glorified as at the cross, although it was in shame. In the glory we shall be with Him and like Him, though there would have been no glory for us without the cross. But who could have been with Him on the cross? There He was wholly alone with God.

The word “Lord” is used in two distinct senses in the New Testament; in some places it means “Jehovah,” and in others means “Lord and Christ,” as Lord over all; as in Acts 10. He is “Lord of all.” This is the sense in which it is used in chapter 2:11. Of course, we know that He is Jehovah, as in John 12:41, where the quotation is made from Isaiah 6:1, “He saw his glory.” There you get Him as Jehovah, and often in the Old Testament. In truth the second Person of the Godhead is He in whom Jehovah is revealed there. We may see how the three persons are closely connected all through the acts of Christ, even in the miracles—Christ as Son wrought the miracles; but it is said, “The Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.” And also, “If I cast out devils by the Spirit of God.” So we see the three inseparably united, as in the resurrection of Christ also. We find in chapter 2 of John’s gospel Christ speaking of raising Himself. “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” Then we read in another scripture, “Whom God raised from the dead” (Acts 4:1); and lastly, He was “quickened by the Spirit” (1 Peter 3:18). All God’s glory was engaged in the resurrection of Christ.

In the epistles of John you cannot separate Christ and God. The apostle speaks of Christ both as God and Christ in the very same sentence, as in 1 John 2:28; chapter 3:1: “Abide in him; that when he shall appear... at his coming”; that is Christ, born of Him. In verse 29 the same person is God, as is manifest from chapter 3:1; “him not” is Christ; “he shall appear,” now it is Christ again, and so all verses 2, 3. Thus he calls Him God and Christ in the same verse, and there are other similar instances in this epistle. We see this divine union in the words of Christ Himself, for He says in John’s Gospel, “The Son of man which is in heaven” (John 3:13), although He was then actually on earth at the time. The word “Jehovah” refers to the three persons of the Gospel, which men rightly call the Trinity.

The New Testament is the opening out of the unity of the Godhead in the Trinity of the Persons. Christ was here God as well as Man, and His Person cannot be divided. “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:20). Of course it is spiritually that this is true; but nevertheless it is our privilege to rejoice in His presence as that very Jesus who shed His blood for us. It is not the Spirit’s presence, though He must be present that we may enjoy Christ’s. But the Spirit has not died, suffered, and walked amongst us as Jesus did. The Holy Spirit is present, and reveals the Father’s love and Christ Himself to us, and thus the Holy Spirit is the power in us, and the Father and the Son are they with whom we have fellowship; and this is the reason why we do not pray to the Holy Spirit. His place, in the ways of grace, is to be in us; the Father and the Son are the objects, by His revelation of them, before the soul.

I would just notice the way in which people have blundered with reference to the twelfth verse, which they think conveys the idea of a person working himself to obtain eternal life in contrast with God’s working, insisting on the words “work out your own.” It is altogether mistaken. The apostle had been with them and had cared for them, had worked for them, kept at bay the power of the enemy, meeting the difficulties of the warfare. But this was not to continue; he now being in prison and having left them, they had to work out their salvation. That is, they would now have to fight their own battles, and have their own conflicts, which Paul felt was a very solemn thing; they were to do it “with fear and trembling.” And I am sure we shall all feel it a solemn thing, if we have a right apprehension of it, when we think of the great powers that are against us—the world, the flesh, and Satan; and are having to make good God’s cause and maintain by grace our own standing (learning too the conflict of flesh and Spirit).

It is indeed a solemn thing to know that we are the vessels of a conflict between God and Satan. But it is no contrast between our working and God's; but our working and Paul's, who could no longer be in the conflict for them, but who adds, "it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do." They had not lost Him. When Scripture speaks of my place in Christ as the result of accomplished redemption, there are no "ifs" or "buts" or warnings about it. These come when it looks at me as a Christian in the world under responsibility. And the Lord brings us through our trials and difficulties; but it is only to show us what is in ourselves and also to display what is in God, to abound over it all. So we see the passage of the children of Israel from the Red Sea to Canaan taught them many difficulties, but it also taught them the faithfulness of God: and when the journey through the wilderness was really finished, and they were come to the borders of the land, and were called to go up the mountain and enter into the land, their unbelief and distrust broke out, and they wanted Moses to send spies to see the land before they attempted to enter. Well, God permitted it, but what was the result? The very appearance of the place frightened them; the high walls, etc., staggered them; and they were afraid to go up. So Moses says, Well, there is nothing but the wilderness for you; and so they turned back. But, though chastening, God turned back with them.

Surely it only brings out God's purpose of grace, as Moses told them in Deuteronomy 8, it was to "humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart," and also to show them what was in His. And He was above all their failure and shortcomings, taking care of them even to the nap of their coats. His ultimate result was blessing. "In all their affliction he was afflicted" (Isa. 63:9). I am sure it is a real conflict; but then we have the joy that God works in us. A man who has been a very proud one, when he is really broken-hearted before God, makes a humbler Christian than a man who never showed signs of pride at all; for he finds grace with God to be subdued, and manifests that grace with others; when he sees it rising, he knows what is rising, and therefore is ready with a check upon it.

Philippians 2:14-15. In this latter verse each element of the exhortation is exactly what Christ was upon earth; blameless, harmless, Son of God, and without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, the light of the world, holding forth the word of life. It forms a lovely picture of Christ's path, and just what we are exhorted to be. So we hear Paul saying of himself what Christ could have said, "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). This is a very wonderful thing to say. Real fellowship with Christ's sufferings was this, and we find Paul looking on to the day, in verse 16, with joy at the time when the result of all would be manifested. It is then when rewards are distributed; it is not a question of salvation at all. Reward is connected with labor, not with salvation.

Philippians 2:19-30. How sweet it is to see the gracious thoughtfulness of the apostle towards these saints. "I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort, when I know your state." You see he could say he would send Timotheus shortly; not so with Epaphroditus—he must send him at once, for they had heard he had been sick and were sorrowful, and so the apostle is careful to end that sorrow by sending Epaphroditus unto them (vs. 28). In the last verse he seems to intimate that they had been a little careless about him—"Your lack of service," and also in chapter 4:10; and he gives a very gentle rebuke and corrects what he says by expressing his assurance of their loving care not that he spoke in respect

of want, for he knew how to be abased and how to abound. If it was a gift of love, he would gladly receive their gifts; but still the good of the gospel is in his mind. If as the Corinthians they attached great importance to their money, he would have nothing to do with it, he wanted not their money but their hearts.

In chapter 3 we see Paul, in his energetic spirit, running after a prize. Important warnings in verse 2, he will not allow these Judaisers to be the “circumcision” here, but “concision,” which was a word of contempt: “we are the circumcision.”

Paul counts all dross and dung that he might win Christ. O what single-eyed energy for Christ! You see if Christ is so precious to me that everything else is dung and dross, it will be no difficulty for me to throw it aside; that is the secret— the power of an absorbing object to deliver me from all else. It is to the extent my heart values an object that it is a temptation to me. Suppose I have a very beautiful cloak on, and I am running a race, if my heart is really occupied with the prize, I shall not mind the beauty of the cloak; I shall only know it as a weight, and shall cast it off me, as we find in Hebrews, “lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset.” There they are only looked at as weights that have simply to be thrown aside. Note, this was not a mere passing effect with Paul when the glory of Christ first gleamed in upon him; but at the end of his course he could say, “And do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.” He kept up to it all through his course; and we shall do the same just to the extent our minds are on the prize; and first of all the prize to him was winning Christ Himself.

Philippians 3:11-12. Paul views his own glory as connected with it at the end of his journey. The resurrection is an object of attainment. He looked at all suffering too in the power of resurrection, which always makes suffering easy. He says, It does not matter what I pass through, whether death or anything else, so that I may get Him. If by any means—no matter what (vs. 1), if it costs me my life—“ I might attain unto the resurrection from among the dead”; not “of the dead,” but “from among the dead.” This was the difficulty in Mark 9:10. They reasoned what the resurrection from the dead meant. A general resurrection of the dead was common enough: every Pharisee or orthodox Jew held it; but one from the dead was a new thing altogether, and this is the character of the saint’s resurrection. God delighted in Christ, and therefore raised Him from among the dead. He also delights in us and is going to raise us from among the dead. We run a race, but not an uncertain one.

The perfect ones spoken of in verse 15 are those who have laid hold on the truth of being risen and glorified with Christ on high; not only knowing that my sins are just forgiven, but apprehending the higher truth of resurrection in Christ. And it is as these we are called to walk. This is the same perfection as is spoken of in I Corinthians 2, “We speak wisdom among them that are perfect.” The only perfection the apostle has before him is to be like Christ in glory and not like the first Adam.

A person may more easily know his sins forgiven, but it is a further truth to know that he is himself “dead to sin.” He finds this conflicts with his experience—that does not affect his experience. Suppose I tell you a debt of a thousand pounds which you owed was paid by some one, it would not be a question of experience, but of simply believing my statement. Just so with God. He tells us our sins are forgiven, and it is a question whether we believe Him. But when He tells us we are dead to sin, we look inside and say, Ah, sin is still at work: how is that? A person must be taught of God to know really the truth that he is dead to sin.

The rest of the epistle is still simply experience—sitting loose to the world, caring about nothing but Christ, superiority over all circumstances; and the apostle concludes, “My God shall supply all your need.” My God, the One whom I have been learning, I count upon for all your wants.

Chapter 21

Brief Thoughts on Philippians

Philippians 1.

The Epistle to the Philippians has a peculiar character rather distinct from the other epistles; though there are indeed traces of the same in the Epistle to Timothy. Taking it characteristically, it is the epistle of Christian experience.

We do not get doctrinal teaching in it, but 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 counts himself not to have attained anything. He is on the road, he has not got there; but Christ has laid hold on him. When I speak of my place in Christ, as in Ephesians, it is in heavenly places; but, as a matter of fact, we are here going on through the earth full of temptations and snares.

Philippians gives us—not of course failure—but the path of the Christian, salvation being looked at throughout as at the end of the wilderness. Paul had no doubt that Christ had laid hold on him for this blessedness, but he had not got there. Salvation is always looked at as the close of the journey in Philippians.

It is so much the more remarkable as to the Christian's path that you never find sin mentioned from the beginning to the end of the epistle. The thorn in the flesh was needed when Paul came down from Paradise; it was not that the flesh had become any better. The thorn was something to hinder sin, something that made him outwardly contemptible in his ministry. Every one, probably, would have a different thorn according to his need. There is no change in the flesh, but the power of the Spirit of God is such that the flesh is kept down. "Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus" (2 Cor. 4:10) would not be necessary if the flesh were any better. It is not that there is any uncertainty as to salvation or acceptance, but that we should so walk through the wilderness that the flesh should be shut up, as it were. Suppose I have a troublesome man in the house, if I keep him locked up, I am quite easy about him; but sometimes we are foolish enough to leave the door open. God looks at us as dead with Christ, and we are called on to reckon ourselves dead. I have a title to do it because Christ has died, and I am crucified with Christ. It is not only that we are born of God, but we have died with Christ.

Up to the middle of Romans 5 sins are treated of, and atonement; in verse 12 nature is dealt with. We have each our own sins, but "by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin" we have the same nature, we are all in the same boat; the remedy for this is that we have died with Christ. You cannot say of a man lying dead on the floor, 'You have got bad passions and self-will'; he has neither passions nor self-will, he is dead.

Then we have the power of Christ. "At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you" (John 14:20). You say you are in Christ, then your acceptance is perfect; if you are in Christ, Christ is in you: then let me see Christ and nothing else.

If you are dead, you cannot live on in sins. If you have Christ, it is through His death you have got Him. In Colossians 3:3 we have God sees us as dead; in Romans 6:11 I reckon myself dead; in 2 Corinthians 4:10 we have “bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.” This is going very far indeed. Death to a Paul was so realized that only the life of Jesus works in him.

In chapter 1 we see the position and life of the Christian in this scene; in chapter 2 we see the pattern of Christ; in chapter 3 the energy that carries the Christian through this world, all things being dross and dung that he may win Christ; in chapter 4 we see the Christian’s superiority to all circumstances. We have in this epistle the whole character of Christian life; this assumes that our place in Christ is settled. You cannot manifest Christ if you have not Christ. Assuming that Christ has borne our sins, and that we have died with Him, we get on that foundation the unfolding of the path of the Christian, the manifestation of this life we have got from God (a thing John looks at abstractedly in itself); he that “is born of God doth not commit sin” (1John 3:9). The Christian is to manifest the life of Christ, and nothing else. “Ye are” (not ought to be) “the epistle of Christ,” and let Christ be read in you as plainly as the law in the tables of stone. As Christ represents us before God, so you appear in the presence of the world for Christ.

It is a great thing to say that my heart is so full of Christ that nothing but Christ appears. If I am in lowliness of heart before Him, living by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God, I shall manifest Christ. In these days when the word of God is so called in a question, it is blessed to think how a single verse of scripture was sufficient for Him for authority, and sufficient for the devil, who had not a word to say.

There is no uncertainty as to the faithfulness of Christ in bringing us through the wilderness. The moment the Christian looks at himself in Christ, there is no “if”; but the moment you get a Christian in the wilderness, there are “ifs”; not that there is the smallest doubt, but to bring in dependence. We are “kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation” (1 Peter 1:5), this suffices, but dependence. I am “the righteousness of God in him.” “If ye hold fast the beginning of our confidence” (Heb. 3:14); if I hold fast I am to be trusted. There must be positive dependence every moment; I learn that. The mischief of the state of the heart is that, as to will, man has got independent. The whole thing for us is to get to absolute dependence on infallible faithfulness, on unwearied love to carry us through. The heart is brought back to blessed dependence; the dependence is blessed, but the sense of that faithful love is unfailing joy and rest. It is not that the “if” is not true, but the Father’s hand will never let it take place. We have grace to help in every time of need; without Him we can do nothing; with Him, in a certain sense, everything. We learn here that I can never excuse myself if I let the flesh act. The existence of the flesh does not give a bad conscience: otherwise we should never have a good one.

“And this I pray that your love may abound yet more and more in all knowledge and in all judgment; that ye may approve things that are excellent” (Phil. 1:9-10). There is growth. What I desire to press is, the practical place into which God has brought us in grace to Himself. “Thou hast guided them in thy strength unto thy holy habitation” (Ex. 15:13). That is where you are brought: God has brought you to Himself. It is not a rule imposed, but Christ revealed. The question for you as Christians is, Are you walking in the light as God is in the light? God is light and love; His essential names. You are brought to God without a veil, and there is light on

everything you do.

God has brought us to know Christ: “This is my beloved Son,” that is what I delight in. The more we look at Him, the more we see there is the place God has brought us. If heaven opens on Him, it opens on us; if God owns Him as Son, He owns us as sons.

Now we have to learn Christ. Has Christ had such a place in your hearts today that the things which spring from Christ sprung from you? Have you understood that Christ has brought you to Himself? Now especially it is important that Christians should be Christians. What He was before God in perfection reproduced itself before men to please His Father. Are you thus learning Christ day by day? When I look at Christ, I see God manifested in a man in this world, the expression and pattern of what God delights in. I am not before God on the ground of what I have done, or what I am, but on the ground of Christ. There is for us this continually learning Christ. God has been revealed to us; we have seen what He is—seen it in light to love it. It is not an effort that I may get more like Christ, but that, according to the knowledge of Him I have got, there should be nothing contrary to that knowledge. One does not expect a babe to be a man. When one sees a babe delighting in its mother, and obedient, it is just as delightful in its way as to see a man.

“That in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death” (Phil. 1:20). Whether it were life or death that he came across Christ would be always glorified in his body. The Christian, having his eye on Christ, knows no standard but Christ in glory. We are “to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Rom. 8:29); this is the blessed hope of the Christian and nothing short of it. “As we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly” (1 Cor. 15:49); there is no doubt, no uncertainty, of our having it or of what it is. Christ is “the firstborn among many brethren”—they like Him. Christ “shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied” (Isa. 53:11).

Seeing Christ up there I get this unspeakably simple truth that, when I was a poor sinner, another Man stepped in and set me free. “Let these go their way,” Christ said of His disciples; they go away, they run—poor work, but they are safe. He takes the whole thing on Himself, and He is to be the judge. The perfect good of God and the perfect evil of man met at the cross; everything was settled there. The new heavens and the new earth depend upon the cross. The Man who was there made sin is now sitting at the right hand of God in glory. The Holy Spirit comes down and makes me know that my place is settled before God. A sinner cannot have confidence if sin is not put away; but there He is, the pattern of what I am to be, our “forerunner.”

I am going to bear the image of the heavenly; I want to attain that, to win Christ, to be like Him forever. The treasure is indeed in an earthen vessel, but I have got the treasure. I never rest until I am like Christ in glory. Christ is my life; that life lives on Christ as its object; I am going to be like Him, I shall never be satisfied till then. The Spirit of God realizes this in our hearts in power. The light that shines from the glory shines in my heart.

Even before chapter 4 how perfectly the apostle puts the heart at peace. “Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife”: never mind, if Christ is preached. What peace of heart he had! He had been in prison for four years, in the most trying circumstances; “I know that this,” he says, “shall turn to my salvation.” It is what is behind that faith gets hold of. The wretched Jews, that the

bodies should not remain on the cross on the sabbath day, send the soldiers to break their legs; and what did they do? They sent one of them right into Paradise.

Paul has been feeding the church ever since from that prison at Rome. “To depart, and be with Christ, which is far better: nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.” So completely happy, so completely settled that I do not know which to choose! Self is gone. It would be worth while to stay because I can labor for Christ. Christ loves the church: then I shall stay! With him it was laboring for Christ, or living with Christ. Christ had such a place that the power of circumstances disappears. How near he lived to Christ! There was not perfection—not yet; but he had Christ completely. He was living up to Christ in the measure to which he had attained.

We may get a blessed truth, as Peter did, revealed by the Father, a real revelation (I do not question that); but the flesh may not be broken down up to the measure of what we have been taught. Peter was doing Satan’s work, and Christ said to him, “Get thee behind me, Satan.” Would not Christ have to call you Satan in something? If we are not bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, our condition of soul is not up to the measure in which we have been taught.

Have you the true desire? Is there a locked up chamber in your heart? Christ will open it some day. Can you say, “Search me, O God, and know my heart... and lead me in the way everlasting”? (Psa. 139:23-24). The Lord grant us wisdom to understand His love!

Philippians 2.

In this whole epistle is little or no doctrine, but the practical exhibition of Christian walk by the power of the Spirit of God.

The chapter before us shows us the spirit in which Christ walked down here, as the true character and spirit of the Christian, the meekness and gentleness of Christ, as in chapter 3 we see the energy of divine life. The next chapter gives the energy of divine life; in the last we see superiority to circumstances. In some Christians there is a certain degree of natural energy. When Moses killed the Egyptian, he had not forgotten the fleshly energy of Pharaoh’s court. Flesh on God’s side can never stand against flesh on the devil’s side. Moses had to be kept for forty years keeping sheep that he might learn to be quiet. If one side of Christian character is wanting, the other is always defective too. You never get one side by itself without even that being defective.

In this chapter we see the perfect blessed giving up of self, and the most delicate consideration of others. Wherever true love is at work, you always reckon on the love of others. Epaphroditus was very uneasy because he perfectly reckoned on the love of the Philippians when they heard that he had been sick. You see the thoughtfulness and considerateness of grace where self is done with. It was perfect in Him. Where there is not the positive power of Christ’s presence, self will be there directly.

How gently and graciously the apostle speaks! The Philippians had thought of him in prison. He had heard of disputings among them: Euodias and Syntyche were not of the same mind; but he cannot rebuke them sharply when he had just received their kindness. “Fulfill ye my joy,” if you want to make me perfectly happy, you will be like-minded, “having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind”—a rebuke, but a very gentle one. The spirit in which he writes is exceedingly beautiful.

Here we find that which in Christ leads to all this. In Him there was the total absence of self; in us there ought to be the suppression of self. “In lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.” This will be no difficulty to us if we are practically with Christ. With Him, if I think of self at all, what do I think of? My faults, of course. I see in Christ such obedience, such love and grace, that I must think of my own failures. If I look at a brother, I see the blood of Christ upon him, I see the Spirit in him when I look on him with the eyes of Christ. Wherever the heart is feeling with Christ, one cannot but see good in others. Paul always speaks first of the good amongst those to whom he writes. There is only one exception to this amongst the epistles. Take Corinthians (which is not an exception): they were going on shockingly ill, and yet he says, before there is a word about the evil, “I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; that in every thing ye are enriched of him” (1 Cor. 1:4-5). The Epistle to the Galatians is the exception; there he plunges right into the evil at once. Where doctrine and faith were touched, he was a great deal more severe than when Christians were walking badly, not that there is any excuse for a bad walk. “I stand in doubt of you,” he says to them; but in the next chapter, “I have confidence in you through the Lord” (Gal. 5:10); his mind rises up to Christ.

In the ordinary path of the Christian, the heart being with Christ, the thing I see in myself is never a good thing—not that it brings distrust, for this is all wrong—it is thinking Christ’s heart is like mine! I do not doubt His love, but the effect of living near Him and being with Him is that, while love is perfect, light is perfect too. Suppose one Christian a powerful evangelist, another a teacher: the teacher will think, What a poor evangelist I am! the evangelist will feel, Oh, I know only the elements. He does see Christ in his brother. We are wretched creatures in ourselves, but this is not a cold measure of what a person is, but the thoughts of Christ about others and about self. The man who has a great gift from God will be thinking of bringing it out as pure as he got it in—“He has lit a lantern in my heart: does the light come out as pure as it went in?” It is wonderful the happiness with which a person walks when going through the world in that way. Self is gone. As a Christian, he sees that God has lit up grace in his heart, but alas! the walls of the lantern are sometimes dirty; when he looks at others, he sees they let out a little light any way.

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” What was the mind that was in Jesus? It was always coming down. We should call it a long journey from the throne of God to the cross; it was very far indeed, and it was always down. “He that humbleth himself shall be exalted” (Luke 14:11). The more He humbled Himself, the more He was trampled on. He begins His ministry with “Blessed, blessed,” He has to end it with “Woe, woe.” He goes down, whether trampled on or not, till He can go no lower, down to “the dust of death.”

He “being in the form of God thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation.” He always was God, but He laid aside the form of God, the outward glory, “and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.” He will never cease to be a servant, though Lord of all; He will never give up this service of love to minister to our blessing. In the condition of Godhead to begin, He takes the form of a servant, and He was always obedient. He had no will of His own: nothing could be more humble than this. We find in this chapter the path the Lord went, from having the form of God, down to that death on the cross. Adam was in the form of man, and he did set up by robbery to be equal with God; he was the first example of he “that exalteth himself shall be abased.” The last Adam abases Himself and is exalted; He lays aside His glory and takes a servant’s form.

Man (especially in these days) is just the opposite; man's mind does not want God. The whole effort is to get the first man up; and you find even Christians joining in this, following where they cannot lead. Are children more obedient, servants more faithful, men of business more honest? It is the exaltation of man's will and the setting aside of God. The second Man's path was exactly the opposite; He always went down. Are you content to do this? Are you content to have the mind that was in Christ Jesus, content to be always trampled on? This was God's path in the midst of evil, and this is what we want to get. People talk about God's creation— why it was sin made it as it is, not the physical world of course, but the world as we have it. When was the world embellished? By Cain, when he went out from the presence of God. Man tries to make the world pleasant without God; this is the true and real character of the world. You continually hear it said, What harm is there in music? what harm in painting? There is harm in not one of physical things, the harm is in the use I make of them. What harm is there in strength? None whatever; but if I use my strength to knock a man down, there is harm in that. The harm is in the use people make of things. What harm was there in the trees of the garden? None. Men have in a certain sense lost God, and they try to get on as well without Him as they can.

Christ was in this world in the form of a servant, a poor carpenter. Love delights to serve, blessed infinite love! Nothing could be more divine than when He gave up "the form of God" and went down, down, till He came to the gibbet—I do not say the cross, for the cross has become an honored name—but the actual gibbet. Then God exalts Him as Man.

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." We see the perfectness of love that takes the form of a servant and gives up self in everything. If this mind is in you, you do not look at self to look at the good that is there, or to spare yourself suffering. "And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God" (Eph 5:2); such is the character of divine love come into this world of evil. "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" will not do now. The world would be a paradise if that were done, but it is not a paradise; and what we want is a spirit of love that will carry us through the world. "For us an offering and a sacrifice to God"; there was in Christ the absolute giving up of self for what is perfectly worthless, and yet with a worthy object. Take the divine side of love; and the worse the object, the greater is the love; but if you take the human side, the greater the object, the greater is the love. We find both in Christ. If I take the creature side, the excellence of the object makes the greatness of the affection; if I take the divine side the worthlessness of the object makes the greatness of the affection. We see divine power come into the midst of evil—there never was anything like it. God could not come among angels as He came in this sinful world. "Unto the glory of God by us." "That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus" (2 Cor. 2:20). "Which things the angels desire to look into" (1 Peter 1:12).

Christ is the center of all that. I find His divine Person tracing this path all the way down. He never gives up the service of love. He will reign as King above all; all must confess His Lordship. But the service of love He will never give up; as indeed it is a higher thing. He is made Lord (He was always God, of course), but He makes Himself a servant.

"Jesus knowing that…he was come from God, and went to God; he riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself" (John 13:3-4). If He was going out of this world, the disciples might say He is gone into glory and has left us here; His service is over. No,

says the Lord, and He shows them that He does not give up His service. The key to John 13 is this, I cannot stay with you, but you must have a part with Me: a spot will not do there. He will take the place of a servant even in the glory. “He shall gird himself... and will come forth and serve them” (Luke 12:37). His love is His glory; the nearer we are to Him, the more we shall adore Him.

In 1 Corinthians 15 we read, “Then shall the Son also himself be subject.” He gives up the kingdom which He will rule in, but He keeps His place as Man. He will be the “Firstborn among many brethren” forever and ever. His ear was bored to the door-post. The slave had a right to go out free after seven years of service, but He says, “I will not go out free,” I will be a servant forever, when He could have had twelve legions of angels at His command. Down here He was as much God as before He came down, but He had the form of a servant. “He ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25), and it will be His delight and joy to minister blessing throughout eternity, and thus make it doubly precious to us.

If I get hold of the path, the spirit, the mind of Jesus, nothing could be more hateful to me than anything of self. You never find an act of self in Christ. Not merely was there no selfishness, but there was no self in Him. He has given us the immense privilege of always going down to serve others as He did.

“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” Salvation is always looked at as the end of the journey, as the thing arrived at, in this epistle; therefore he speaks of working it out. “Work out your own salvation”: this is in contrast with Paul’s working, not with God’s work, as people so often misunderstand it to be. Paul was in prison: they had lost him. They had not lost God, but Satan seemed to have got the victory. If you are there with Joshua fighting Amalek, it is a very solemn thing; and if you have not Moses’ hands up, you will be beaten.

There is no uncertainty, but it is exceedingly serious to fight God’s battle against Satan. Perhaps you think it must be easy to fight God’s battles. It is not easy even with the Lord to help me; it is a most solemn thing that my business is to overcome Satan. There was no conflict in Egypt; the Israelites were slaves there. When out of Egypt, there was both the conflict and the trial of the wilderness. When they got over Jordan, they entered into Canaan, and whenever Joshua crossed the Jordan, conflict characterized their state. “Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?” (Josh. 5:13). There was no circumcision till they crossed the Jordan; the stamp of Egypt was on them till they were dead and risen. It is a solemn thing that I stand in Christ’s place, in Christ’s name (every Christian does, of course, I mean) in the scene of Satan’s power.

We are vessels of God’s power against Satan. Here am I standing in Christ’s name in Satan’s world! God works in me; but this makes it only the more serious still: I should not fail. “Do all things without murmurings and disputings.” Before God we never murmur, never dispute. If God were seen, there would not be one murmur, one disputation; and faith realizes His presence. It is remarkable as to the exhortation which follows, that if you take it to pieces you see Christ in everything. “That ye may be blameless and harmless”; He was that. He was the Son of God, “without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation.” He was “the light of the world,” while He was in it: “holding forth the word of life”—this is just what He did.

“Ye are…the epistle of Christ,” filled up with mud it may be, and hard to read, but still ye are the epistle of Christ. “That the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body” (2 Cor. 4:10). I

owe everything to Christ: I owe Him salvation, heaven, everything. I owe Him myself. The heart becomes engaged with this manifestation. He is gone, and He has left us here, and He says, “I am glorified in them.”

Is that kind of desire yours?—not the desire of the sluggard who has nothing, who roasteth not that he took in hunting; but the real desire of manifesting Christ— the desire that cannot bear anything that is not Christ? God helps us in this. Paul could speak of “always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus”; he takes death and holds it on himself. He wants to keep the walls of the lantern bright, and so he would rub them.

“Always”? this is a great deal to say. What we have to do is to carry about with us the dying of the Lord Jesus, and then the flesh would never stir. We fail in this, and the Lord comes in and helps us. “We which live are alway delivered unto death” (2 Cor. 4:11). The flesh is always present, there is no change in that. The Lord knows He has to help us, and He puts us through trials and exercises; the Lord makes everything to work for good to us.

The apostle could say, “delivered unto death for Jesus’ sake.” When we look back to a past life, we have more to be thankful for our trials than for anything else. Till the root is reached, the Lord does not let you go; the heart desires this— would not let the trial slip away. Oh, if we only trusted God, there would be confidence in His love! “Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen” (2 Cor. 4:17-18). Are your hearts on the things that are seen, or on the things that are not seen?

There are three spaces in our hearts: Christ must be at the bottom of our heart and at the top also; it is what is between the two that shows my state. Has your heart been open all day for the things of the world to trot over? Has the highway of your heart been open all day? May God give us to be anything or nothing, so that the Lord Jesus may be everything!

Philippians 3.

In this chapter we get the energy that carries the Christian on through the wilderness in view of the glory. It does not give us the meekness and gentleness of Christ like chapter 2, but the energy that counts all but dross and dung to win Him. Doctrine is not the point in this epistle. Salvation is always looked on as at the end of the journey. The Christian is viewed as in a race, and in that race he is entirely under the power of the Spirit of God; the flesh is not looked at as acting. Christ is before us: the thing we are predestinated to is to be conformed to His image. There is no thought now, inasmuch as there is a Man in the glory, of any place or object for the Christian but to be with and like that Man on high.

As Christ was taken up as man into glory, we shall be taken up the same way to be like Him. The thought of the believer can never rest short of this. Paul says that he wants not to be unclothed, but clothed upon. “To depart, and to be with Christ” is blessed, but it is still waiting. The apostle here says that He will “change our vile bodies.” The cross having come in, it has given us the death of the old man, and the reception of Christ as Head of the new family in glory; we look off from everything to this. The hope that is in Christ is that when He appears we shall be like Him. Thus we look to be like Himself, with Himself surely, but like Himself: nothing short of this is the object of the believer. He would grow undoubtedly, but still it is growth by looking at an object we

shall never attain to till we are raised from the dead in His image or changed into it.

There is no mending of the flesh, no sanctification of nature, no forming of man as he is; there is death to it. The old man has been entirely and finally judged, but another is now in the glory as man. This we could not have as an object of faith until Christ was risen. God has “provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect” (Heb. 11:40)—“perfect,” that is, in glory. That could not be, nor was there any title for it, till the work upon the cross; therein is the title and groundwork for all this. There was no connection with Christ as man among the children of Adam; He was a true man, but union there was none whatever. He was one of them, but He was alone. He was a man without sin; we were men with sin: you can never unite the two, for they “are contrary the one to the other.” He could come in grace as a true man amongst us, but He abode alone.

In Hebrews 2 four reasons are given why Christ took flesh and blood: first, to make atonement; second, for God’s glory and counsels; third, to destroy him that had the power of death; fourth, that He should go through every sorrow, and so have sympathy with us. There was perfect grace in Him, but He was alone. People speak of Him as “bone of our bone,” but this is totally false; we are bone of His bone now that He is on high. Wherever you find the thought of Christ being bone of our bone, you get redemption and atonement made unnecessary, or at any rate muddled up. When atonement has been wrought, then by the Holy Spirit He unites us to Himself, and says we are “members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.”

Thus we learn that the only thing by which the flesh can be dealt with is death. Until atonement was made, God could not deal with sinners in the way of righteousness; He could forbear—“for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.” The difference with us is that righteousness is now before Him, and we are in it. Our souls stand in divine righteousness in the presence of God.

The apostle does not talk of sin in the flesh here. The flesh has its religion as well as its lusts, and this is much more attractive than worshipping God in the spirit—the flesh cannot do this. “Though I might also have confidence in the flesh,” such is the flesh’s religion. Paul was the most positive enemy of God all the while. Suppose this blamelessness of Paul—to whose credit was it? Paul’s. Wherever religion is a credit to us, it is not worth anything; worse than that, it deceives us. You may have all the truths which do not test faith, and yet be without this. The time will come when whosoever “killeth you will think that he doeth God service” (John 16:2). They thought they were doing God service, but they would not hear of the truth that tested faith—the Father revealed in the Son.

Thus the whole system of the religion of the flesh is set aside here. It is always the truth that tests faith. Suppose I fast twice in the week, and give tithes of all I possess, to whose credit is this? Mine. The moment I get the cross the flesh is judged, and that is no credit to me. The thing that tests faith flesh resists. The disciples would not hear of the Lord’s death, because it tested their faith. Peter, the very man that owned what He was going to build the church on, says, “Be far from thee,” and the Lord has to call him “Satan.” Although he had got a truth, he had not the flesh judged up to the measure of what he knew; he would not have a truth that breaks through the flesh in a way he does not like.

“That I may win Christ”—this is the great principle of the whole chapter, and you get perseverance in it, which is more. Suppose a man just saved, what does he think about the world? That it has deceived him. Leave him for a while, and his family twine round him, and soon he begins to seek the things of the world. Paul saw Christ on the way to Damascus, and he gives up his importance, his Pharisaism, his teaching, everything else, and he counts all but loss that he may win Him. “And do count them but dung, that I may win Christ”—not “did count,” which would be comparatively easy.

The value of Christ must be fresh enough in the soul, as a present thing, to enable one to count all the rest mere dross and dung. Everybody is governed by the object he is pursuing, and, what is more, everybody judges of others by the thing he is pursuing himself. One man makes money his object, another pleasure. The man who loves money says, Oh, what a fool that man is to spend so much on his pleasure! and the man who loves pleasure says, What a fool that man is to hoard up his money, it is no better to him than so much clay!

The moment I want to win Christ, all besides is dross and dung. You have only to lay aside every weight, Paul could say, with Christ has his object: only to lay aside is easily said, but the moment it becomes a weight it is easy. When I say, I must get Christ, death may be on the road, but never mind so that I get Him. The desire is not weakened by the eye being dimmed by present things. Paul goes on. There we get testing. He went on looking at Christ. He had found Christ the satisfaction of his soul, and he did not hunger, he did not thirst, as the Lord says, for anything else. People talk of sacrifices; but there is no great sacrifice in giving up dung. If the eye were so fixed on Christ that these things got that character, it would not be a trouble to give them up. The thing gets its character from what the heart is set on. The moment the heart is set on Christ, all the rest becomes dross. The man with one object is the energetic man. The Christian’s one object is Christ—the object God has and the object the Spirit gives to the heart of the Christian. Have we only to say that Christ is the one sole object of the heart? are there not distractions? We allow other things to come in; the eye is not single.

Paul however would “be found in him, not having mine own righteousness... but the righteousness which is of God by faith.” The apostle was still looking forward as he is always doing in this Epistle. Here he speaks of righteousness in contrast (not to his sins, but) to his righteousness. A poor man may not part with his old coat; but if you give him a new one instead, he will soon have done with it. The moment the soul has the eye fixed on the Lord Jesus, all our righteousness becomes filthy rags, and the heart revolts from mixing it up with Him. When the Spirit is come, He will convince the world “of sin, because they believe not on me.” The world’s sin was proved by not believing on Jesus; all are under sin together. The one single righteous Person was turned out of the world: where will you find righteousness now? At the right hand of God. The world will never see Christ again except in judgment. Satan was never called “the prince of this world” till Christ came, till the cross. When He comes, Satan raises the whole world against Him. There is the prince of this world, the Lord says. He might rule before, but in the cross Satan was proved the prince of this world.

Again, we hear of “the righteousness which is of God by faith”; not now righteousness of man for God, but of God for man. “Being made conformable unto his death” (Phil. 2:10). In a world where Christ had been rejected, the object of all my hopes is at the right hand of God. I have got a life

completely paramount over death. The resurrection of Christ was past sin, past Satan's power, past judgment, past death. The second Man had gone into death—was made sin; but He is risen, and tall that is past. God has been glorified, and death belongs to us now as we belonged to it in the first man. We have got this divine life which is above everything in the world. If I know Him, I want to know the power of His resurrection that left everything behind. What comes next? "The fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death"; all was gain to Paul. Do we not see the blessedness of being a martyr?

"If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead": death might be on the road, but death would be positive gain because one would be like Christ. Christ risen becomes power in me going through the same scene as He did. The apostle was a man of like passions with us, but he was single-eyed. Here he gives us not only the Christ he was going to win, but something he was going to win for himself "the resurrection from among the dead" (Phil. 3:11).

In Mark 9:9-10, we read of "the rising from the dead," about which the disciples questioned; every Pharisee, every orthodox Jew, believed in the resurrection of the dead. What did the resurrection of Christ mean? It was God's seal on everything He was, and everything He had done during His life here. He took Him out from among all the other dead. If He takes people out from among the rest of the dead because He delights in them, that is the seal of their acceptance. Paul says, No matter what it costs me, I will attain to that. What condition is the saint raised in? "It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is reaised in power" (1 Cor. 15:43). "Christ the first-fruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming" (1 Cor. 15:23).

As God put His perfect seal on Christ and Christ's work, and raised Him, so, when He raises us up, He puts His seal on us: only it is because of His righteousness, not our own. The apostle was apprehended of Christ Jesus, but he had not got it yet. What I am looking for is to lay hold of that for which Christ has laid hold for me. When we attain to that, we get Christ Himself and being like Christ; we do not, could not, get that down here. Perfection as to the state of the Christian means perfect conformity to the image of Christ in glory.

Three classes are spoken of here, the "perfect," those "otherwise minded," and those who are the "enemies of the cross of Christ." The perfect are those who have entered by the power of the Spirit of Christ into this truth of being perfectly like Him. Many a Christian knows only the forgiveness of sins; he has not got the thing that is before him, but the thing that is behind him. The thought of having Christ in glory and being like Him governed Paul completely; but, like a man going through a strait passage with a lamp at the other end of it, he got more of the light as he went on, though as yet he had not attained. Every step the Christian takes he has got more of the light: "we…beholding…are changed into the same image," though in a certain sense we have none of it. One has not merely seen redemption that has given him the object, but he is running after the object. He has got what Christianity gives—got all of it, and this in a certain sense is perfection. "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling [calling above] of God in Christ Jesus." Till we are above, we have not got the calling—the effect of it, I mean. It cost Paul suffering, it cost him difficulty, but it filled his heart with joy—filled it with Christ.

You know persons who have found they are poor sinners, who see their sins are forgiven, but they do not see farther; they are "otherwise minded," but God will reveal this to them: wait a while, have patience. "For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they

are the enemies of the cross of Christ." Those who call themselves Christians and love the world. Men who mind earthly things are the enemies of the cross of Christ. The cross and the glory go together, not at the same time of course, but the one depends on the other.

The cross of Christ toward this world is saying, "The world seeth me no more" (John 14:19). The cross is perfect security for heaven, but entire judgment of this world. Paul's heart having followed Christ up there, his object, his heart, is there. "One thing I do"—that is the Christian. You may be in various circumstances, you may be a carpenter as Christ was; but the Christian's "conversation is in heaven." What is he waiting for? For Christ to come and take him to Himself. His heart is fixed on Christ's Person. He has found Him at the cross, who has carried him into heaven with Him. I am changed into the same glory as Christ, while it is acting on my soul that I am to be like Him; it governs the heart the whole way.

The righteousness of the law was the righteousness of man, the law being the measure of man's righteousness. Christ Himself is our righteousness. I have got life from God and righteousness: both are Christ. The power that raised Christ from the dead the Spirit will exercise to raise or change our bodies. These are God's thoughts about us. What am I going to get? Christ, and to be like Christ; then do you run after Him. Can we say we are doing that? I distrust the moral condition of the man that thinks much of crimes. The thief went into paradise to be with Christ, the moral man went out.

Can we say, "This one thing I do?" I have but one thing, and I am pushing on. If you wanted a person to get to London, whether would you rather meet him, four miles from London with his back to it, or four miles from Holyhead with his face to London? Even a babe may have his face turned to Christ. Are you going God's way? Can we honestly say, with glory before us, with Christ before us, "One thing I do"? Which way does your eye turn? Which way are you going? God has only one way—Christ.

There is the constant solicitation of distractions on the road: quite true, everything round us is a temptation. When the people came to Christ in the garden of Gethsemane, of what was it the occasion to Him? Of perfect obedience. Of what to Peter? Of temptation. What one looks for in the Christian is a single eye. One of the comforts of heaven will be that there I shall not want my conscience; I want it every moment now; I cannot let my heart out now.

The Lord give us in all liberty of heart so to see Him before us that we may run hard after Him, having our hearts kept by the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord.

Philippians 4.

This chapter takes up the entire superiority to circumstances which characterizes the Christian. The apostle had gone through very trying circumstances; he had been in prison for four years, chained to a heathen soldier—a terrible kind of thing. There he had been to have the experience that no circumstances could ever separate from the love of Christ, and that the life of Christ was paramount to everything. Christ felt all, far more than we do; but there was that which sustained Him and made it positive joy to Him. It is a great thing to see that the power of Christ in us can set us entirely above everything. Paul knew how to suffer need, and he knew how to abound—a far more dangerous thing; for if we suffer need, we are thrown on God necessarily. What we find all through this epistle is the power of the Spirit of God raising him above all circumstances and

sorrows; it is always the power of the Spirit of God which sustains him.

Sin is never mentioned in the epistle, nor flesh as a gross thing, but only in its religious shape. But we get the power of the Spirit of God carrying us through this world where temptations are: not that the flesh is any better, but there is such a thing as living above it. This is a very important principle for all of us. It is true that “in many things we offend all” (James 2:9); but Scripture never supposes that we are going to offend; and we can never excuse ourselves if we do offend. The flesh is as bad as ever; and what we get is, not the grace of God for it, but a thorn in the flesh, the thorn being from the grace of God, of course.

If we are conscious of weakness and are leaning only on grace, we need not offend: there is power for us. It is possible that at a given moment I may not have power; but this is because I have been going wrong previously. Christ was witnessing while Peter was denying; but Christ had been praying while Peter had been sleeping. The armor should be put on before the battle, not just at the battle. When Satan came to Him with his wiles, the Lord had only to rest quietly in obedience: there was no longer reasoning, no confusion about it. Satan says, “Command that these stones be made bread” (Matt. 4:3); the Lord answers He is come to obey. For it is written that “man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” Then Satan tells Him to cast Himself down (that is, not to trust God), but is told, “It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.” These are wiles; but when Satan comes openly, then resist Satan. “Get thee hence, Satan”; then he flees. We have not to overcome him who is overcome; but we have to overcome his wiles by the word in obedience.

The only effect of trying circumstances is to give much deeper acquaintance with the Lord’s faithfulness, and withal much deeper joy. At the end of four years in prison Paul could say, “Rejoice in the Lord always”; he had nothing else to rejoice in. He says, as it were, The more I know of every trial and hindrance in my work as an, apostle, the more I can tell you, You can rejoice in the Lord always. It is a beautiful thing to see Paul the person to say, You must be always rejoicing. The thing that hinders our rejoicing is not trouble, but being half-and-half. If in the world, his conscience reproaches the Christian; if he meets spiritual Christians, he is uncomfortable there; in fact he is happy nowhere. A man’s affections do not hinder his work for his children. If we were serving Christ simply, we should go back to Him all the happier when the service was done.

We never can give a reason for not rejoicing in Christ, except the evil of our hearts. Here we get what is so important practically—to rejoice always. Any one can rejoice in the Lord when the Lord gives him what he likes. “Bless the Lord at all times” (Psa. 34:1): that is the testing point. “In everything give thanks.” “The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want”; not, I have got blessing and shall not want, but “The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want.” “He restoreth my soul.” He stood by me when in misery, sorrow, failure it may be. I may get my own weakness, death in the way; but the table is spread in the very presence of my enemies (like Joshua and the Israelites eating the passover before ever a blow was struck). God’s natural work is to give us green pastures and still waters; but He makes everything work together for our good: it is not the circumstances, it is the Lord. “I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” After the sorrowful and trying things Paul had passed through, he is full of comfort. He had had green pastures, pleasant things from the Lord; but he rejoices all through, whatever the circumstances.

Again, he says, “Let your moderation [yieldingness] be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.” He does not insist upon his rights, because he trusts the Lord, he is not careful. Abraham says to Lot, “If thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right” (Gen. 13:9). Lot chooses Sodom—always the effect of choosing for oneself. The part Abraham seemed to have lost was Sodom and Gomorrah.

Then there is another exceedingly strong thing connected with it: how long is this going to last? “The Lord is at hand.” You have got your joy and strength elsewhere, and “the fashion of this world passeth away.” If conscious that my portion is in Christ, the looking for the Lord, who is my portion, makes me to sit loose to everything here. If our expectation, if the feeling of our hearts, is that the Lord is at hand (I do not mean prophecy, but the personal expectation of the saint himself), it must be so. What event is there between you and heaven? The only one is our going up there. If I am looking for Christ to come straight down from heaven and take me up, what event is there between? It is no great wonder if the Christian has power to go through circumstances and master them; he has joy in the Lord that nothing can touch. In waiting for Christ what must be done before He comes? “That day and hour knoweth no man”; but there is only one thing that must be done, the gathering in of the saints. “The longsuffering of the Lord is salvation.” “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise,” but He is waiting on poor sinners. Prophecy does not speak to us of heaven; faith looks to heaven, and sees what is there. Prophecy is God’s politics, and it saves us from human politics—a great mercy too. Our portion is Christ Himself.

There are trials in the way; but then you get, “Be careful for nothing.” This is a magnificent sentence and leaves no loophole. It has often stopped my mouth completely when I have thought of the church, the saints. “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.” He does not say, Do you go and do the will of God, but reckon on God that you are going to get the best thing. Present your requests to God; thank Him before you get them. He does not say you will get them always; it is the interest which God takes in us that is the point here. Paul besought the Lord three times that the thorn should be taken away. Indeed I am not going to take away what I ment for your good! such virtually was the answer. “My grace is sufficient for thee” (2 Cor. 12:9).

“And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts.” This is not peace with God; or that your heart keeps the peace either. The peace keeps your heart, and it is the peace of God, the peace He is in. My own peace I understand very well. The peace He is in keeps my heart, and it passes all understanding—of course it does, because it is “the peace of God.” I do not know what I may get; but of one thing I am sure—I shall get the very best thing, though it may come in a way very grating to my feelings.

When this is the case, I can think of what is good. God thinks of my trouble; I can now think of what is good. “Whatsoever things are honest…whatsoever things are of good report…if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.” What a blessed condition of soul this is, beloved friends! There is no burden in my cares: I cannot burden God, when I put them there. “And the God of peace shall be with you.” Cast your care on God, and the peace of God will keep you; walk as a Christian ought to walk, and the God of peace will be with you. You have a companion in the path of trouble and sorrow, and such a companion too! “The God of peace!” He is never called the God of joy. Joy is an uncertain thing, peace is always there. This word

continually through Scripture is attached to God's name. Where peace is, there is no trouble. Rejoicing in the Lord always, his moderation known unto all men, the Lord at hand, no care—what a happy picture of the Christian!

There is more: "But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again, wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity." Observe the delicacy of the apostle here; "At the last" this proves that he had been in trouble, in want—I do not mean you were forgetting me, but ye lacked opportunity.

I have learned in whatsoever state I am to be content; this is the effect of trusting Christ in it all. "I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound." He was in abundance sometimes; and this is much more dangerous: we are apt to rest in the gift instead of looking at the giver; but with Paul it brought out only thankfulness.

"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." This is the epistle of experience. It is not people can do all things, but "I can do all things"; Christ is always sufficient. Paul found it so. He had gone through perils of all kinds, but Christ was always sufficient. He was in abundance now, but Christ in all things was sufficient. It is a blessed truth that, though we may fail Him, we cannot be in circumstances Christ is not sufficient for. Whether it be the church or individual saints, it is impossible to be in a place for which Christ is not sufficient. Paul was in danger from the flesh, and a thorn was sent to him. The thorn was something which made him in some way despicable in his ministry. The wonderful effect of his preaching, then, did not come from him; the evidence of the power of Christ was there. Then let me have it, Paul says: "I rather glory in my infirmities" (2 Cor. 12:9). The thorn was not power, but it was the way of power; the flesh is broken down completely that Christ may come in. If there had been a fourth heaven, the flesh would have been only the more puffed up: you cannot correct what is evil in its nature. What came to make nothing of Paul is not power, but Christ is there. 2 Corinthians 12 takes two sides; we have there a man in Christ (a man in the flesh totally put down), and then Christ in a man, the other side of the Christian life—the power of Christ in us, and with us.

Do not say, A Christian can do all things; it is quite true in the abstract, but not what the apostle says. "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, to be content." He found Christ always sufficient. His whole heart was full at the same time of affectionate remembrance of the Philippians. "Even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity."

I think it is beautiful how the apostle does not take himself out of a man. Superiority is to go through circumstances and feel them all, and yet to be above them. Look how he speaks of Epaphroditus in Philippians 2. As a doctrine, if he had died, he would have gone to heaven; but it was not that.

He felt it as it was, it was not a hard mind that cast off the trial. When the Lord saw the widow, "He had compassion on her" (Luke 7:13). There was no insensibility in Him, but in going through the circumstances He was sensible of them, yet above them. The way we should walk is as never governed by circumstances, not in insensibility, but in superiority. Christ is the answer to it: cast your care on Him.

Paul attaches all the importance of divine grace to their service. You see what a link there is in the church of God even in gifts. Poor old bed-ridden women may have prayed for Paul. “My God shall supply all your need.” It is “my God,” he knew Him—the God I know, the One I have been with, as if answering for the God he knew. How his heart gets up to the source of it all! The heart gets back to God. What was to be the measure of supply? Was it their need? No, “his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” We find here a blessed picture of the way in which the Spirit of God lifts him, while feeling everything, above the circumstances. It is perfect impressibility by the circumstances here below, but we have this source of strength in Christ Himself. The thing I have to learn is my own weakness.

We make a mistake about the apostles, we often think of them as if they were eagles soaring above all. Paul says, “I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling” (1 Cor. 2:3). There were great people in Corinth. Paul was a blessed vessel, but the vessel must be made nothing of. What we have to learn is being nothing that Christ may be everything. If a person is humble, he does not want to be humbled; but if he is not humble, he must be.

Are we content to be nothing? Are we content to walk in the secret of God? The Lord give us to learn practically what it is thus to pass through this world. You can get neither the Christian nor the church in a state that Christ is not sufficient for. The Lord give us to know our nothingness.

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