

COMMENTARY ON 1 PETER

by Robert Leighton

Leighton's devotional and practical commentary on the First Epistle of Peter, comparing God's provision of spiritual nourishment for new believers to His natural provision of physical sustenance. A work renowned for its warm spiritual tone and depth of insight.

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A Practical Commentary upon the First Epistle of Peter By Robert Leighton

CHAPTER I. Ver. 1. Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. The grace of God in the heart of man is a tender plant in a strange unkindly soil; and therefore cannot well prosper and grow, without much care and pains, and that of a skilful hand, and one who has the art of cherishing it: for this reason God has given the constant ministry of the word to His Church, not only for the first work of conversion, but also for confirming and increasing His grace in the hearts of His children. And though the extraordinary ministers of the Gospel, the Apostles, had principally the former for their charge—the converting of unbelievers, Jews and Gentiles, and so the planting of Churches, to be after kept, and watered by others (as the Apostle intimates, 1 Corinthians 3:6); yet did they not neglect the other work of strengthening the grace of God begun in the new converts of those times, both by revisiting them, and exhorting them in person, as they could, and by the supply of their writing to them when absent. And the benefit of this extends, (not by accident, but by the purpose and good providence of God,) to the Church of God in all succeeding ages. This excellent Epistle (full of Evangelical doctrine and Apostolic authority) is a brief, and yet very clear summary both of the consolations and instructions necessary for the encouragement and direction of a Christian on his journey to Heaven; elevating his thoughts and desires to that happiness, and strengthening him against all opposition along the way, both that of corruption within, and temptations and afflictions from without. The heads of doctrine contained in it are many, but the main that are most insisted on, are these three, faith, obedience, and patience; to establish them in believing, to direct them in doing, and to comfort them in suffering. And because the first is the groundwork and support of the other two, this first chapter is much occupied with persuading them of the truth of that mystery which they had received and did believe, viz. their redemption and salvation by Christ Jesus; that inheritance of immortality bought by His blood for them, and the evidence and stability of their right and title to it. And then he uses this belief, this assurance of the glory to come, as the great persuasive to the other two, both to holy obedience, and constant patience, since nothing can be too much either to forego or undergo, either to do or to suffer, for the attainment of that blessed state. And as from the consideration of that object and matter of the hope of believers, he encourages to patience, and exhorts to holiness in this chapter in general; so in the following chapters, he expresses more particularly both the universal and special duties of Christians, both in doing and suffering; often setting before those to whom he wrote the matchless example of the Lord Jesus and the greatness of their engagement to follow Him. In the first two verses we have the inscription and salutation, in the usual style of the Apostolic Epistles. The Inscription has the author and the address,—from whom, and to whom. The author of this Epistle is designated by his name—Peter; and his calling—an Apostle. We shall not insist upon his name, that it was imposed by Christ, or what is its signification: this the Evangelists teach us.¹ By that which is spoken of him in various passages of the Gospel, he is very remarkable amongst the Apostles, both for his graces and his failings; eminent in zeal and courage, and yet stumbling oft in his forwardness, and

once grossly falling; and these, by the providence of God being recorded in Scripture, give a check to the excess of Rome's conceit concerning this Apostle. Their extolling and exalting him above the rest, is not for his cause, much less to the honor of his Lord and Master Jesus Christ, for He is injured and dishonored by it; but it is in favor of themselves. As Alexander distinguished his two friends, that the one was a friend of Alexander, the other a friend of the king, the preferment which they give this Apostle is not in good-will to Peter, but in the desire of primacy. But whatever he was they would be much in pain to prove Rome's right to it by succession. And if ever it had any such right, we may confidently say they have forfeited it long ago, by departing from St. Peter's footsteps, and from his faith, and retaining too much those things wherein he was faulty; namely—His unwillingness to hear of, and consent to, Christ's sufferings,—his Master, spare yourself, or Be it far from you,²—in those they are like him; for thus they would unburden and exempt the Church from the cross, from the real cross of afflictions, and instead of that, have nothing but painted, or carved, or gilded crosses; these they are content to embrace, and worship too, but cannot endure to hear of the other.—Instead of the cross of affliction, they make the crown or miter the badge of their Church, and will have it known by prosperity, and outward pomp; and so turn the Church militant into the Church triumphant, not considering that it is Babylon's voice, not the Church's, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow.³ Again, they are like him in his saying on the mount at Christ's transfiguration, when he knew not what he said, It is good for us to be here:⁴ so they have little of the true glory of Christ, but the false glory of that monarchy on their seven hills: It is good to be here, they say. Again, in their undue striking with the sword, not the enemies, as he, but the faithful friends and servants of Jesus Christ. But to proceed. We see here Peter's office or title,—an apostle; not chief bishop. Some in their glossing have been so impudent as to add that besides the text; though in chap. 5 ver. 4, he gives that title to Christ alone, and to himself only fellow elder; and here, not prince of the apostles, but an apostle, restored and reestablished after his fall, by repentance, and by Christ Himself, after His own death and resurrection.⁵ Thus we have in our Apostle a singular instance of human frailty on the one side, and of the sweetness of Divine grace on the other. Free and rich grace it is indeed, that forgives and swallows up multitudes of sins, of greatest sins; not only sins before conversion, as to St. Paul, but foul offenses committed after conversion, as to David, and to this Apostle: not only once raising them from the dead, but when they fall, stretching out the same hand, and raising them again, and restoring them to their station, and comforting them in it by His free Spirit, as David prays: not only to cleanse polluted clay, but to work it into vessels of honor; not only so, but of the most defiled shape to make the most refined vessels; not vessels of honor of the lowest sort, but for the highest and most honorable services; vessels to bear His own precious name to the nations; making the most unworthy and the most unfit, fit by His grace to be His messengers. Of Jesus Christ.] Both as the beginning and end of his Apostleship, as Christ is called Alpha and Omega; chosen and called by Him, and called to this—to preach Him, and salvation wrought by Him. Apostle of Jesus Christ.] Sent by Him, and the message no other than His Name, to make that known. And what this Apostleship was then, after some extraordinary way, befitting these first times of the Gospel, that the ministry of the word in ordinary is now; and therefore an employment of more difficulty and excellence than is usually conceived by many, not only of those who look upon it, but even of those who are exercised in it;—to be Ambassadors for the Greatest of Kings, and upon no mean employment, that great treaty of peace and reconciliation between Him and mankind.⁶ This epistle is directed to the elect, who are described here by their temporal and by their spiritual conditions.

The first has very much dignity and comfort in it; but the other has neither, but rather the contrary of both; and therefore the Apostle, intending their comfort, mentions the one but in passing, to signify to whom particularly he sent his Epistle; but the other is that which he would have their thoughts dwell upon, and therefore he prosecutes it in his following discourse. And if we look to the order of the words [That is, the order in the original ...], their temporal condition is but interjected; for it is said, To the elect, first, and then, To the strangers scattered, &c. and he would have this as it were drowned in the other—According to the foreknowledge of God the Father. That those dispersed strangers who dwelt in the countries here named, were Jews, appears if we look to the foregoing Epistle, where the same word is used, and expressly appropriated to the Jews.⁷ St. Peter, in Galatians 2:8, is called an apostle of the circumcision, as exercising his Apostleship most towards them; and there is in some passages of this Epistle, somewhat which, though belonging to all Christians, yet has, in the strain and way of expression, a particular fitness to the believing Jews, as being particularly verified in them, which was spoken of their nation.⁸ Some argue from the name "strangers," that the Gentiles are here meant, which seems not to be; for proselyte Gentiles were indeed called strangers in Jerusalem, and by the Jews; but were not the Jews strangers in these places, Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia?—Not strangers dwelling together in a prosperous, flourishing condition, as a well planted colony, but strangers of the dispersion, scattered to and fro. Their dispersion was partly, first by the Assyrian captivity, and after that by the Babylonish, and by the invasion of the Romans; and it might be in these very times increased by the believing Jews flying from the hatred and persecution raised against them at home. The places here mentioned, through which they were dispersed, are all in Asia. So Asia here is Asia the lesser; where it is to be observed, that some of those who heard St. Peter are said to be of those regions. And if any of those then converted were amongst these dispersed, the comfort was no doubt the more grateful from the hand of the same Apostle by whom they were first converted; but this is only conjecture. Though Divine truths are to be received equally from every minister alike, yet it must be acknowledged, that there is something (we know not what to call it) of a more acceptable reception of those who at first were the means of bringing men to God, than of others; like the opinion some have of physicians whom they love. The Apostle comforts these strangers of this dispersion, by the spiritual union which they obtained by effectual calling; and so calls off their eyes from their outward, dispersed, and despised condition, to look above that, as high as the spring of their happiness, the free love and election of God. Scattered in the countries, and yet gathered in God's election, chosen or picked out; strangers to men amongst whom they dwelt, but known and foreknown to God; removed from their own country, to which men have naturally an unalterable affection, but made heirs of a better (as follows, ver. 3, 4); and having within them the evidence both of eternal election and of that expected salvation, the Spirit of holiness (ver. 2). At the best, a Christian is but a stranger here, set him where you will, as our Apostle teaches after; and it is his privilege that he is so; and when he thinks not so, he forgets and disparages himself, and descends far below his quality, when he is much taken with anything in this place of his exile. But this is the wisdom of a Christian, when he can solace himself against the meanness and any kind of discomfort of his outward condition, with the comfortable assurance of the love of God, that He has called him to holiness, given him some measure of it, and an endeavor after more; and by this may he conclude, that He has ordained him unto salvation. If either he is a stranger where he lives, or as a stranger deserted by his friends, and very nearly stripped of all outward comforts, yet may he rejoice in this, that the eternal, unchangeable love of

God, which is from everlasting to everlasting, is sealed to his soul. And O! what will it avail a man to be surrounded with the favor of the world, to sit unmolested in his own home and possessions, and to have them very great and pleasant, to be well moneyed, and landed and befriended, and yet estranged and severed from God, not having any token of His special love? To the elect.] The Apostle here designates all the Christians to whom he writes, by the condition of true believers, calling them elect and sanctified, &c.: and the Apostle St. Paul writes in the same style in his Epistles to the Churches. Not that all in these Churches were such indeed, but because they professed to be such, and by that their profession and calling as Christians, they were obliged to be such: and as many of them as were in any measure true to that, their calling and profession were really such. Besides, it would seem not unworthy of consideration, that in all probability there would be fewer false Christians, and the number of true believers would be usually greater, in the Churches in those primitive times, than now in the best reformed Churches; because there could not then be many of those who were from their infancy bred in the Christian faith, but the greatest part were such as, being of years of discretion, were, by the hearing of the Gospel, converted from Paganism and Judaism to the Christian religion first, and made a deliberate choice of it; to which there were at that time no great outward encouragements, and therefore the less danger of multitudes of hypocrites, which, as vermin in summer, breed most in the time of the Church's prosperity. Though no nation or kingdom had then universally received the faith, but rather hated and persecuted it, yet were there even then amongst them, as the writings of the Apostles testify, false brethren, and inordinate walkers, and men of corrupt minds, earthly-minded, and led with a spirit of envy and contention and vainglory. Although the question that is raised concerning the necessary qualifications of all the members of a true visible Church can no way, as I conceive, be decided from the inscriptions of the Epistles; yet certainly they are useful to teach Christians and Christian Churches what they ought to be, and what their holy profession requires of them, and sharply to reprove the gross unlikeness and nonconformity that is in the most part of men to the description of Christians. As there are some that are too strict in their judgment concerning the being and nature of the visible Church, so certainly the greatest part of Churches are too loose in their practice. From the dissimilarity between our Churches and those, we may make this use of reproof, that if an Apostolic Epistle were to be directed to us, it ought to be inscribed, "To the ignorant, profane, malicious," &c. As he, who at the hearing of the Gospel read, said, "Either this is not the Gospel, or we are not Christians," so, either these characters, given in the inscription of these Epistles, are not true characters, or we are not true Christians. Ver. 2. Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. In this verse we have their condition and the causes of it.—Their condition, sanctified and justified; the former expressed by obedience, the latter by sprinkling of the blood of Christ. The causes, 1. Eternal election. 2. The execution of that decree, their effectual calling, which, I conceive, is meant by election here, the selecting them out of the world, and joining them to the fellowship of the children of God.⁹ The former, election, is particularly ascribed to God the Father, the latter to the Holy Spirit; and the blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is here assigned as the cause of their justification; and so the whole Trinity concurring dignify them with this their spiritual and happy estate. First, I shall discourse of these separately, and then of their connection. I. Of the state itself, and 1. Of justification, though named last. This sprinkling refers to the rite of the legal purification by the sprinkling of blood; and aptly so; for these rites of sprinkling and blood all pointed out this blood and this sprinkling, and exhibited

this true ransom of souls, which was only shadowed by them. The use and purpose of sprinkling were purification and expiation, because sin merited death, and the pollutions and stains of human nature were by sin. Such is the pollution, that it can in no way be washed off but by blood.¹⁰ Neither is there any blood able to purge from sin except the most precious blood of Jesus Christ, which is called the blood of God.¹¹ That the stain of sin can be washed off only by blood, intimates that it merits death; and that no blood but that of the Son of God can do it, intimates that this stain merits eternal death—and that would have been our portion, if the death of the eternal Lord of life had not freed us from it. Filthiness needs sprinkling; guiltiness, such as deserves death, needs sprinkling of blood; and the death it deserves being everlasting death, the blood must be the blood of Christ, the eternal Lord of life, dying to free us from the sentence of death. The soul, like the body, has its life, its health, its purity, and the opposite of these,—its death, diseases, deformities, and impurity, which belong to it as to their first subject, and to the body by participation. The soul and body of all mankind are stained by the pollution of sin. The impure leprosy of the soul is not an outward spot, but wholly inward; so, as the bodily leprosy was purified by the sprinkling of blood, this is, too. Then, by reflecting, we see how all this expressed by the Apostle St. Peter is necessary for our justification. 1. Christ, the Mediator between God and man, is God and Man 1:2. A Mediator not only interceding, but also satisfying.¹² 3. This satisfaction does not reconcile us, unless it is applied; therefore there is not only mention of blood, but the sprinkling of it. The Spirit by faith sprinkles the soul, as with hyssop, by which the sprinkling was made: this is what the Prophet speaks about,¹³ So shall he sprinkle many nations; and which the Apostle to the Hebrews prefers above all legal sprinklings (chap. 9:12-14), both as to its duration and as to the excellence of its effects. Men are not easily convinced and persuaded of the deep stain of sin, and that no other laver can remove it but the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. Some who have moral resolutions of amendment dislike at least gross sins, and try to avoid them—to them it is cleanness enough to reform in those things, but they haven't considered what becomes of the guiltiness they have already contracted, and how that shall be purged, how their natural pollution shall be taken away. Don't be deceived in this; it is not a passing sigh, or a light word, or a wish of "God forgive me;" no, nor the highest current of repentance, nor that which is the truest evidence of repentance, change—none of these purify us in the sight of God, and expiate His wrath; they are all imperfect and stained themselves, cannot stand and answer for themselves, much less be of value to compensate the former guilt of sin. The very tears of the purest repentance, unless sprinkled with this blood, are impure; all our washings without this are but washings of the blackamoor—it is labor in vain.¹⁴ None are truly purified by the blood of Christ, who do not endeavor after purity of heart and conversation; yet it is the blood of Christ by which they are all made fair, and there is no spot in them. Here it is said, elect to obedience; but because that obedience is imperfect, there must be sprinkling of the blood too. There is nothing in religion further out of nature's reach, and out of its liking and belief, than the doctrine of redemption by a Savior, and a crucified Savior,—by Christ, and by His blood, first shed on the cross in His suffering, and then sprinkled on the soul by His Spirit. It is easier to make men aware of the necessity of repentance and amendment of life (though that is very difficult), than of this purging by the sprinkling of this precious blood. If we saw how necessary Christ is to us, we should esteem and love Him more. It is not by the hearing of Christ, and of His blood in the doctrine of the Gospel; it is not by the sprinkling of water, even that water which is the sign of this blood, without the blood itself, and the sprinkling of it. Many are present where it is sprinkled, and yet have no portion in it. See to it that this blood is sprinkled on

your souls, so that the destroying angel may pass by you. There is a generation (not some few, but a generation) deceived in this; they are their own deceivers, pure in their own eyes.¹⁵ How earnestly does David pray, Wash me, purge me with hyssop! Though bathed in tears, that satisfies not—Wash me.¹⁶ This is the honorable condition of the saints, that they are purified and consecrated to God by this sprinkling; yes, they have on long white robes washed in the blood of the Lamb. There is mention indeed of great tribulation,¹⁷ but there is a double comfort joined with it. 1. They come out of it; that tribulation has an end. And, 2. They pass from that to glory; for they have on the robe of candidates, long white robes washed in the blood of the Lamb, washed white in blood. As for this blood, it is nothing but purity and spotlessness, having no stain of sin, and besides, has the virtue to take away the stain of sin where it is sprinkled. My well-beloved is white and ruddy,¹⁸ says the spouse; thus in His death, ruddy by bloodshed, white by innocence and purity of that blood. Shall those, then, who are purged by this blood, return to live among the swine, and tumble with them in the puddle? What gross injury would this be to themselves, and to that blood by which they are cleansed! Those who are chosen to this sprinkling, are likewise chosen to obedience. This blood purifies the heart; yea, this blood purges our consciences from dead works to serve the living God.¹⁹ 2. Of their sanctification. Elect unto obedience.] It is easily understood to whom. When obedience to God is expressed by the simple absolute name of obedience, it teaches us that to Him alone belong absolute and unlimited obedience, all obedience by all creatures. It is the shame and misery of man, that he has departed from this obedience, that we have become sons of disobedience; but grace, renewing the hearts of believers, changes their natures, and so their names, and makes them children of obedience (as afterwards in this chapter). As this obedience consists in the receiving Christ as our Redeemer, so also at the same time as our Lord or King; in an entire rendering up of the whole man to His obedience. This obedience, then, of the Only-begotten, Jesus Christ, might well be understood not as His actively, as Beza interprets it, but objectively, as 2 Corinthians 10:5. I think here it is chiefly understood to mean the obedience that the Apostle in the Epistle to the Romans calls the obedience of faith, by which the doctrine of Christ is received, and so Christ Himself, which unites the believing soul to Christ,—He sprinkles it with His blood, to the remission of sin,—and which is the root and spring of all future obedience in the Christian life. By obedience, sanctification is intimated; it signifies both habitual and active obedience, renovation of heart, and conformity to the Divine will. The mind is illuminated by the Holy Spirit, to know and believe the Divine will; yea, this faith is the great and chief part of obedience.²⁰ The truth of the doctrine is first impressed on the mind—pleasant, loving obedience flows from it. From there all the affections, and the whole body, with its members, learn to willingly obey, and submit to God; while before they resisted Him, being under the standard of Satan. This obedience, though imperfect, yet has a certain, if I may so say, imperfect perfection. It is universal in three kinds of ways,—1. In the subject. 2. In the object. 3. In the duration. The whole man is subjected to the whole law, and that constantly and perseveringly. The first universality is the cause of the other. Because it is not in the tongue alone, or in the hand, but has its root in the heart, it does not wither as the grass or flower lying on the surface of the earth; but flourishes, because rooted. And it embraces the whole law because it arises from a reverence it has for the Lawgiver Himself. Reverence, I say, but tempered with love; hence, it considers no law nor command little, or of little importance, which is from God, because He is great and highly esteemed by the pious heart; no command hard, though contrary to the flesh, because all things are easy to love. There is the same authority in all, as St. James divinely argues; and this authority

is the golden chain of all the commandments, which if broken in any link, all fall to pieces. That this threefold perfection of obedience is not a picture drawn by fancy, is evident in David, Psalms 119:1-176, where he subjects himself to the whole law: his feet, ver. 105; his mouth, ver. 13; his heart, ver. 11; the whole tenor of his life, ver. 24. He subjects himself to the whole law, ver. 6, and he professes his constancy therein, in verses 16 and 33: Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes, and I shall keep it unto the end. II. We have the causes of the condition above described. According to the foreknowledge of God the Father.] The most exact knowledge of things is, to know them in their causes; it is then an excellent thing, and worthy of their endeavors who are most desirous of knowledge, to know the best things in their highest causes; and the happiest way of this knowledge is, to possess those things, and to know them in experience. To such the Apostle here speaks, and sets before them the excellence of their spiritual condition, and leads them to the causes of it. Their state is, that they are sanctified and justified: the nearest cause of both these is, Jesus Christ. He is made to them both righteousness and sanctification: the sprinkling of His blood purifies them from guiltiness, and quickens them to obedience. Now follows to consider the appropriating or applying cause, which is the Holy, and holy-making or sanctifying Spirit, the Author of their selection from the world, and effectual calling unto grace. The source of all, the appointing or decreeing cause, is God the Father: for though they all work equally in all, yet, in order of working, we are taught thus to distinguish and particularly to ascribe the first work of eternal election to the first Person of the blessed Trinity. In or through sanctification.] For to render it, elect to the sanctification, is strained: so then I conceive this election is their effectual calling, which is by the working of the Holy Spirit; as in 1 Corinthians 1:26-28, where vocation and election are used in the same sense: You see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, &c., but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise. It is the first act of the decree of election; the beginning of its performance in those who are elected; and it is in itself a real separation of men from the profane and miserable condition of the world, and an appropriation and consecration of a man to God; and therefore, both regarding its relation to election, and regarding its own nature, it well bears that name.²¹ Sanctification in a narrower sense, as distinguished from justification, signifies the inherent holiness of a Christian, or his being inclined and enabled to perform the obedience mentioned in this verse; but it is here more large, and co-extends with the whole work of renovation; it is the severing or separating of men to God, by His Holy Spirit, drawing them unto Him; and so it includes justification, as here, and the first working of faith, by which the soul is justified, through its apprehending and applying the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Of the Spirit.] The word calls men externally, and by that external calling prevails with many to an external reception and profession of religion; but if it is left alone it goes no further. It is indeed the means of sanctification and effectual calling, as John 17:17, Sanctify them through your truth; but it does this when the Spirit, who speaks in the word, works in the heart, and causes it to hear and obey. The spirit or soul of a man is the chief and the first subject of this work, and it is but slight false work that doesn't begin there; but the Spirit here is rather to be taken for the Spirit of God, the efficient, than for the spirit of man, the subject of this sanctification. And therefore our Savior in that place prays to the Father, that He would sanctify His own by that truth; and this He does by the concurrence of His Spirit with that word of truth which is the life and vigor of it, and makes it prove the power of God to salvation to everyone who believes.²² It is a fit means in itself, but it is a prevailing means only when the Spirit of God brings it into the heart. It is a sword, and sharper than any two-edged sword, fit to divide, yea, even to the

dividing asunder of soul and spirit;²³ but it does not do this without being in the Spirit's hand, and Him applying it to this cutting and dividing. The word calls, but the Spirit draws, not severed from that word, but working in it, and by it. It is a very difficult work to draw a soul out of the hands and strong chains of Satan, and out of the pleasing entanglements of the world, and out of its own natural perverseness, to yield up itself to God,—to deny itself, and live to Him, and in so doing, to run against the mainstream, and the current of the ungodly world without, and corruption within. The strongest rhetoric, the most moving and persuasive way of discourse, is all too weak; the tongue of men or angels cannot prevail with the soul to free itself, and shake off all that detains it. Although it be convinced of the truth of those things that are represented to it, yet still it can and will hold out against it, and say, *Non persuadebis etiamsi persuaseris*—You shall not persuade me, even though you convince me. The hand of man is too weak to pluck any soul out of the crowd of the world, and to set it in amongst the select number of believers. Only the Father of spirits has absolute command of spirits, viz. the souls of men, to work on them as He pleases, and where He will. This powerful, this sanctifying Spirit knows no resistance; works sweetly, and yet strongly; it can come into the heart, whereas all other speakers are forced to stand without. That still voice within persuades more than all the loud crying without; as he who is within the house, though he speak low, is better heard and understood, than he who shouts outside the doors. When the Lord Himself speaks by this His Spirit to a man, selecting and calling him out of the lost world, he can no more disobey than Abraham did, when the Lord spoke to him after an extraordinary manner, to depart from his own country and kindred: Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him.²⁴ There is a secret, but very powerful, virtue in a word, or look, or touch of this Spirit upon the soul, by which it is forced, not with a harsh, but a pleasing violence, and cannot choose but follow it, not unlike that of Elijah's mantle upon Elisha.²⁵ How easily did the disciples forsake their callings and their dwellings to follow Christ! The Spirit of God draws a man out of the world by sanctified light sent into his mind, 1. Revealing to him how base and false the sweetness of sin is, which withholds men and amuses them, so that they return not; and how true and sad the bitterness is that will follow upon it; 2. Setting before his eyes the free and happy condition, the glorious liberty of the children of God,²⁶ the riches of their present enjoyment, and their far larger and assured hopes for hereafter; 3. Making the beauty of Jesus Christ visible to the soul; which immediately takes it so, that it cannot be stopped from coming to Him, though its most beloved friends, most beloved sins, lie in the way, and hang about it, and cry, *Will you leave us so?* It will tread upon all who come within the embraces of Jesus Christ, and say with St. Paul, *I was not disobedient unto, or unpersuaded by, the heavenly vision.*²⁷ It is no wonder that the godly are by some called singular and precise: they are so, singular—a few selected ones picked out by God's own hand, for Himself: *Know that the Lord has set apart him that is godly for himself.*²⁸ Therefore, says our Savior, *Because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.*²⁹ For the world lies in unholiness and wickedness—is buried in it; and as living men can have no pleasure among the dead, neither can these elected ones amongst the ungodly; they walk in the world as warily as a man or woman neatly appareled would do amongst a multitude that are all sullied and bemired. Endeavor to have this sanctifying Spirit in yourselves; pray much for it; for His promise has passed to us, that He will give this Holy Spirit to those who ask it.³⁰ And shall we be such fools as to lack it, for lack of asking? When we find heavy fetters on our souls, and much weakness, yea averseness to follow the voice of God calling us to His obedience, then let us pray with the spouse, *Draw me.* She cannot go nor stir without that

drawing; and yet, with it, not only goes, but runs. We will run after you.³¹ Think it not enough that you hear the word, and use the outward ordinances of God, and profess His name; for many are thus called, and yet but a few of them are chosen. There is but a small part of the world outwardly called, compared to the rest that is not so, and yet the number of the true elect is so small, that it gains the number of these that are called the name of many. Those who are in the visible Church, and partake of external vocation, are but like a large list of names (as is usual in civil elections), out of which a small number is chosen to the dignity of true Christians, and invested into their privilege. Some men in nomination to offices or employments, think it a worse disappointment and disgrace to have been in the list, and yet not chosen, than if their names had not been mentioned at all. Certainly, it is a greater unhappiness to have been not far from the kingdom of God,³² (as our Savior speaks), and miss it, than still to have remained in the furthest distance; to have been at the mouth of the haven, the fair havens indeed, and yet driven back and shipwrecked. Your labor is most preposterous; you seek to ascertain and make sure things that cannot be made sure, and that which is both more worth and may be made surer than them all, you will not endeavor to make sure. Listen to the Apostle's advice, and at length set about this in earnest, to make your calling and election sure.³³ Make sure this election, as it is here (for that is the order), your effectual calling sure, and that will bring with it assurance of the other, the eternal election and love of God towards you, which follows to be considered. According to the foreknowledge of God the Father.] Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world, says the Apostle James.³⁴ He sees all things from the beginning of time to the end of it, and beyond to all eternity, and from all eternity He foresaw them. But this foreknowledge here relates peculiarly to the elect. Verba sensus in sacra scriptura denotant affectus—Words of sensation in Scripture denote affections,—as the Rabbis remark. So in man, If I regard iniquity;³⁵ and in God, For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, &c.³⁶ And again, You only have I known of all the families of the earth, &c.³⁷ And in that speech of our Savior, relating it as the terrible doom of reprobates at the last day, Depart, &c., I know you not, I never knew you.³⁸ So St. Paul, For that which I do I allow [Gr. know] not.³⁹ And Beza observes that ginosko is by the Greeks sometimes taken for discernere, judicare—to determine, judge; thus some speak, to cognosce upon a business. So then this foreknowledge is none other than that eternal love of God, or decree of election, by which some are appointed unto life, and being foreknown or elected to that end, they are predestinated to the way to it. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.⁴⁰ It is most vain to imagine a foresight of faith in men, and that God in the view of that faith, as the condition of election itself, has chosen them: for, 1. Nothing at all is futurum, or can have that imagined futurity, so to speak, but as it is, and because it is, decreed by God to be; and, therefore (as says the Apostle St. James in the passage before cited) Known unto God are all his works, because they are His works in time, and his purpose from eternity. 2. It is most absurd to give any reason of Divine will without Himself. 3. This easily solves all that difficulty which the Apostle speaks of; and yet he never thought of such a solution, but runs high for an answer, not to satisfy caviling reason, but to silence it, and stop its mouth: for thus the Apostle argues, You will say then to me, Why does he yet find fault? For who has resisted his will? No but, O man, who are you who reply against God?⁴¹ Who can conceive where this should be, that any man should believe unless it has been given him of God? And if given him, then it was His purpose to give it him; and if so, then it is evident that He had a purpose to save him; and for that end He gives faith; not therefore purposes to save,

because man shall believe. 4. This seems cross to these Scriptures, where they speak of the subordination, or rather coordination, of those two: as here, foreknown and elect, not because of obedience, or sprinkling, or any such thing, but to obedience and sprinkling, which is by faith. So God predestinated, not because He foresaw men would be conformed to Christ, but that they might be so: For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate.⁴² And the same order, And the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved. Also, And as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.⁴³ This foreknowledge, then, is His eternal and unchangeable love; and that thus He chooses some, and rejects others, is for that great purpose, to manifest and magnify His mercy and justice; but why He appointed this man for the one, and that man for the other, made Peter a vessel of this mercy, and Judas of wrath, this is even so, because it seemed good to Him. If this is harsh, yet is Apostolic doctrine. Has not the potter (says St. Paul) power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?⁴⁴ This deep we must admire, and always, in considering it, close with this: O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!⁴⁵ III. The connection of these we are now for our profit to take notice of; that effectual calling is inseparably tied to this eternal foreknowledge or election on the one side, and to salvation on the other. These two links of the chain are up in Heaven in God's own hand: but this middle one is let down to earth into the hearts of His children; and they, laying hold on it, have sure hold on the other two, for no power can sever them. If therefore they can read the characters of God's image in their own souls, those are the counterpart of the golden characters of His love, in which their names are written in the book of life. Their believing writes their names under the promises of the revealed book of life, the Scriptures; and so ascertains them, that the same names are in the secret book of life which God has by Himself from eternity. So that finding the stream of grace in their hearts, though they see not the fountain from where it flows, nor the ocean into which it returns, yet they know that it has its source, and shall return to that ocean which arises from their eternal election, and shall empty itself into that eternity of happiness and salvation. Therefore much joy arises to the believer: this tie is indissoluble, as the agents are, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit: so are election, and vocation, and sanctification, and justification, and glory. And therefore, in all conditions, they may, from the sense of the working of the Spirit in them, look back to that election, and forward to that salvation; but those who remain unholy and disobedient, have as yet no evidence of this love; and therefore cannot, without vain presumption and self-delusion, judge thus of themselves, that they are within the peculiar love of God. But in this, Let the righteous be glad, and let them shout for joy, all that are upright in heart.⁴⁶ It is one main point of happiness, that he who is happy knows and judges himself to be so: this being the peculiar good of a reasonable creature, it is to be enjoyed in a reasonable way; it is not as the dull resting of a stone, or any other natural body in its natural place; but the knowledge and consideration of it is the fruition of it, the very relishing and tasting its sweetness. The perfect blessedness of the saints is awaiting them above; but even their present condition is truly happy, though incompletely, and but a small beginning of that which they expect. And their present happiness is so much the more, the clearer their knowledge and firmer their persuasion they have of it. It is one of the pleasant fruits of the godly, to know the things that are freely given to us of God.⁴⁷ Therefore the Apostle, to comfort his dispersed brethren, sets before them a description of that excellent spiritual condition to which they are called. If election, effectual calling, and salvation, are inseparably linked together, then by any one of them a man may lay hold on all the rest, and may know that his hold is sure; and this is that way by which we may attain, and ought to

seek that comfortable assurance of the love of God. Therefore make your calling sure, and by that your election;⁴⁸ for that being done, this follows of itself. We are not to pry immediately into the decree, but to read it in the performance. Though the mariner sees not the pole-star, yet the needle of the compass which points to it tells him which way he sails: thus the heart that is touched with the loadstone of Divine love, trembling with godly fear, and yet still looking towards God by fixed believing, points at the love of election, and tells the soul that its course is heavenward, towards the haven of eternal rest. He who loves may be sure he was loved first; and he who chooses God for his delight and portion may conclude confidently that God has chosen him to be one of those who shall enjoy Him and be happy in Him forever; because our love and electing of Him is but the return and repercussion of the beams of His love shining upon us. Find but within you sanctification by the Spirit, and this argues, necessarily, both justification by the Son, and the election of God the Father. Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.⁴⁹ It is a most strange demonstration, *ab effectu reciproco*—from the reciprocal effect:—He called those He has elected; He elected those He called: Where this sanctifying Spirit is not, there can be no persuasion of this eternal love of God: those who are children of disobedience can conclude no otherwise of themselves, but that they are the children of wrath. Although, from present unsanctification, a man cannot infer that he is not elected—for the decree may, for part of a man's life, run, as it were, underground—yet this is sure, that that estate leads to death, and unless it be broken, will prove the black line of reprobation. A man has no portion amongst the children of God, nor can read one word of comfort in all the promises that belong to them while he remains unholy. Men may please themselves in profane scoffing at the Holy Spirit of grace, but let them nevertheless know this, that that Holy Spirit, whom they mock and despise, is that Spirit who seals men unto the day of redemption.⁵⁰ If any pretend that they have the Spirit, and so turn away from the straight rule of the Holy Scriptures, they have a spirit indeed, but it is a fanatical spirit, the spirit of delusion and giddiness; but the Spirit of God that leads His children in the way of truth, and is for that purpose sent them from heaven to guide them there, squares their thoughts and ways to that rule: and that word whereof It is Author, which was inspired by It, sanctifies them to obedience. He who says, I know him, and keeps not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.⁵¹ Now this Spirit which sanctifies, and sanctifies to obedience, is within us the evidence of our election, and the earnest of our salvation. And whoever are not sanctified and led by this Spirit, the Apostle tells us what their condition is: If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.⁵² Let us not delude ourselves: this is a truth, if there be any in religion—those who are not made saints in the state of grace, shall never be saints in glory. The stones which are appointed for that glorious temple above, are hewn and polished, and prepared for it here; as the stones were wrought and prepared in the mountains for building the temple at Jerusalem. This is God's order. He gives grace and glory.⁵³ Moralists can tell us that the way to the temple of honor is through the temple of virtue. Those who think they are bound for heaven in the ways of sin have either found a new way untrodden by all who have gone before, or will find themselves deceived in the end. We need not then that poor scheme for the pressing of holiness and obedience upon men, to represent it to them as the meriting cause of salvation. This is not at all to the purpose, considering that without it the necessity of holiness to salvation is pressing enough; for holiness is no less necessary to salvation, than if it were the meriting cause of it; it is as inseparably tied to it as the purpose of God. And in the order of performance, godliness is as certainly before salvation, as if salvation wholly and altogether

depended upon it, and was in point of justice deserved by it. Seeing, then, there is no other way to happiness but by holiness, no assurance of the love of God without it, take the Apostle's advice; study it, seek it, follow earnestly after holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.⁵⁴ Grace to you, and peace, be multiplied.] It has always been a civil custom amongst men, to season their conversation with good wishes one for another; this the Apostles use in their epistles in a spiritual Divine way suitable to their holy writings. It well becomes the messengers of grace and peace to wish both, and to make their salutation conform to the main scope and subject of their discourse. The Hebrew word of salutation we have here—Peace, and that which is the source both of this and all good things, in the other word of salutation used by the Greeks—Grace. All right rejoicing, and prosperity, and happiness, flow from this source, and from this alone, and are sought elsewhere in vain. In general, this is the character of a Christian spirit, to have a heart filled with blessing, with this sweet good will and good wishing to all, especially to those who are their brothers in the same profession of religion. And this charity is a precious balm, diffusing itself in the wise and seasonable expressions of it, upon fitting occasions; and those expressions must be cordial and sincere, not like what you call court holy-water, in which there is nothing else but falsehood, or vanity at the best. This manifests men to be the sons of blessing, and of the ever-blessed God, the Father of all blessing, when in His name they bless one another: more than this, our Savior's rule goes higher, bless those who curse you, and urges it by that relation to God as their Father, that in this they may resemble Him: that you may be the children of your Father who is in heaven.⁵⁵ But in a more eminent way it is the duty of Pastors to bless their people, not only by their public and solemn benediction, but also by daily and importunate prayers for them in secret. And the great Father, who sees in secret, will reward them openly.⁵⁶ They are to be ever both endeavoring and wishing their increase of knowledge and all spiritual grace, in which they have St. Paul as a frequent pattern. To those who are messengers of this grace, if they have experience of it, it is the oil of gladness that will dilate their heart, and make it large in love and spiritual desires for others, especially their own flocks. Let us consider, 1. The matter of the Apostle's desire for them—grace and peace. 2. The measure of it,—that it may be multiplied. 1st. The matter of the Apostle's desire, grace. We need not make a noise with the many school distinctions of grace, and describe in what sense it is here to be taken: for no doubt it is all saving grace to those dispersed brethren, so that in the largest notion which it can have that way, we may safely here take it. What are preventing grace, assisting grace, working and co-working grace (as we may admit these differences in a sound sense), but various names of the same effectual saving grace, in relation to our different state? as the same sea receives different names from the different parts of the shore it beats upon. First, it prevents and works; then it assists and prosecutes what it has wrought: He works in us both to will and to do.⁵⁷ But the whole sense of saving grace, I think, is comprehended in these two. 1. Grace in the fountain, that is, the peculiar love and favor of God. 2. Grace in the streams, the fruits of this love, (for it is not an empty, but a most rich and liberal love,) viz. all the graces and spiritual blessings of God bestowed upon those whom He had freely chosen. The love of God in itself can neither diminish nor increase, but it is multiplied, or abounds in the manifestation and effects of it. So then, to desire grace to be multiplied to them, is to wish to them the living spring of it—that love which cannot be exhausted, but is ever flowing forth, and instead of abating, makes each day richer than the one before. And this is that which should be the top and sum of Christian desires,—to have, or want any other thing indifferently, but to be resolved and resolute in this, to seek a share in this grace, the free love of

God, and the sure evidences of it within you, the fruit of holiness, and the graces of His Spirit. But most of us are taken up with other things. We will not be convinced how basely and foolishly we are busied, though in the best and most respected employments of the world, as long as we neglect our noblest trade of growing rich in grace, and the comfortable enjoyment of the love of God. Our Savior tells us that one thing is needful,⁵⁸ signifying that all other things are comparatively unnecessary, by-works, and mere impertinences: and yet in these we lavish out our short and uncertain time; we let the other stand by until we find leisure. Men who are altogether profane, do not think about it at all. Some others possibly deceive themselves thus, and say, When I have done with such a business in which I am engaged, then I will sit down seriously to this, and bestow more time and pains on these things, which are undeniably greater and better, and more worthy of it. But this is a neglect that is in danger to undo us. What if we reach not the end of that business, but end ourselves before it? Or if we do not, yet some other business may step in after that. Oh! then, say we, that must be dispatched also. Thus, by such delays, we may lose the present opportunity, and in the end, our own souls. Oh! be persuaded it deserves your diligence, and that without delay, to seek something that may be constant enough to abide with you, and strong enough to uphold you in all conditions, and that is alone this free grace and love of God. While many say, Who will show us any good? set in with David in his choice, Lord, lift up the light of your countenance upon me, and this shall rejoice my heart more than the abundance of corn and wine.⁵⁹ This is that light which can break into the darkest dungeons, from which all other lights and comforts are shut out; and without this all other enjoyments are, what the world would be without the sun—nothing but darkness. Happy are those who have this light of Divine favor and grace shining into their souls, for by it they shall be led to that city, where the sun and moon are unnecessary; for the glory of God does lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.⁶⁰ Godliness is profitable unto all things, says the Apostle, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come;⁶¹ all other blessings are the attendants of grace, and follow upon it. This blessing which the Apostle here, as St. Paul also in his Epistles, joins with grace, was, with the Jews, of so large a sense, as to include all that they could desire; they wished peace, they meant all kind of good, all welfare and prosperity. And thus we may take it here for all kind of peace; yes, and for all other blessings; but especially that spiritual peace, which is the proper fruit of grace, and so intrinsically flows from it. We may and ought to wish outward blessings for the Church of God, and particularly outward peace,—as one of the greatest, so one of the most valuable favors of God: thus prayed the Psalmist, Peace be within your walls, and prosperity within your palaces.⁶² But that Wisdom which does what He will, by what means He will, and works one contrariety out of another, brings light out of darkness, good out of evil,—can and does turn tears and troubles to the advantage of His Church; but certainly, in itself, peace is more suitable to its increase, and, if not abused, it proves so too. As in the Apostolic times, it is said, The Church had peace, and increased exceedingly.⁶³ We ought also to wish for ecclesiastical peace to the Church, so that she may be free from dissensions and divisions. These readily arise, more or less, as we see in all times, and haunt religion, and the reformation of it, as a malus genius. St. Paul had this to say to his Corinthians, though he had given them this testimony, that they were enriched in all utterance and knowledge, and were lacking in no gift,⁶⁴ yet, presently after, 11:18; 3:3, I hear that there are divisions and contentions among you. An enemy has done this,⁶⁵ as our Savior speaks; and this enemy is no fool, for, by Divine permission, he works to his own end very wisely; for there is not one thing that does on all hands choke the seed of religion so much, as thorny debates and

differences about itself. So, in succeeding ages, and at the breaking forth of the light in Germany, in Luther's time, multitudes of sects arose. Profane men do not only stumble, but also fall and break their necks upon these divisions. "We see," think they, and some of them possibly say it out, "that they, who mind religion most, cannot agree upon it: our easiest way is, not to embroil ourselves, nor at all to be troubled with the business." Many are of Gallio's temper; they will care for none of those things.⁶⁶ Thus these offences prove a mischief to the profane world, as our Savior says, Woe unto the world because of offences!⁶⁷ Then those on the erring side, who are taken with new opinions and fancies, are altogether taken up with them, their main thoughts are spent upon them; and thus the sap is drawn from that which should nourish and prosper in their hearts, sanctified useful knowledge, and saving grace. The other are as weeds, which divert the nourishment in gardens from the plants and flowers; and certainly these weeds, men's own conceits, cannot but grow more with them, when they give way to them, than solid religion does; for their hearts, as one said of the earth, are mother to those, and but step-mother to this. It is also a loss, even to those who oppose errors and divisions, that they are forced to be busied in that way; for the wisest and godliest of them find (and such are sensible of it) that disputes in religion are no friends to that which is far sweeter in it, but hinder and abate it; viz. those pious and devout thoughts, that are both the more useful and truly delightful. As peace is a choice blessing, so this is the choicest peace, and is the peculiar inseparable effect of this grace with which it is here jointly wished,—Grace and Peace; the flower of peace growing upon the root of grace. This spiritual peace has two things in it. 1. Reconciliation with God. 2. Tranquility of spirit. The quarrel, and matter of enmity, you know, between God and man, is, the rebellion, the sin of man; and he being naturally altogether sinful, there can proceed nothing from him, but what foment and increases the hostility. It is grace alone, the most free grace of God, that contrives, and offers, and makes the peace, else it had never been; we would have universally perished without it. Now in this is the wonder of Divine grace, that the Almighty God seeks agreement, and entreats for it, with sinful clay, which He could wholly destroy in a moment. Jesus Christ, the Mediator and Purchaser of this peace, bought it with His blood, killed the enmity by His own death.⁶⁸ And therefore the tenor of it in the Gospel runs still in His name: We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ;⁶⁹ and St. Paul expresses it in his salutations, which are the same with this, Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.⁷⁰ As the free love and grace of God appointed this means and way of our peace, and offered it,—so the same grace applies it, and makes it ours, and gives us faith to apprehend it. And from our sense of this peace, or reconciliation with God, arises that which is our inward peace, a calm and quiet temper of mind. This peace which we have with God in Christ, is inviolable; but because the sense and persuasion of it may be interrupted, the soul that is truly at peace with God may for a time be disquieted in itself, through weakness of faith, or the strength of temptation, or the darkness of desertion; losing sight of that grace, that love and light of God's countenance, on which its tranquility and joy depend. You hid your face, said David, and I was troubled.⁷¹ But when these eclipses are over, the soul is revived with new consolation, as the face of the earth is renewed and made to smile with the return of the sun in the spring; and this ought always to uphold Christians in the saddest times, viz. that the grace and love of God towards them depends not on their sense, nor upon anything in them, but is still in itself incapable of the smallest alteration. It is natural for men to desire their own peace, the quietness and contentment of their minds: but most men miss the way to it; and therefore find it not; for there is no way to it, indeed, but this one by which few seek it, viz.

reconciliation and peace with God. The persuasion of that alone makes the mind clear and serene, like your fairest summer days. My peace give unto you, says Christ, not as the world gives.⁷² Let not your heart be troubled.⁷³ All the peace and favor of the world cannot calm a troubled heart; but where this peace is which Christ gives, all the trouble and disquiet of the world cannot disturb it. When he gives quietness, who then can make trouble? when he hides his face, who then can behold him? whether it be done against a nation, or against a man only.⁷⁴ All outward distress to a mind thus at peace, is but as the rattling of the hail upon the rooftop, to him who sits within the house at a sumptuous feast. A good conscience is called so, and with an advantage that no other feast can have, nor could men endure it. A few hours of feasting will weary the most professed epicure; but a conscience thus at peace is a continual feast, with continual unwearied delight. What makes the world take up such a prejudice against religion as a sour unpleasant thing? They see the afflictions and griefs of Christians, but they do not see their joys, the inward pleasure of mind that they can possess in a very hard estate. Have you not tried other ways enough? Has not he tried them who had more ability and skill for it than you, and found them not only vanity but vexation of spirit?⁷⁵ If you have any belief of holy truth, put but this once upon the trial, seek peace in the way of grace. This inward peace is too precious a liquor to be poured into a filthy vessel. A holy heart, that gladly entertains grace, shall find that it and peace cannot dwell asunder. An ungodly man may sleep to death in the lethargy of carnal presumption and impenitence; but a true, lively, solid peace, he cannot have. There is no peace, says my God, to the wicked.⁷⁶ And if He says there is none, speak peace who will, if all the world with one voice should speak, it shall prove none. 2ndly. Consider the measure of the Apostle's desire for his scattered brethren, that this Grace and Peace may be multiplied. This the Apostle wishes for them, knowing the imperfection of the graces and peace of the saints while they are here below; and this they themselves, under a sense of that imperfection, ardently desire. Those who have tasted the sweetness of this grace and peace, call incessantly for more. This is a disease in earthly desires, and a disease incurable by all the things desired; there is no satisfaction attainable by them; but this avarice of spiritual things is a virtue, and by our Savior is called Blessedness, because it tends to fullness and satisfaction. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.⁷⁷ Ver. 3. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy has begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, Ver. 4. To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fades not away. It is a cold lifeless thing to speak of spiritual things upon mere report: but those who speak of them as their own, as having share and interest in them, and some experience of their sweetness, their discourse of them is enlivened with firm belief, and ardent affection; they cannot mention them, but their hearts are straight taken with such gladness, as they are forced to vent in praises. Thus our Apostle here, and St. Paul, Ephesians 1:1-23 and often elsewhere, when they considered these things with which they were about to comfort the godly to whom they wrote, they were suddenly elevated with the joy of them, and broke forth into thanksgiving; so teaching us, by their example, what real joy there is in the consolations of the Gospel, and what praise is due from all the saints to the God of those consolations. This is such an inheritance, that the very thoughts and hopes of it are able to sweeten the greatest griefs and afflictions. What then shall the possession of it be, where there shall be no rupture, nor the least drop of any grief at all? The main subject of these verses is that, which is the main comfort that supports the spirits of the godly in all conditions. 1. Their after inheritance, as in the 4th verse. 2ndly, Their present title to it, and assured hope of it,

ver. 3. 3rdly, The immediate cause of both assigned, viz. Jesus Christ. 4thly, All this derived from the free mercy of God, as the first and highest cause, and returned to His praise and glory, as the last and highest end of it. For the first: The inheritance. [But because the 4th verse, which describes it, is linked with the subsequent, we will not go so far off to return back again, but first speak to this 3rd verse, and in it,] Consider 1. Their Title to this inheritance, Begotten again. 2. Their Assurance of it, viz. a

02 1Pe 2:1-25

A Practical Commentary upon the First Epistle of Peter

Robert Leighton

CHAPTER II. Ver. 1. Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies; and envies, and all evil speakings, Ver. 2. As new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that you may grow thereby. The same power and goodness of God that manifests itself in giving being to His creatures, appears likewise in sustaining and preserving them. To give being is the first, and to support it is the continued effect of that power and goodness. Thus it is both in the first creation, and in the second. In the first, the creatures to which He gave life, He provided suitable nourishment to uphold that life;¹ so here, in the close of the former chapter, we find the doctrine of the new birth and life of a Christian, and in the beginning of this, the proper food for that life. And it is the same word by which we there find it to be begotten, that is here the nourishment of it; and therefore Christians are here exhorted by the Apostle so to esteem and so to use it; and that is the main scope of the words. Observe in general—The word, the principle, and the support of our spiritual being, is both the incorruptible seed and the incorruptible food of that new life of grace, which must therefore be an incorruptible life; and this may convince us that the ordinary thoughts, even of us who hear this word, are far below the true excellence and worth of it. The stream of custom and our profession brings us here, and we sit out our hour under the sound of this word; but how few consider and prize it as the great ordinance of God for the salvation of souls, the beginner and the sustainer of the Divine life of Grace within us! And certainly, until we have these thoughts of it, and seek to feel it thus ourselves, although we hear it most frequently, and let slip no occasion, yea, hear it with attention and some present delight, yet, still we miss the right use of it, and turn it from its true end, while we take it not as the engrafted word which is able to save our souls.² Thus ought those who preach to speak it; to endeavor their utmost to accommodate it to this end, that sinners may be converted, begotten again, and believers nourished and strengthened in their spiritual life; to regard no lower end, but aim steadily at that mark. Their hearts and tongues ought to be set on fire with holy zeal for God and love to souls, kindled by the Holy Spirit, who came down on the Apostles in the shape of fiery tongues. And those who hear should remember this as the purpose of their hearing, that they may receive spiritual life and strength by the word. For though it seems a poor despicable business, that a frail sinful man like yourselves should speak a few words in your hearing, yet, look upon it as the way by which God communicates happiness to those who believe, and works that believing unto happiness, alters the whole frame of the soul, and makes a new creation, as it begets it again to the inheritance of glory—consider it thus, which is its true notion; and then what can be so precious? Let the world disesteem it as they will, you know that it is the power of God unto salvation.³ The preaching of the cross is to those who perish foolishness; but unto us who are saved it is the power of God,⁴ says the Apostle; and if you would have the experience of this, if you would have life and growth by it, you must look above the poor worthless messenger, and call in His almighty help, who is the Lord of life. As the Philosophers affirm, that if the heavens should stand still, there would be no

generation or flourishing of anything here below, so it is the moving and influence of the Spirit that makes the Church fruitful. If you would but do this before you come here, present the blindness of your minds, and the deadness of your hearts to God, and say, "Lord, here is an opportunity for You to show the power of Your word. I would find life and strength in it; but neither can I who hear, nor he who speaks, make it thus unto me—that is Your prerogative; say the word and it shall be done." God said, Let there be light; and there was light.⁵ In this exhortation to the due use of the word, the Apostle continues the resemblance of that new birth he mentioned in the preceding chapter. As new-born babes.] Don't be satisfied with yourselves until you find some evidence of this new, this supernatural life. There are delights and comforts in this life, in its lowest condition, that would persuade us to look after it if we knew them; but as most cannot be made aware of these, consider therefore the end of it. Better never to have been, than not to have been partaker of this new being. Except a man be born again, says our Savior, he cannot see the kingdom of God.⁶ Surely those who are not born again, shall one day wish they had never been born. What a poor wretched thing is the life that we have here! a very heap of follies and miseries! Now if we would share in a happier being after it, in the life that doesn't end, it must begin here. Grace and glory are one and the same life, only with this difference, that the one is the beginning, and the other the perfection of it; or, if we do call them two several lives, yet the one is the undoubted pledge of the other. It was a strange word for a heathen to say, that that day of death we fear so—aeterni natalis est—is the birthday of eternity. Thus it is indeed to those who are here born again: this new birth of grace is the sure earnest and pledge of that birthday of glory. Why do we not then labor to make this certain by the former? Is it not a fearful thing to spend our days in vanity, and then lie down in darkness and sorrow forever; to disregard the life of our soul, while we may and should be making provision for it, and then, when it is going out, cry, Quo nunc abibis?—Where are you going, O my soul? But this new life puts us out of the danger and fear of that eternal death. We have passed from death unto life,⁷ says St. John, speaking of those who are born again; and being passed, there is no re-passing, no going back from this life to death again. This new birth is the same that St. John calls the first resurrection, and he pronounces them blessed who partake of it; Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection: on such the second death has no power.⁸ The weak beginnings of grace, in comparison to the further strength attainable even in this life, are sometimes expressed as the infancy of it; and so believers should not continue to be infants: if they do, it is reprobable in them, as we see, Ephesians 4:14; 1 Corinthians 2:2; 1 Corinthians 14:20; Hebrews 5:12. Though the Apostle writes to new converts, and so may possibly imply the tenderness of their beginnings of grace, yet I think that infancy is here to be taken in such a sense as corresponds to a Christian in the whole course and best state of his spiritual life here below. So, likewise, the milk here recommended is suitable to this sense of infancy; and not to the former, (as it is in some of those cited places, where it means the easiest and first principles of religion, and so is opposed to the higher mysteries of it, as to strong meat;) but here it signifies the whole word of God, and all its wholesome and saving truths, as the proper nourishment of the children of God. And so the Apostle's words are a standing exhortation for all Christians of all degrees. And the whole state and course of their spiritual life here is called their infancy, not only as opposed to the corruption and wickedness of the old man, but likewise as signifying the weakness and imperfection of it at its best in this life, compared with the perfection of the life to come—for the weakest beginnings of grace are by no means so far below the highest degree of it possible in this life, as that highest degree falls short of the state of glory; so that, if

one measure of grace is called infancy in comparison to another, much more is all grace infancy in comparison to glory. And surely, as for duration, the time of our present life is far less compared to eternity, than the time of our natural infancy is to the rest of our life; so that we may be still called but new or lately born. Our best pace and strongest walking in obedience here, is but as the stepping of children when they begin to go by hold, compared to the perfect obedience in glory when we shall follow the Lamb wherever he goes. All our knowledge here is but as the ignorance of infants, and all our expressions of God and of His praises but as the first stammerings of children, in comparison of the knowledge we shall have of Him hereafter, when we shall know as we are known, and of the praises we shall then offer Him, when that new song shall be taught us. A child has in it a reasonable soul, and yet, by the indisposedness of the body, and abundance of moisture, it is so bound up, that its difference from the beasts in partaking of a rational life, is as apparent as afterwards; and thus the spiritual life that is from above infused into a Christian, although it acts and works in some degree, yet it is so clogged with the natural corruption still remaining in him, that the excellence of it is much clouded and obscured; but in the life to come, it shall have nothing at all encumbering and indisposing it. And this is the Apostle St. Paul's doctrine.⁹ And this is the wonder of Divine grace, which brings such small beginnings to a height of perfection that we are not able to conceive of—that a little spark of true grace, which is not only indiscernible to others, but often to the Christian himself, should yet be the beginning of that condition in which they shall shine brighter than the sun in the firmament. The difference is great in our natural life, in some persons especially; that those who in infancy were so feeble and wrapped up as others in swaddling clothes, yet afterwards come to excel in wisdom and in the knowledge of sciences, or to be commanders of great armies, or to be kings; but the distance is far greater and more admirable between the weakness of these newborn babes, the small beginnings of grace, and our after-perfection, that fullness of knowledge that we look for, and that crown of immortality which all those are born to, who are born of God. But as in the faces or actions of some children, some characters and presages of their after-greatness have appeared, (as a singular beauty in Moses' face, as they write of him, and as Cyrus was made king among the shepherds' children with whom he was brought up, &c.) so also, certainly in these children of God there will be some characters and evidences that they are born for Heaven by their new birth. The holiness and meekness, the patience and faith, that shine in the actions and sufferings of the saints, are characters of their Father's image, and show their high origin, and foretell their glory to come; such a glory, as does not only surpass the world's thoughts, but the thoughts of the children of God themselves. Now, that the children of God may grow by the word of God, the Apostle requires these two things of them: 1. The innocence of children; 2. The appetite of children. For this expression, as newborn babes, as I think, is relative not only to the desiring of the milk of the word, ver. 2, but to the former verse, the putting off malice. So the Apostle Paul exhorts, Howbeit in malice be you children.¹⁰ Wherefore laying aside.] This signifies that we are naturally prepossessed with these evils, and therefore we are exhorted to put them off. Our hearts are by nature nothing more than cages of those unclean birds—malice, envy, hypocrisies, &c. The Apostles sometimes name some of these evils, and sometimes others of them, but they are inseparable,—all one garment, and all included under that one word, the old Man 1:11 which the Apostle exhorts Christians to put off—and here it is pressed as a necessary evidence of their new birth, and furtherance of their spiritual growth, that these base habits be thrown away; ragged, filthy habits, unbecoming the children of God. They are the proper marks of an unrenewed mind,

the very character of the children of Satan, for they are his image. He has his names from enmity, and envy, and slandering; and he is that grand hypocrite and deceiver, who can transform himself into an angel of light.¹² So, on the contrary, the Spirit of God who dwells in His children is the Spirit of meekness, and love, and truth. That dovelike Spirit which descended on our Savior, is communicated from Him to believers. It is the grossest impudence to pretend to be Christians, and yet to entertain hatred and envyings upon whatever occasion; for there is nothing more recommended to them by our Savior's own doctrine, nothing more impressed upon their hearts by His Spirit, than love. Kikia may be taken generally, but I conceive it intends that which we particularly call malice. Malice and envy are but two branches growing out of the same bitter root; self-love and evil-speakings are the fruit they bear. Malice is properly the procuring or wishing another's evil, envy the repining at his good; and both these vent themselves by evil speaking. This infernal fire within smokes and flashes out by the tongue, which St. James says, is set on fire of hell,¹³ and fires all about it; misjudging the actions of those they hate or envy, aggravating their failings, and detracting from their virtues, taking all things by the left ear; for (as Epictetus says,) Every thing has two handles. The art of taking things by the better side, which charity always does, would save much of those janglings and heart-burnings that so abound in the world. But folly and perverseness possess the hearts of most people, and therefore their discourses are usually the vent of these; For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.¹⁴ The unsavory breaths of men show their inward corruption. Where shall a man come, almost, in societies, but his ears shall be beaten with the unpleasant noise (surely it is so to a Christian mind) of one detracting and disparaging another? And yet this is extreme baseness, and the practice only of false counterfeit goodness, to make up one's own esteem out of the ruins of the good name of others. Real virtue neither needs nor can endure this dishonest shift; it can subsist of itself, and therefore ingenuously commends and acknowledges what good is in others, and loves to hear it acknowledged: and neither readily speaks nor hears evil of any, but rather, where duty and conscience require not discovery, casts a veil upon men's failings to hide them: this is the true temper of the children of God. These evils of malice, and envies, and evil speakings, and such like, are not to be overlooked by us, in ourselves, and conveyed under better appearances, but to be cast away; not to be covered, but put off; and therefore that which is the upper garment and cloak of all other evils, the Apostle here commands us to cast that off too, namely, hypocrisies. What avails it to wear this mask? A man may indeed in the sight of men act his part handsomely under it, and pass so for a time; but know we not that there is an Eye who sees through it, and a Hand that, if we will not pull off this mask, will pull it off to our shame, either here in the sight of men, or, if we should escape all our life, and go fair off the stage under it, yet that there is a day appointed in which all hypocrites shall be unveiled, and appear what they are indeed before men and angels? It is a poor thing to be approved and applauded by men while God condemns, to whose sentence all men must stand or fall. Oh! seek to be approved and justified by Him, and then, who shall condemn?¹⁵ It is doesn't matter who does. How easily may we bear the mistakes and dislikes of the entire world, if He declares Himself well pleased with us! It is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment; he who judges me is the Lord,¹⁶ says the Apostle. But these evils are here particularly to be put off, as contrary to the right and profitable receiving of the word of God; for this part of the exhortation (Laying aside) looks to that which follows (Desire, &c.), and is especially so to be considered. There is this double task in religion—when a man enters upon it he is not only to be taught true wisdom, but he is also, yea, first of all, to be untaught the errors and

wickedness that are deep-rooted in his mind, which he has not only learned by the corrupt conversation of the world, but brought the seeds of them into the world with him. They improve and grow indeed by the favor of that example which is round about a man, but they are originally in our nature as it is now; they are inherent to us, besides continual custom, which is another nature. No one comes to the school of Christ suiting the Philosopher's word, ut tabula rasa—as blank paper—to receive his doctrine: but, on the contrary, all scribbled and blurred with such base habits as these, malice, hypocrisies, envies, &c. Therefore, the first work is to raze out these, to cleanse and purify the heart from these blots, these foul characters, so that it may receive the impression of the image of God. And because it is the word of God that both begins and continues this work, and draws the lineaments of that Divine image on the soul, therefore, in order to receive this word rightly, and to be properly affected by it, the conforming of the soul to Jesus Christ, which is the true growth of the spiritual life, it is required beforehand that the hearts of those who hear it be purged of these and other such impurities. These dispositions are so opposite to the profitable receiving of the word of God, that while they possess and rule the soul, it cannot at all embrace these Divine truths; while it is filled with such guests, there is no room to entertain the word. They cannot dwell together, because of their contrary nature; the word will not mix with these. The saving mixture of the word of God in the soul is what the Apostle speaks of, and he assigns the lack of it as the cause of unprofitable hearing of the word—not being mixed with faith in those who heard it.¹⁷ For by that the word is concocted into the nourishment of the life of grace united to the soul, and mixed with it, by being mixed with faith, as the Apostle's expression means: that is the proper mixture it requires. But with the qualities here mentioned it will not mix; there is a natural antipathy between them, as strong as in those things in nature, that cannot be brought by any means to agree and mingle together. Can there be any thing more contrary than the good word of God,¹⁸ as the Apostle calls it, and those evil speakings? than the word, which is of such excellent sweetness, and the bitter words of a malignant tongue? than the word of life, and words full of deadly poison? For so slanders and defamings of our brethren are termed. And is not all malice and envy most opposite to the word, which is the message of peace and love? How can the gall of malice and this milk of the word agree? Hypocrisy and guile stand in direct opposition to the name of this word, which is called the word of truth; and here the very word shows this contrariety, sincere milk, and a double, insincere mind. These two are necessary conditions of good nourishment: 1st, That the food be good and wholesome; 2ndly, That the inward constitution of those who use it be so too. And if this fails, the other profits not. This sincere milk is the only proper nourishment of spiritual life, and there is no defect or undue quality in it; but the greatest part of hearers are inwardly unwholesome, diseased with the evils here mentioned, and others of the same nature; and, therefore, either have no kind of appetite to the word at all, but rather feed upon such trash as suits with their distemper (as some kind of diseases incline those who have them to eat coals or lime, &c.), or, if they are in any way desirous to hear the word, and seem to feed on it, yet the noxious humors that abound in them make it altogether unprofitable, and they are not nourished by it. This evil of malice and envying, so ordinary among men (and, which is most strange, amongst Christians), like an overflowing of the gall, possesses their whole minds; and not only are they not nourished by the word they hear, but are made the worse by it; their disease is fed by it, as an unwholesome stomach turns the best meat it receives into that bad humor that abounds in it. Don't they do so, who observe what the word says, in order to be better enabled to discover the failings of others, and speak maliciously and uncharitably of them, and

vent themselves, as is too common—This word met well with such a one's fault, and this with another's?—Is not this to feed these diseases of malice, envy, and evil speakings, with this pure milk, and make them grow, instead of growing by it ourselves in grace and holiness? Thus, likewise, the hypocrite turns all that he hears of this word, not to the inward renovation of his mind, and redressing what is amiss there, but only to the composing of his outward carriage, and to enable himself to act his part better—to be more cunning in his own faculty, a more refined and expert hypocrite; not to grow more a Christian indeed, but more in appearance only, and in the opinion of others. Therefore it is a very necessary admonition, considering these evils are so natural to men, and so contrary to the nature of the word of God, that they be purged out, so that it might be profitably received. A very similar exhortation to this has the Apostle St. James, and some of the same words, but in another metaphor: Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word.¹⁹ He compares the word to a plant of excellent virtue, the very tree of life, the word that is able to save your souls; but the only soil in which it will grow is a heart full of meekness, a heart that is purged of those luxuriant weeds that grow so rank in it by nature; they must be plucked up and thrown out to make place for this word. And there is such a necessity for this, that the most approved teachers of wisdom, in a human way, have required of their scholars that, to the end their minds may be capable of it, they should be purified from vice and wickedness. For this reason the Philosopher considers young men unsuitable hearers of moral philosophy, because of their abundant and unbridled passions, granting that, if those were composed and ordered, they might be admitted. And it was Socrates' custom, when they asked him a question, seeking to be informed by him,—before he would answer them, he asked them concerning their own qualities and course of life. Now, if men require a calm and purified disposition of mind to make it capable of their doctrine, how much more is it suitable and necessary for learning the doctrine of God, and those deep mysteries that His word opens up! It is well expressed in that Apocryphal book of Wisdom, that Froward thoughts separate from God, and into a malicious soul wisdom shall not enter:²⁰ no, indeed, that is a very unfit dwelling for it; and even a heathen (Seneca) could say, The mind that is impure is not capable of God and Divine things. Therefore we see the strain of that book of Proverbs that speaks so much of this wisdom; it requires, in the first chapter, that those who would hear it, do retire themselves from all ungodly customs and practices. And, indeed, how can the soul apprehend spiritual things, that is not in some measure refined from the love of sin, which abuses and bemires the minds of men, and makes them unable to arise to heavenly thoughts? Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God,²¹ says our Savior: not only shall they see Him perfectly hereafter, but so far as they can receive Him, He will impart and make Himself known unto them here. 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.²² What makes the word obscure is the filthy mists within; whereas, on the contrary, He will in just judgment hide Himself, and the saving truth of His word, from those who entertain and delight in sin; the very sins in which they delight shall obscure and darken the light of the Gospel to them, so that though it shines clear as the sun at noonday, they shall be as those who live in a dungeon—they shall not discern it. And as those who have the evils here mentioned reigning and in full strength within them, receive no benefit by the word, so with those who are indeed born again, the more they retain of these evils, the less shall they find the influence and profit of the word; for this exhortation concerns them. Some of them may possibly have a great remainder of these corruptions unmortified; therefore they are exhorted to lay aside entirely those

evils, all malice, hypocrisies, &c., else, although they hear the word often, yet they will be in a spiritual atrophy; they will eat much, but grow nothing by it; they will find no increase of grace and spiritual strength. If we want to know the main cause of our fruitless hearing of the word, here it is; men do not bring meek and guileless spirits to it, not minds emptied and purified to receive it, but stuffed with malice, and hypocrisy, and pride, and other such evils; and where should the word enter, when all is so taken up? And if it did enter, how should it prosper amongst so many enemies, or at all abide amongst them? Either they will turn it out again, or choke and kill the power of it. We think religion and our own lusts and secret heart-idols should agree together, because we would have it so—but this is not possible. Therefore labor to entertain the word of truth in the love of it, and lodge the mystery of faith in a pure conscience,²³ as the Apostle St. Paul speaks. Join those together with David, I hate vain thoughts: but your law do I love.²⁴ And as here our Apostle, Lay aside all malice, and hypocrisies, and envies, and evil speakings, and so receive the word, or else look for no benefit by it here, nor for salvation by it hereafter; but cast out all impurity, and give your whole heart to it; so desire it, that you may grow, and then, as you desire, you shall grow by it. Every real believer has received a life from Heaven, far more excelling our natural life than that excels the life of the beasts. And this life has its own peculiar desires and delights, which are the proper actings, and the certain characters and evidence of it: amongst others this is one, and a main one, corresponding to the like desire in natural life—namely, a desire for food; and because it is here still imperfect, therefore the natural end of this is, not only nourishment, but growth, as it is here expressed. The sincere milk of the word.] The life of grace is the proper life of a reasonable soul, and without it the soul is dead, as the body is without the soul; so that without untruth this may be rendered reasonable milk, as some read it; but certainly that reasonable milk is the word of God, The milk of the word. It was before called the immortal seed, and here it is the milk of those who are born again, and thus it is nourishment very agreeable to their spiritual life, according to the saying, *lisdem alimur ex quibus constamus*.²⁵ As the milk that infants draw from the breast is the most suitable food for them, being of that same substance that nourished them in the womb; so, when they are brought forth, that food follows them as it were for their supply, in the way that is provided in nature for it; by certain veins it ascends into the breasts, and is there fitted for them, and they are by nature directed to find it there. Thus, as a Christian begins to live by the power of the word, so he is by the nature of that spiritual life directed to that same word as its nourishment. To follow the resemblance further in the qualities of milk, after the monkish way, that runs itself out of breath in allegory, I conceive is neither solid nor profitable; and to speak freely, the curious searching of the similitude in other qualities of milk, seems to wrong the quality here given it by the Apostle, in which it is so well resembled by milk, namely, the simple pureness and sincerity of the word; besides that the pressing of comparisons of this kind too far, proves often so constrained before they have finished it, that by too much drawing they bring forth blood instead of milk. Pure and unmixed, as milk drawn immediately from the breast; the pure word of God without the mixture, not only of error, but of all other composition of vain unprofitable subtleties, or affected human eloquence, such as become not the majesty and gravity of God's word. If any man speak, says our Apostle, let him speak as the oracles of God.²⁶ Light conceits and flowers of rhetoric wrong the word more than they can please the hearers: the weeds among the corn make it look gay, but it were all the better they were not amongst it. Nor can those mixtures be pleasing to any but carnal minds. Those who are indeed the children of God, as infants who like their breast-milk best pure, do love the word best so, and wherever they find it so,

they relish it well; whereas natural men cannot love spiritual things for themselves, desire not the word for its own sweetness, but would have it sauced with such conceits as possibly spoil the simplicity of it; or at the best, love to hear it for the wit and learning which, without any wrongful mixture of it, they find in one delivering it more than another. But the natural and genuine appetite of the children of God is to the word for itself, and only as milk, sincere milk; and where they find it so, from whomever or in whatever way delivered to them, they feed upon it with delight. Before conversion, wit or eloquence may draw a man to the word, and possibly prove a happy bait to catch him (as St. Augustine reports of his hearing St. Ambrose), but once born again, then it is the milk itself that he desires for itself. Desire the sincere milk.] Not only hear it because it is your custom, but desire it because it is your food. And it is, 1. A natural desire, as the infant's of milk; not upon any external respect or inducement, but from an inward principle and bent of nature. And because natural, therefore, 2. Earnest; not a cold indifferent willing, that doesn't care whether it obtains it, but a vehement desire, as the word signifies, and as the resemblance clearly bears; as a child who will not be stilled till it has the breast; offer it what you will, silver, gold, or jewels, it regards them not, these answer not its desire, and that must be answered. Thus David, My soul breaks for the longing that it has unto your judgments;²⁷ as a child likely to break its heart with crying for want of the breast. And again, because natural, it is, 3. Constant. The infant is not cloyed or wearied with daily feeding on the breast, but desires it every day, as if it had never had it before: thus the child of God has an unchangeable appetite for the word: it is daily new to him; he finds still fresh delight in it. Thus David, as before cited, My soul breaks for the longing that it has unto your judgments at all times. And then this law was his meditation day and night.²⁸ Whereas a natural man is easily surfeited of it, and the very commonness and cheapness of it makes it contemptible to him. And this is our case; that while we should wonder at God's singular goodness to us, and therefore prize His word all the more, that very thing makes us despise it—while others, our brethren, have bought this milk with their own blood, we have it upon the easiest terms that could be wished, only for the desiring, without the hazard of bleeding for it, and scarcely at the pains of sweating for it. That you may grow thereby.] This is not only the purpose for which God has provided His children with the word, and moves them to desire it, but that which they are to intend in their desire and use of it; and, answerable to God's purpose, they are therefore to desire it, because it is proper for this end, and that by it they may attain this end, to grow thereby. And herein, indeed, these children differ from infants in the natural life, who are directed to their food beside their knowledge, and without intention of its end; but this rational milk is to be desired by the children of God in a rational way, knowing and intending its end, having the use of natural reason renewed and sanctified by supernatural grace. Now the end of this desire is, growth. Desire the word, not that you may only hear it—that is to fall very far short of its true end—yea, it is to take the beginning of the work for the end of it. The ear is indeed the mouth of the mind, by which it receives the word, (as Elihu compares it, Job 34:2,) but you know that meat which goes no further than the mouth cannot nourish. Neither should you desire the word only to satisfy a custom; it would be a great folly to make such superficial a thing the purpose of so serious a work. Again, to hear it only to stop the mouth of conscience, that it may not clamor more for the gross impiety of condemning it, this is to hear it, not out of desire, but out of fear. To desire it only for some present pleasure and delight that a man may find in it, is not the due use and end of it: that there is delight in it, may help to commend it to those who find it so, and so be a means to advance the end; but the end it is not. To seek no more than a present delight, which vanishes with the sound of the

words that die in the air, is not to desire the word as meat, but as music, as God tells the prophet Ezekiel of his people.²⁹ And, lo, you are to them as a very lovely song of one that has a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear your words, but they do them not. To desire the word for the increase of knowledge, although this is necessary and commendable, and being rightly qualified, is a part of spiritual growth, yet, take it as going no further, it is not the true end of the word. Nor is the venting of that knowledge in speech and frequent discourse of the word and the Divine truths that are in it; which, where it is governed with Christian prudence, is not to be despised, but commended; yet, certainly, the highest knowledge, and the most frequent and skillful speaking of the word, severed from the growth here mentioned, misses the true end of the word. If anyone's head or tongue should grow apace, and all the rest stand at a stay, it would certainly make him a monster; and they are no other, who are knowing and discoursing Christians, and grow daily in that, but not at all in holiness of heart and life, which is the proper growth of the children of God. Appropriate to their case is Epictetus's comparison of the sheep; they return not what they eat in grass, but in wool. David, in that 119th Psalm, which is wholly spent upon this subject, the excellence and use of the word of God, expresses, ver. 15, 16, 24, his delight in it, his earnest desire to be further taught, and to know more of it; his readiness to speak of it, ver. 13, 27; but withal, you know, he joins his desire and care to keep it, to hide it in his heart, ver. 5, 11; to make it the man of his counsel, to let it be as the whole assembly of his private counselors, and to be ruled and guided by it; and with him to use it so, is indeed to grow by it. If we know what this spiritual life is, and of what the nature of it consists, we may easily know what is the growth of it. When holiness increases, when the sanctifying graces of the Spirit grow stronger in the soul, and consequently act more strongly in the life of a Christian, then he grows spiritually. And as the word is the means of begetting this spiritual life, so likewise of its increase. 1. This will appear, if we consider the nature of the word in general, that it is spiritual and Divine, treats of the highest things, and therefore has in it a fitness to elevate men's minds from the earth, and to assimilate to itself such as are often conversant with it; as all kind of doctrine readily does to those who are much in it, and apply their minds to study it. Doubtless, such kind of things as are frequent with men, have an influence on the disposition of their souls. The Gospel is called light, and the children of God are likewise called light, as being transformed into its nature; and this they are still the more, by more hearing of it, and so they grow. 2. If we look more particularly unto the strain and tenor of the word, it is most fit for increasing the graces of the Spirit in a Christian; for there are in it particular truths relative to them, that are apt to excite them, and set them on work, and so to make them grow, as all habits do, by acting. It does (as the Apostle's word may be translated) stir up the sparks, and blow them into a greater flame, make them burn clearer and hotter. This it does both by particular exhortation to the study and exercise of those graces, sometimes pressing one, and sometimes another: and by right representing to them their objects. The word feeds faith, by setting before it the free grace of God, His rich promises, and His power and truth to perform them all; shows it the strength of the new covenant, not depending upon it, but holding in Christ in whom all the promises of God are yea and amen; and drawing faith still to rest more entirely upon His righteousness. It feeds repentance by making the vileness and deformity of sin daily more clear and visible. Still as more of the word has admission into the soul, the more it hates sin, sin being the more discovered and the better known in its own native color: as the more light there is in a house, the more any thing that is unclean or deformed is seen and disliked. Likewise it increases love to God, by opening up still more and more of His infinite excellence and loveliness. As it

borrow the resemblance of the vilest things in nature to express the foulness and hatefulness of sin, so all the beauties and dignities that are in all the creatures are called together in the word to give us some small scantling of that Uncreated Beauty who alone deserves to be loved. Thus might it be instanced in respect to all other graces. But above all other considerations, this is observable in the word as the increaser of grace, that it holds forth Jesus Christ to our view to look upon not only as the perfect pattern, but also as the full fountain of all grace, from whose fullness we all receive. The contemplation of Him as the perfect image of God, and then drawing from Him as having in Himself a treasure for us, these give the soul more of that image which is truly spiritual growth. This the Apostle expresses excellently³⁰ speaking of the ministry of the Gospel revealing Christ, that beholding in him (as it is, ch. 4 ver. 6, in his face) the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord; not only that we may take the copy of His graces, but have a share of them. There be many things that might be said of this spiritual growth, but I will add only a few. First, in the judging of this growth, some persons conclude too rigidly against themselves, that they grow not by the word, because their growth is not so sensible to them as they desire. But, 1. It is well known, that in all things that grow, this growth is not discerned in motu, sed in termino,³¹ not in the growing, but when they are grown. 2. Besides, other things are to be considered in this: although other graces seem not to advance, yet if you grow more self-denying and humble in the sense of your slowness, all is not lost; although the branches shoot not up so fast as you wish, yet, if the root grow deeper, and fasten more, it is a useful growth. He who is still learning to be more in Jesus Christ, and less in himself, to have all his dependence and comfort in Him, is doubtless a growing believer. On the other side, a far greater number conclude wrong in their own favor, imagining that they do grow, if they gain ground in some of those things we mentioned above, namely, more knowledge and more faculty of discoursing; if they find often some present stirrings of joy or sorrow in hearing of the word; if they reform their life, grow more civil and blameless, &c.; yet all these and many such things may be in a natural man, who notwithstanding grows not, for that is impossible; he is not, in that state, a subject capable of this growth, for he is dead, he has none of the new life to which this growth relates. Herod heard gladly, and obeyed many things.³² Consider, then, what true delight we might have in this. You find a pleasure when you see your children grow, when they begin to stand and walk, and so forth; you love well to perceive your estate or your honor grow: but for the soul to be growing more like God, and nearer Heaven, if we know it, is a pleasure far beyond them all: to find pride, earthliness, and vanity abating, and faith, and love, and spiritual-mindedness increasing; especially if we reflect that this growth is not as our natural life, which is often cut off before it reaches full age, as we call it, and, if it attain that, falls again to move downwards, and decays, as the sun, being at its meridian, begins to decline again; but this life shall grow on in whomever it is, and come certainly to its fullness; after which, there is no more need for this word, either for growth or nourishment,—no death, no decay, no old age, but perpetual youth, and a perpetual spring; ver aeternum; fullness of joy in the presence of God, and everlasting pleasures at His right hand.³³ Ver. 3. If so be you have tasted that the Lord is gracious. Our natural desire for food arises principally from its necessity for that end which nature seeks, viz. the growth, or at least the nourishment of our bodies. But there is, besides, a present sweetness and pleasantness in the use of it that serves to sharpen our desire, and is placed in our nature for that purpose. Thus the children of God, in their spiritual life, are naturally carried to desire the means of their nourishment and of their growth, being always here in a growing state; but besides, there is a

spiritual delight and sweetness in the word, in that which it reveals concerning God, and this adds to their desire, stirs up their appetite towards it. The former idea is expressed in the preceding verse, the latter in this. Nature sends the infant to the breast; but when it has once tasted of it, that is a new superadded attraction, and makes it desire after it the more earnestly. So here, The word is fully recommended to us by these two, usefulness and pleasantness: like milk, (as it is compared here,) which is a nourishing food, and also sweet and delightful to the taste: by it we grow, and in it we taste the graciousness of God. David, in that Psalm which he dedicates wholly to this subject, gives both of these as the reason for his appetite. He passionately expresses his love for it (119:97-102), O how love I your law! It follows, that by it he was made wiser than his enemies,—than his teachers,—and than the ancients; taught to refrain from every evil way; taught by the Author of that word, the Lord Himself, to grow wiser and warier, and holier in his ways; and then, ver. 103, he adds this other reason, How sweet are your words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth! We shall speak, I. Of the goodness or graciousness of the Lord; II. Of this taste; and III. Of the inference from both. I. The goodness of God: The Lord is gracious; or, of a bountiful, kind disposition. The Hebrew word in Psalms 34:8, whence this is taken, signifies good. The Septuagint renders it by the same word as is used here by our Apostle. Both the words signify a benignity and kindness of nature. It is one of love's attributes,³⁴ that it is kind, chresteuomai, ever compassionate, and helpful as it can be in straits and distresses, and still ready to forget and pass by evil, and to do good. In the largest and most comprehensive sense must we take the expression here, and yet still we shall speak and think infinitely below what His goodness is. He is naturally good, yea, goodness is His nature; He is goodness and love itself. He who loves not knows not God; for God is love.³⁵ He is primitively good; all goodness is derived from Him, and all that is in the creature comes forth from none other than that ocean; and this Graciousness is still larger than them all. There is a common bounty of God, in which He does good to all, and so the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.³⁶ But the goodness that the Gospel is full of,—the particular stream that runs in that channel, is His peculiar graciousness and love to His own children, that by which they are first enlivened, and then refreshed and sustained in their spiritual being. It is this that is here spoken of. He is gracious to them in freely forgiving their sins, in giving no less than Himself to them; He frees them from all evils, and fills them with all good. He satisfies your mouth with good things and so it follows with good reason, that He is merciful and gracious; and His graciousness is further expressed in His gentleness and slowness to anger, His bearing with the frailties of His own, and pitying them like as a father pities his children.³⁷ No friend is so kind and friendly (as this word signifies), and none so powerful. He is a very present help in trouble,³⁸ ready to be found: whereas others may be far off, He is always at hand, and His presence is always comfortable. Those who know God, still find Him a real useful good. Some things and some persons are useful at one time, and others at another, but God at all times. A well-furnished table may please a man while he has health and appetite, but offer it to him in the height of a fever, how unpleasant would it be then! Though never so lavishly prepared, it is then not only useless, but hateful to him; but the kindness and love of God is then as seasonable and refreshing to him, as in health, and possibly more; he can find sweetness in that, even on his sickbed. The bitter choler abounding in the mouth, in a fever, does not make distasteful this sweetness; it transcends and goes above it. Thus all earthly enjoyments have but some time (as meats) when they are in season, but the graciousness of God is always sweet; the taste of that is never out of season. See how old age spoils the relish of outward delights, in the example of

Barzillai,³⁹ but it makes not this distasteful. Therefore the Psalmist prays, that when other comforts forsake him and wear out, when they ebb from him and leave him on the sand, this may not; that still he may feed on the goodness of God: Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength fails.⁴⁰ It is the continual influence of His graciousness that makes them still grow like a cedar in Lebanon, that makes them still bring forth fruit in old age, and be fat and flourishing; to show that the Lord is upright, as it is there added, that He is (as the word imports) still like Himself, and His goodness is ever the same.⁴¹ Full chests or large possessions may seem sweet to a man, until death presents itself; but then (as the Prophet speaks of throwing away their idols of silver and gold to the bats and moles, in the day of calamity,⁴²) then he is forced to throw away all he possesses, with disdain for it and for his former folly in doting on it—at that time, the kindness of friends, and wife, and children, can do nothing but increase his grief and their own—but then is the love of God the good indeed and abiding sweetness, and it best relishes when all other things are most unsavory and uncomfortable. God is gracious, but it is God in Christ; otherwise we cannot find Him so: therefore this is here spoken in particular of Jesus Christ, (as it appears by that which follows,) through whom all the peculiar kindness and love of God is conveyed to the soul, for it can come no other way; and the word here mentioned is the Gospel,⁴³ of which Christ is the subject. Though God is mercy and goodness in Himself, yet we cannot find or apprehend Him so to us, but as we are looking through that medium the Mediator. That main point of the goodness of God in the Gospel, which is so sweet to a humbled sinner, the forgiveness of sins, we know we cannot taste of, but in Christ—In whom we have redemption.⁴⁴ And all the favor that shines upon us, all the grace that we receive, is of his fullness;⁴⁵ all our acceptance with God, our being taken into grace and kindness again, is in Him—He has made us accepted in the beloved.⁴⁶ His grace appears in both, as it is there expressed, but it is all in Christ. Let us therefore never leave Him out in our desires of tasting the graciousness and love of God; for otherwise we shall not only dishonor Him, but also disappoint ourselves. The free grace of God was given to be tasted, in the promises, before the coming of Christ in the flesh; but being accomplished in His coming, then was the sweetness of grace made more sensible; then was it more fully broached, and let out to the elect world, when He was pierced on the cross, and His blood poured out for our redemption. Through those holes of His wounds may we draw, and taste that the Lord is gracious, says St. Augustine. II. As to this taste: You have tasted.] There is a tasting exercised by temporary believers spoken of, Hebrews 6:4. Their highest sense of spiritual things, (and it will be far higher in some than we easily think,) yet is but a taste, and is called so in comparison of the truer, fuller sense that true believers have of the grace and goodness of God, which, compared with a temporary taste, is more than tasting. The former is merely tasting, rather an imaginary taste than real; but this is a true feeding on the graciousness of God, yet it is called but a taste in respect of the fullness to come. Though it is more than a taste, as distinguishable from the hypocrite's sense, yet it is no more than a taste, compared with the great marriage-feast that we look for. Jesus Christ being all in all⁴⁷ to the soul, faith, apprehending Him, is all the spiritual senses: it is the eye that beholds His matchless beauty, and so kindles love in the soul, and can speak of Him as having seen Him, and taken particular notice of Him:⁴⁸ it is the ear that discerns His voice.⁴⁹ It is faith that smells His name as ointment poured forth;⁵⁰ faith that touches Him and draws virtue from Him; and faith that tastes Him;⁵¹ and so here, If you have tasted. In order to this there must be, 1. A firm believing of the truth of the promises in which the free grace of God is expressed and exhibited to us. 2. A particular application or attraction of that grace to

ourselves, which is the drawing of those breasts of her consolations,⁵² namely, the promises contained in the Old and New Testaments. 3. A sense of the sweetness of that grace, being applied or drawn into the soul, and that is properly this taste. No unrenewed man has any of these in truth, not the highest kind of temporary believer; he cannot have so much as a real lively assent to the general truth of the promises; for if he had that, the rest would follow. But as he cannot have the least of these in truth, he may have the counterfeit of them all, not only of assent but of application, yea, and a false spiritual joy arising from it; and all these so drawn to the life, that they may much resemble the truth of them. To give clear characters of difference is not so easy as most persons imagine; but doubtless the true living faith of a Christian has in itself such a particular stamp, as brings with it its own evidence, when the soul is clear, and the light of God's face shines upon it. Indeed, in the dark we cannot read, nor distinguish one mark from another; but when a Christian has light to look upon the work of God in his own soul, although he cannot make another sensible of that by which he knows it, yet he himself is assured, and can say confidently in himself, "This I know, that this faith and taste of God I have is true; the seal of the Spirit of God is upon it;" and this is the reading of that new name, in the white stone, which no man knows saving he that receives it.⁵³ There is, in a true believer, such a constant love to God for Himself, and such a continual desire after Him, simply for His own excellence and goodness, as no other can have. On the other side, if a hypocrite would deal truly and impartially by himself, he would readily find out something that would reveal him more or less to himself. But the truth is, men are willing to deceive themselves, and herein arises the difficulty. One man cannot make another sensible of the sweetness of Divine Grace: he may speak to him of it very excellently, but all he says in that kind is an unknown language to a natural man; he hears many good words, but he cannot tell what they mean. The natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God, because they are spiritually discerned.⁵⁴ A spiritual man himself does not fully comprehend this sweetness that he tastes of; it is an infinite goodness, and he has but a taste of it. The peace of God, which is a main fruit of this His goodness, passes all understanding,⁵⁵ says the Apostle, not only all natural understanding, (as some modify it,) but all understanding, even the supernatural understanding of those who enjoy it. And as the godly man cannot comprehend it all, so as to that which he understands, he cannot express it all, and that which he does express, the carnal mind cannot conceive of by his expression. But he who has indeed tasted of this goodness, O how tasteless are those things to him that the world calls sweet! As when you have tasted something that is very sweet, it disrelishes other things after it. Therefore a Christian can so easily either lack, or use with indifference the delights of this earth. His heart is not upon them: for the delight that he finds in God carries it unspeakably away from all the rest, and makes them in comparison seem sapless to his taste. Solomon tasted of all the delicacies, the choicest dishes that are in such esteem amongst men, and not only tasted, but ate largely of them, and yet see how he goes over them, to let us know what they are, and passes from one dish to another. This also is vanity, and of the next, This also is vanity, and so through all, and of all in general, All is vanity and vexation of spirit, or feeding on the wind, as the word may be rendered.⁵⁶ III. We come in the third place to the inference: If you have tasted, &c., then lay aside all malice and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speaking, ver. 1; for it looks back to the whole exhortation. Surely, if you have tasted of that kindness and sweetness of God in Christ, it will compose your spirits, and conform them to Him; it will diffuse such a sweetness through your soul, that there will be no place for malice and guile; there will be nothing but love, and meekness, and singleness of heart. Therefore

those who have bitter malicious spirits, prove that they have not tasted of the love of God. As the Lord is good, so those who taste of His goodness are made like Him. Be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you.⁵⁷ Again, if you have tasted, then desire more. And this will be the truest sign of it: he who is in a continual hunger and thirst after this graciousness of God has surely tasted of it. My soul thirsts for God, says David. He had tasted before; he remembers, that he went to the house of God, with the voice of joy.⁵⁸ This is that happy circle in which the soul moves: the more they love it, the more they shall taste of this goodness; and the more they taste, the more they shall still love and desire it. But observe, if you have tasted that the Lord is gracious, then, desire the milk of the word. This is the sweetness of the word, that it has in it the Lord's graciousness, and gives us the knowledge of His love. Those who have spiritual life and senses find this in it, and those senses are exercised to discern good and evil; and this engages a Christian to further desire of the word. They are fantastical deluding tastes, which draw men from the written word, and make them expect other revelations. This graciousness is first conveyed to us by the word; there first we taste it, and therefore there still we are to seek it; to hang upon those breasts that cannot be drawn dry; there the love of God in Christ streams forth in the several promises. The heart that cleaves to the word of God, and delights in it, cannot but find in it, daily, new tastes of His goodness; there it reads His love, and by that stirs up its own to Him, and so grows and loves, every day more than the former, and thus is tending from tastes to fullness. It is but little we can receive here, some drops of joy that enter into us; but there we shall enter into joy, as vessels put into a sea of happiness. Ver. 4. To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, Ver. 5. You also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. The spring of all the dignities of a Christian, and therefore the great motive of all his duties, is his near relation to Jesus Christ. There it is, that the Apostle makes that the great subject of his doctrine, both to represent to his distressed brethren their dignity in that respect, and to press by it the necessary duties he exhorts to. Having spoken of their spiritual life and growth in Him, under the resemblance of natural life, he prosecutes it here by another comparison very frequent in the Scriptures, and therefore makes use in it of some passages of those Scriptures, that were prophetic of Christ and His Church. Though there be here two different similitudes, yet they have so near a relation one to another, and meet so well in the same subject, that he joins them together, and then illustrates them severally in the following verses; a temple, and a priesthood, comparing the Saints to both: the former in these words of this verse. We have in it, 1. The nature of the building: 2. The materials of it: 3. The structure or way of building it. 1. The nature of it; it is a spiritual building. Time and place, we know, received their being from God, and He was eternally before both; He is therefore styled by the Prophet, The high and lofty One who inhabits eternity.⁵⁹ But having made the world, He fills it, though not as contained in it, and so the whole frame of it is His palace or temple, but after a more special manner, the higher and statelier part of it, the highest Heaven; therefore it is called His holy place, and the habitation of His holiness and glory.⁶⁰ And on earth, the houses of His public worship are called His houses; especially the Jewish temple in its time, having in it such a relative typical holiness, which others have not. But besides all these, and beyond them all in excellence, He has a house in which He dwells more peculiarly than in any of the rest, even more than in Heaven, taken for the place only, and that is this spiritual building. And this is most suitable to the nature of God. As our Savior says of the necessary conformity of His worship to Himself,

God is a Spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth,⁶¹ so it holds of His house; He must have a spiritual one, because He is a Spirit; so God's temple is His people. And for this purpose chiefly did He make the world, the heaven, and the earth, that in it He might raise this spiritual building for Himself to dwell in forever, to have a number of His reasonable creatures to enjoy Him, and glorify Him in eternity. And from that eternity He knew what the dimensions, and frame, and materials of it should be. The continuation of this present world, as it now is, is but for the service of this work, like the scaffolding about it; and therefore, when this spiritual building shall be fully completed, all the present frame of things in the world, and in the Church itself, shall be taken away, and appear no more. This building is, as the particular designation of its materials will teach us, the whole invisible Church of God, and each good man is a stone of this building. But as the nature of it is spiritual, it has this privilege (as they speak of the soul), that it is Tota in toto, et tota in qualibet parte:⁶² the whole Church is the spouse of Christ, and each believing soul has the same title and dignity to be called so: thus each of these stones is called a whole temple, the temple of the Holy Ghost;⁶³ though taking the Temple or Building in a more complete sense, each one is but a part, or a stone of it, as it is here expressed. The whole excellence of this building is comprised in this, that it is spiritual, distinguishing it from all other buildings, and preferring it above them. And inasmuch as the Apostle speaks immediately after of a priesthood and sacrifices, it seems to be called a spiritual building, particularly in opposition to that material temple in which the Jews gloried, which was now null, regarding its former use, and was quickly after entirely destroyed. But while it stood, and the legal use of it stood in its fullest vigor, yet in this respect still it was inferior, that it was not a spiritual house made up of living stones, as this, but of a similar matter with other earthly buildings. This spiritual house is the palace of the Great King, or His temple. The Hebrew word for palace and temple is one. God's temple is a palace, and therefore must be full of the richest beauty and magnificence, but such as agrees with the nature of it, a spiritual beauty. In that Psalm which wishes so many prosperities, one is, that our daughters may be as corner-stones, polished after the similitude of a palace.⁶⁴ Thus is the Church: she is called the King's daughter; but her comeliness is invisible to the world, she is all glorious within.⁶⁵ Through sorrows and persecutions, she may be smoky and black, to the world's eye, as the tents of Kedar;⁶⁶ but as to spiritual beauty, she is comely as the curtains of Solomon.⁶⁷ And in this the Jewish temple resembles it rightly, which had most of its riches and beauty on the inside. Holiness is the gold of this spiritual house, and it is inwardly enriched with that. The glory of the Church of God consists not in stately buildings of temples, and rich furniture, and pompous ceremonies; these agree not with its spiritual nature. Its true and genuine beauty is, to grow in spirituality, and so to be more like itself, and to have more of the presence of God, and His glory filling it as a cloud. And it has been observed, that the more the Church grew in outward riches and state, the less she grew, or rather the more sensibly she abated, in spiritual excellences. But the spirituality of this building will better appear in considering particularly, 2ndly, The materials of it, as here expressed To whom coming, &c., you also, as lively stones, are, &c. Now the whole building is Christ mystical, Christ together with the entire body of the elect: He, as the foundation, and they as the stones built upon Him; He, the living stone, and they likewise, by union with Him, living stones; He, having life in himself, as He speaks,⁶⁸ and they deriving it from Him; He, primitively living, and they, by participation. For therefore is He called here a living stone, not only because of His immortality and glorious resurrection, being a Lamb that was slain and is alive again forever,⁶⁹ but because He is the principle of spiritual and eternal life to us, a living

foundation that transfuses this life into the whole building, and every stone of it, In whom (says the Apostle) all the building fitly framed together grows unto a holy temple in the Lord.⁷⁰ It is the Spirit that flows from Him, which enlivens it, and knits it together, as a living body; for the same word is used, Ephesians 4:16, for the Church under the similitude of a body. When it is said, Ch. 20, to be built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, it only refers to their doctrine concerning Christ; and therefore it is added, that He, as being the subject of their doctrine, is the chief corner-stone. The foundation, then, of the Church, lies not in Rome, but in Heaven, an

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