

SIMON PETER HIS LIFE AND LETTERS

by W.T.P. Wolston

Wolston's detailed biographical and exegetical work on the Apostle Peter, covering his conversion, consecration, companionship with Christ, and spiritual development through his life experiences and epistles.

36 Chapters

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00.3. Preface.

Preface.

There is a charm and intensity about Simon Peter's character which have in all ages made his Life and Letters peculiarly attractive to his brethren in Christ. Doubtless it is because he is in so many ways like ourselves, that we have felt so drawn to him. Although an apostle, he "was a man subject to like passions as we are," and by his mistakes we have learned much, while we may well imitate his fervour. When Peter's blessed Master became the writer's — just thirty-two years ago this day — a little bit of his history (Luke 18:28-30), quoted by a servant of God, greatly impressed and helped him spiritually; and the oft-repeated study of his Life, and ministry thereon, has undesignedly led to the unpretending volume now in the reader's hands. It consists largely of notes of addresses, revised, and extended, while some chapters have been written specially. The Author's object has been to trace out completely God's record of His beloved servant, scattered through the New Testament, and briefly to unfold his Epistles. The book is designed for the lambs of Christ's flock, to whom, it is trusted, it may, by the Lord's grace, be helpful. To the care and blessing of a Master unequalled in grace — as both Simon Peter and the writer have tasted — the volume is now commended.

W. T. P. W.

46 Charlotte Square, Edinburgh, 16th December 1892.

01. Simon Peter, 1 Conversion etc.

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Section 1 of 5 (chapters 1-8) of:

02. PART 1 — HIS LIFE.

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Chapter 1 — CONVERSION Chapter 2 — CONSECRATION Chapter 3 — COMPANIONSHIP WITH CHRIST.

Chapter 4 — WALKING ON WATER Chapter 5 — A MODEL PRAYER Chapter 6 — THE TWOFOLD CONFESSION Chapter 7 — THE TRANSFIGURATION, AND THE TRIBUTE Chapter 8 — FEET-WASHING

03. CHAPTER 1 — CONVERSION.

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John 1:19-42. This scripture in the fourth Gospel without doubt gives us the moment when Simon Peter, the fisherman of Bethsaida, first met, and got to know the Lord Jesus, whom to know is life eternal. No more important epoch in a man's history could possibly be than this — the moment when he is brought into personal contact with the living Saviour. Hence there is a most important question which each one of our hearts should ask, and answer before God — viz., Have I been brought to have to do with this living Saviour?

If you have not yet been brought to Jesus, my reader, give me the joy that Andrew had in his day, as he led his brother to Jesus — give me the joy of bringing you to meet that Saviour in this day. This is the evangelist's work in the Gospel.

Let us see now what led to this warm-hearted man — Simon the son of Jonas — being brought to the Lord, for the links in the chain that lead to conversion, whether his, or yours, or mine, are ever very interesting. The Lord had sent to Israel at this moment a servant who roused the people from end to end of the land. No smooth-spoken prophet was John the Baptist. He spoke to people of their sins, and of their need, and multitudes were aroused and gathered round him (see Matthew 3:1-12), until he, as it were, shook them off at the feet of the Saviour. John preached repentance. "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," was the clarion note that reached the conscience of the multitudes that heard him. Thoroughly awakened by his preaching of coming judgment, John plainly told them, in answer to their query, "What shall we do then?" (see Luke 3:1-14), all that they should do, or should not do. To the publicans the Baptist preached, "Exact no more than that which is appointed you;" to the soldiers he said, "Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely, and be content with your wages." He said, moreover, "Now also the axe is laid to the root of the tree;" and if an axe be laid to the root of a tree, down it must go. In a way, therefore, John foretold the ruin of the nation. If the axe were laid to the root of the tree, moreover, it would show what was inside the tree, and it might be rotten to the core. If the axe of God's Word lay open — as it does — the heart of man, it shows it to be rotten to the very core (see Mark 7:20; Mark 7:23).

It was strong language John used as the multitudes came out to him. "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" fell not only on the ears of the common people, but also on "many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism." How they were going to escape the damnation of hell was urgently sought of them, as I would ask it of you, too, my reader. It is a query that must be faced, alike in John's day, and in ours.

John could not give his hearers pardon, nor preach forgiveness, but he told them that if truly repentant they would go down under the waters of Jordan, and be baptized, confessing their sins; and they did so. As he was thus baptizing, there came to him a Man whom John knew to be the sinless One. He had no sins to confess. He was the only sinless man there ever was in this world,

but He asked to be baptized of John — took His place, though sinless, with the remnant that was turning round to God, and, as He came up out of the water, the Spirit of God came down upon Him, like a dove, and a voice from heaven proclaimed, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17).

After this John sees Jesus one day coming unto him, and he gives this lovely testimony of Him, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world. This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me. . . . And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw and bare record that this is the Son of God" (John 1:29-34). John got the sense in his soul, Here is the One who can really bless man. You get the atoning work of the Lamb of God first, and then that He is the One who baptizes with the Holy Ghost. We must learn these two things, first, that Jesus is the One that can take away our sins, and then that He is the One who gives the Holy Ghost, and blesses. The Lord puts away sin in two ways — He puts away the sins of His own people by dying for their sins upon the cross, and then for those who, alas! refuse Him, He baptizes them with fire — that is, judgment sweeps the whole scene. Oh, come to Him, my unsaved reader, while you can get the forgiveness of your sins, and the baptism of the Holy Ghost, and escape the certainly coming baptism of fire, the judgment which is rapidly nearing.

John's first testimony to Jesus seems to have had little effect — no one followed the Lord — hence we hear his voice again raised as he says, the day following, "Behold the Lamb of God." I do not think John is exactly preaching here; he loved his Master, and saw His moral beauty, and as he stands and says, "Behold the Lamb of God," he becomes the channel of introducing to the Bridegroom the nucleus of the Bride, as two of his own disciples were detached from himself, and followed Jesus.

I grant you the Bride, the Church, was not formed till afterwards, but I have no doubt you get here the nucleus of that which becomes the Bride. One of the two who heard John speak was Andrew, and I am inclined to regard the other as the man who wrote the Gospel, the one who does not name himself save as "the disciple whom Jesus loved," John the son of Zebedee. The Baptist spoke in a lovely, meditative manner, as his eyes rested upon that incomparable Man, the One whom he knew to be Jehovah, the One who came to take up the whole question of sin; and as he says, "Behold the Lamb of God," those two disciples turn, and, leaving John, follow Jesus, And thenceforward John disappears, and Jesus fills the whole scene.

Jesus turning saw these two disciples following, and said to them, "What seek ye?" Searching question! Is it fame you are seeking, my reader, knowledge, power, or riches? The Lord asks you this from the glory today. Can you answer Him as these two did? "Master, where dwellest thou?" 1:e., We only want you, we want to know where we can be always sure of finding you, "They came and saw where he dwelt." Capernaum is the place called "his own city" (Matthew 9:1), the place in which His most mighty works were done, and concerning which, at length, he is fain to say, "And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained unto this day; but I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment,

than for thee" (Matthew 11:23-24). The higher the privilege the more terrible the judgment when it falls on those who have not answered to that privilege.

"They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour," that is, there were two hours of the day left. Oh, those two hours with Jesus! I ask you, Have you ever spent two hours with Jesus? I am sure if you have, you have come out and tried to take somebody else back to enjoy what you enjoyed. These disciples did. There comes out at once individual testimony, and let me tell you that quiet personal testimony is often worth far more than public preaching. That quiet man, Andrew, of whom we hear no more, save that he companied with the Lord till the end, became the means of the conversion of the most prominent man of the twelve, the record of whose life and ministry has such a large place in the Scriptures, and who at Pentecost was himself the means of the conversion of three thousand souls in one day.

It is beautiful to see how Andrew goes at once to testify of the One he had found, and he begins at home. "He first findeth his own brother Simon." He begins from the centre, and works out to the circumference.

Andrew not only finds Simon, but "he brought him to Jesus." Happy service! Have you, my reader, been brought to Jesus yet? If not, let me lead you to Him now. Come to Him now!

I think I hear that stalwart fisherman speaking that day, and saying to his brother "We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ; come to Him, Simon," and he came.

It is not a question of having an immense amount of knowledge here, but it was a Person who was known, and to Him Andrew brings his own brother Simon. "And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, a stone." This was a wonderful moment in Simon's history. He gets into the presence of the Lord, and what does he learn? He learns that the One whom he had never seen before, and, as far as he knew, had never before seen him, knew all about him. Jesus knew what Simon was, and He knows what you are, my reader. He knew that Simon was a sinner, needing a Saviour, and He knows that you are a sinner, needing a Saviour too. The Lord, addressing the new-comer, says, "Thou art Simon, the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, a stone." What does this changing of his name mean? In Old Testament times the changing of the name was very frequent. God changed Abram's name, and Sarai's; He changed Jacob's too; Pharaoh changed Joseph's name, and Nebuchadnezzar Daniel's, and the King of Egypt changed the name of the last King of Judah. The changing of the name, then, implied that the one whose name was changed was the vassal, the subject, the property of the one who so changed it. The Lord said, as it were, Simon, you are Mine, spirit, soul, and body, and I shall do what I like with you. "The hour is coming, and now is when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live," was being fulfilled in the Galilean fisherman's history. Simon heard the voice of the Son of God then, and though, perhaps at the time, he did not know the meaning of what He said, yet when he wrote his first epistle afterwards he had found it out, for he says, "To whom coming, as unto a living stone. . . . ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house." What is a stone? A little bit of a rock. And what is a Christian? A little bit of Christ, for he is a member of Christ.

Believers now in the Lord Jesus Christ are linked with, yea, united to Him. Peter was learning this truth, slowly I admit, but the necessity and blessedness of it are apparent as, by-and-by, we hear

him saying, "To whom coming — as unto a living stone, . . . ye also, as living stones, are built up" — that is, Christ communicates that life which is His to us, and we become an integral part of that house which God is building; and is not being a living stone a very different thing from being a dead sinner? Do you ask, How am I to get this life? You must get into personal contact with Jesus. Andrew brought Peter to Jesus, and Jesus said to him, "Thou art Cephas, which is by interpretation, a stone "you are a living stone, Peter, and you belong to Me from this moment. And will not you, my reader, belong to Him today, will not you trust Him now? The whole question of sin is settled by the death of Christ. He went into death, and annulled it. He destroyed him who had the power of death. He took sin upon Him, and put it away; and now at the right hand of God, He says, "Look unto me, come unto me." If you come, He will give you eternal life on the spot, and make you a living stone. Peter then, that day, had life communicated to him from the Son of God. He "passed from death unto life" as he stood before the Son of God that day; his soul was for ever linked with the Lord from that day. I do not say that he followed the Lord then, but here you get the moment of Peter's conversion, he is quickened with the very life of Jesus, and becomes "a living stone." This then is the account of HIS CONVERSION.

04. CHAPTER 2 — CONSECRATION.

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Luke 5:1-11. THE events recorded in our first chapter evidently precede by some space of time what we find here. Although a man be converted, he does not, alas! always begin to follow the Lord. It would appear to have been so in Peter's case. Whether he accompanied the Lord in any of His journeyings between John 1:1-51 and Luke 5:1-39 we know not; at any rate, if he did so, he had resiled, gone back into the old groove, and was settling down to life, just as before the Lord first met him. This is often noticed in the history of young converts, unless the work of conviction of sin in their souls has been deep, and the sense of deliverance correspondingly great; then immediate devotedness to the Lord is usually apparent. For a time, then, we hear no more of Peter, he had evidently gone back to his earthly calling; but now we turn to the next eventful day in his history. We find it in Luke 5:1-39, where you get what I may call his CONSECRATION. In this chapter he sets out to follow Jesus; yes, forsakes all, and follows Him; and it is a happy moment for us when we forsake all and follow Jesus. The Lord goes down to Peter in the very midst of his business. He Himself was, as ever, going on with His mission of grace, and mercy to souls, and in order to more advantageously speak to the multitudes, who were thronging to hear Him, He uses Peter's boat as a pulpit.

It must have been a lovely and impressive scene. One can picture the panorama, and the blessed Lord's appearance, as the Spirit says, "It came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret." A multitude in such a place can easily be accounted for. The scene is laid in one of the most populous parts of Palestine. Looking landward from the lake, far away to the right lay Capernaum, His "own city"; while Chorazin, Bethsaida, Magdala, and Tiberias, in close contiguity, successively dot the western shore of the deep blue lake, whose waters are sparkling beneath the beams of the morning sun. The fishing fleet has made for its port — Bethsaida (which means, the house of fish). There Peter, in partnership with James and John, and probably his own brother Andrew, was carrying on a considerable business, as "hired servants" remain to Zebedee, when these four have ill followed the Lord's call (see Mark 1:16-20). All is therefore stir and activity in the things that concern human life when the Lord appears on the scene. The language here used by Luke makes one incline to think that the occasion may have been the same as that recorded by Matthew, where he says, "And great multitudes were gathered together unto him, so that he went into a ship, and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore" (Matthew 13:2). Be this as it may, the Lord's action is significant, as "he entered one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship" (Luke 5:3). The Lord's object in this step is plain. He desired that those to whom He spoke might easily hear Him. He was a model preacher in every way, whether matter, manner, or method be considered. All who preach should seek only to imitate Him. Did they, I believe all listeners would hear, and more be profited.

We are not informed of the subject of the Lord's discourse by Luke, but if the suggestion be correct that Matthew 13:1-58 supplies this information, what wondrous tidings of God's activity in grace fell on the ears of landsmen, and fisherfolk, alike that day! Further, I am inclined to think that the ministry which Peter heard that morning — as, dropping his net-mending, he listened to the Lord — had much to do with what followed. The Son of Man, as the Sower, was bounteously scattering the seed. He tells us "the seed is the word of God." The soil is the heart of man, and into Peter's heart that day fell seed that brought forth eventually fruit a hundredfold. The effect of God's Word is ever far-reaching, though the fruit may be slow of appearing. His sermon over, the Lord now turns to Peter personally, with intent to richly bless him. In John 1:1-51 He sought to teach Peter one lesson, namely this, "Peter, you belong to Me," though evidently Peter did not then fully learn it. Now He teaches him another lesson, namely, "Peter, you, and all that you have, belong to Me." He had stepped into Peter's boat, without asking for it, because it belonged to Him; and now He says, "Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught." He will not be beholden to any man, so He is going to pay Peter for the use of his boat. Peter says, "Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless, at thy word I will let down the net." Peter obeys, for he knows now something of who He is who speaks, and, as a result, finds that he never had taken such a haul of fish in all his days. His answer is at once a confession of failure, and of faith. Failure as regards his own efforts, and faith in the One who now bids him lower his nets. Daylight is not the time when fish enter a net, hence the man who would catch them goes out by night. Reason would have said, If there were none to be got last night, there are sure to be none caught in broad daylight. But reason is of no avail in nearing God. Faith alone understands Him; and "the obedience of faith," as well as its confidence, is manifest in the utterance, "Nevertheless, at thy word I will let down the net." At once it is filled to breakage, and Simon's partners have to be summoned to help to secure the catch, two ships filled to the gunwale, "so that they began to sink," being the result. Thoroughly "astonished" thereat, and awakened thereby to a sense of his sin, Peter "fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." He saw now not two boatloads of fish, but the Godhead glory of the Son of Man, the Messiah, the more than Man, Son of God. He saw the application of Psalms 8:4-8 to his Master as the fish obey Him. He is convicted about his sin, his guilt. He had never had the truth of his sinful state raised before. He had to learn what he was. He had learned something of what Jesus was in John 1:1-51, and something more of what He was in this scene. Now he had to learn his own good-for-nothingness, his guiltiness; but he felt too, I cannot do without Thee, O Lord, and he gets as close as he can to Jesus' knees, while he says, "Depart from me: for I am a sinful man, O Lord." The experience in the soul which this passage in Peter's history illustrates is most important. In John 1:1-51 no question of Peter's guilty state had been raised. There it was simply the absoluteness of sovereign grace blessing him. Here the Lord purposely lets the question of his state as a sinner be raised. His conscience is profoundly aroused. His heart had been attracted in John 1:1-51 by the grace of the Lord's person; here a ray of divine glory from that same person illumines the dark chambers of that heart. The effect is electric. All his life is flung into deepest shade. "Sinful". he judged himself to be all along the line, but chiefly, I opine, in that he had not followed the Lord from the time when He first spoke to him.

There is a real and deep work of grace here. He is spiritually convicted — morally broken up, and brought in self-judgment on his face before the Lord. He is joining company with Job, as he says, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor

myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:5-6). He is side by side, morally, with Isaiah, as he exclaims, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts" (Isaiah 6:5). The stalwart fisherman of Galilee joins the patriarch, and the prophet, in the unspeakably blessed pathway of deep self-judgment, and self-repudiation, as out of the depths of a broken heart he cries, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." The importance of this process in the soul cannot be overestimated. In the lack of it is found the secret of so much of the slipshod profession that abounds around us. The seed gets no deep root in unbroken ground. The deeper the furrow produced by the ploughshare of conviction, the deeper the root, and the more abundant the fruit in later days. One longs to see more of this sort of work where the Gospel is proclaimed. Only where deep, genuine, Holy Ghost-wrought repentance, and self-judgment are produced, will there be the gladsome hundred-fold harvest which the Lord so delights to garner. May I inquire, my reader, what you know of all this? If you have never passed through something akin to this, I think it is high time you carefully, and prayerfully examined the foundations of your soul's relationship with God. John Bunyan said, "When religion goes in silver slippers, there are plenty found to put them on." This witness is true. Profession of Christ is easy enough nowadays. Possession of Christ is another thing altogether, and I doubt if any heart really possesses Him until, like Peter, it feels that it is utterly unfit for Him.

Peter felt he was utterly unfit to be near Him, yet he could not do without Him. His actions and his words are strangely contradictory. "He fell down at Jesus' knees," — 1:e., got as close to Him as he could, — and then said, "Depart from me, O Lord." I do not believe he thought the Lord would depart from him, but nevertheless he was morally right in his utterance. He felt profoundly how unfit he was for Jesus, but could not do without Him, and so it has been with every divinely-awakened soul from that day to this.

Jesus sweetly calms his troubled conscience, as He says unto him, "Fear not, from henceforth thou shalt catch men." His troubled soul is sweetly calmed by the Lord's own blessed ministry, "Fear not"; and to every troubled soul, in this our day, He says now, "Fear not."

"And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him." No doubt most people would have thought Peter a most improvident man, — would have said he had better go to market with his fish first; but Peter, heeding the call Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men (Matthew 4:19; Mark 1:17), gave up all that had hitherto entranced him, in the day when it was most bright and prosperous. He had a heart to be for the Lord, and the Lord only. Christ eclipsed everything in his soul, and he leaves all to be near that Saviour, to be His companion, and His servant, as He passes through this scene. Happy choice, blessed submission of faith, and answer of affection!

We are not all called, as Peter was here, to abandon an earthly calling to follow the Lord, but the principle is the same. When grace is known, and peace and joy fill the heart, as the fruit of hearing the divine words, "Fear not" — which always come to the soul after honest confession, — then to follow the Lord fully is the only safe and right path, for the new-born soul. We must make a clean break with the world if we are going to have the enjoyment of the Lord's favour. Out-and-out decision for Christ is of the last possible importance.

Peter turned his back upon his world when it was most attractive, and he most successful in it. This is particularly fine. Many a man has turned to the Lord when all has gone dead against him, and his earthly history has been, so to speak, a huge failure. Peter consecrated himself to the Lord, and His service when everything was most flourishing, and all combined to keep him where his heart had hitherto found all its springs of joy. The fact is, an eclipse had occurred. He has been introduced really to the Lord of glory, and from that moment everything else was hidden from his view, and paled into utter insignificance, compared with the blessedness of being in the company of, and near to the One who had said to him, "Follow me."

Now, my reader, if Jesus says to you today, "Follow thou me," what will you say? Let your answer be, "Lord, from this day forth my heart is Thine!" The Lord grant it.

05. CHAPTER 3 — COMPANIONSHIP WITH CHRIST.

CHAPTER 3 — COMPANIONSHIP WITH CHRIST.

Mark 1:28-37, Mark 3:13-19. THE next thing we find in the Gospel narrative, as we pursue Peter's history, is that the Lord enters his house at a most opportune juncture. He comes out of the synagogue, where He had just been casting an unclean spirit out of a man, and forthwith (a characteristic word of Mark's Gospel) He goes to Peter's house, and "Simon's wife's mother lay sick of a fever," and they tell Him of her. It was most natural that they should tell the Lord of the sick woman, and He heals her with a word.

Now, it has often been taught that a man must remain unmarried in order to fully follow the Lord; but here we learn that Simon was a married man, and he was a man who had affections large enough to take in his wife's mother, not only into his heart but into his house. We live in a day when mothers-in-law are often at a discount; not so here, and God has not recorded this in the pages of His Word for nothing.

I have no doubt Peter's wife was in a tremor that day. Her mother, possibly (for we do not read of children) the dearest object, save her husband, that she had in the world, lay sick of a fever. Another Gospel (Luke 4:38) says, she was "taken with a great fever." But Jesus "stood over her, and rebuked the fever, and it left her;" and He "took her by the hand, and lifted her up," and "she ministered unto them," instead of being ministered to. She was a useful mother-in-law that. Do you think it was by chance that the Lord went there that day? I believe not. If we go back a few days in Peter's history, we remember that he had given up all to follow the Lord; and having abandoned his earthly calling so to do, it is quite possible that his wife might have felt somewhat anxious as to ways and means, and may have thought, if she did not say, "How are we now to be cared for and supported?" The Lord comes into her house — her home; takes her mother by the hand, and heals her with a word; and as the loving daughter sees the mother healed and restored, she must have felt quite assured as to the wisdom of her husband's action in fully following the Lord. And I doubt not, before Peter left again to accompany his Master in His labours, he got a word of this sort from his wife, "You follow Him fully, Simon; I see well you are on the right track; He has the heart and the power to care for us in all things." This scene is so like the Lord. He ever loves to put His servants at rest at home, as well as to set them free to follow Him. It is sweet to think that He has His eye on the oft-times solitary wife at home, with her cares and burdens, while the husband, called to labour in public, is frequently and necessarily away. Ye wives of evangelists, and other servants of the Lord, note how the Lord thinks of you!

Passing on now to the third chapter of Mark, we find the special call which Peter received of the Lord. After a night spent in prayer (see Luke 6:12), the Lord selects those who should be His companions in His pilgrim pathway here. We read, "He ordained twelve, that THEY SHOULD BE WITH HIM." I know nothing more blessed than that!

People think it is a wonderful thing to be saved, to escape the damnation of hell — a wonderful thing to go to heaven; and so it is. But to go to heaven in Scripture, is always to be with a Person. "Absent from the body, present with the Lord," — "to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better," — is the language of Scripture. To be with Him, to enjoy companionship with the Lord Jesus Christ, is what God calls us to; and here these men, in a very special way, were called to be with Him. Have you been called to be with Him, my reader? You are not called to be an apostle, but the eternity of a Christian is to be with Jesus. But for you, my unconverted friend, what is your eternity? To be with Jesus? Alas! you do not know him! To be in glory? You have no title to it! Your future is very different. I fear there will fall on your ears a sadly solemn word, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." Perhaps you say, I do not believe God ever made hell for man. Nor do I. The Lord Jesus says it was "prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41). But some men are such fools they prefer the company of the devil and his angels to the company of Christ. See where you stand, my unconverted reader, and think of the contrast between your portion and that of the true follower of Jesus.

"He ordained twelve, that they should be with him." "Ah! but," you say, "one was a traitor." Well, do not you be a traitor! God help you, and me too, not to be traitors! Judas's history has its lessons for all of us. It is like a beacon light put on a dangerous coast, to keep the watchful mariner off the sunken rocks — to teach our souls to be in no wise like him. In this place, again (Mark 3:16), you get Simon's new name emphasised, and in all the Gospels it is so. His name always comes first on the list (see Matthew 10:2; Mark 3:16; Luke 6:14; John 21:2); not that he had any authority over his brethren, or was made a sort of primate, as Rome would fain teach us. It was his natural fervour, and warm-hearted impulsive earnestness, that put him always in the front rank. If there be a query, Peter most usually puts it; if it be a confession of who the Lord is, Peter is the spokesman. I grant you his very impulsiveness drew him oftentimes into danger, and ended in his denying his Lord at a later date; but still Peter's is a wonderful history of devotion to the Lord, and where he failed, the Lord, in infinite wisdom and faithfulness, tells us about it, and puts him too before us as another beacon light, lest our small barks should also be stranded on the selfsame rocks that damaged his.

Nothing but devotion of heart to Christ personally will do for us. A mere creed is of no value whatever. Unless there be affection of heart that puts us near Himself, and, if we have got away, leads us back to Him as quickly as possible, our confession of Him is valueless to us, and nauseous to Him. Peter learned a blessed lesson at this point of his history, viz., The Lord wants me to be with Him, — He wants my company. Have you learned yet, dear reader, that the Lord loves your companionship, and desires to have your affections? But besides the thought of companionship, there was another purpose in the Lord's mind as He drew the twelve around Him. Luke's record of the event runs thus: — "And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named Apostles; Simon (whom he also named Peter)," etc. (Luke 6:12-14). Turning to Mark we read, "And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils. And Simon he surnamed Peter" (Mark 3:14-16). This is intensely interesting. Notice the prelude to the selection. He, who was Lord of all, and knew all, "continued all night in prayer to God" before He selects His companions, and ordains His apostles.

What a lesson to us all of dependence on God. This is only recorded by Luke, who gives us the pathway of the perfectly dependant man. We are not surprised, therefore, though deeply instructed thereby, to find the Lord bowed in prayer seven times in that Gospel (Luke 3:21, Luke 5:16, Luke 6:12, Luke 9:18-29, Luke 11:1, Luke 22:41). Each occasion has its own peculiar lesson for our hearts.

Here then we get Simon's new name (Peter) confirmed, his apostolic call declared, and at the same time we receive instruction as to the meaning of the term "Apostle." Jesus so named the twelve, Luke tells us; and Mark adds the explanation, "that he might send them forth to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils." How comprehensive is apostolic work, — to preach God, to heal man, and to defeat the devil. No wonder Satan did his best to trip up the most prominent of the band, and gladly entered into the meanest, who at best was but a "thief" and a "devil," in order by the one to dishonour, and by the other to get rid of, their blessed lowly Master! The reader is referred to Matthew 10:1-42 and Luke 9:1-62 for the actual moment when the Lord conferred on Peter, and the twelve, the power here spoken of, and sent them on their joyful mission; from which we may also see them returning in Mark 6:30, and reporting to their Master "both what they had done, and what they had taught." How He appreciated, and entered into the toil, connected with their service, is seen in what follows, as He says, "Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest awhile," Blessed Master! How well does He know how to equip, and send out His servants, and how to care for and refresh them, when they came back, whether returning elated with success, as in this instance, or depressed by difficulties, as has often been the case with His less highly gifted, but not less deeply loved servants of later days.

Now let us go on to the eighth chapter of Luke for a moment. There is a remarkable scene here, and again Peter comes to the front (Luke 8:41-56). How beautifully the Lord responds to every call and every need! If you have any difficulty about the affection of Christ, about how He would respond to your call, and your need, these lovely Gospel narratives ought to settle your difficulty. Look at this man Jairus, who had a dying daughter! He comes to Jesus about her. The Lord responds at once. Then the people throng Him, and press Him, and a woman who had spent all her living on physicians, and had only got worse instead of better, comes and touches His garment. Just like today. People spend their lives going about to all sorts of spiritual doctors, instead of simply coming to Christ, and of course get no better, for religion cannot save them. Religion can damn you very easily, if you are content with religiousness, without having ever come to a personal Saviour to be saved. This woman heard of Jesus, and she came to Him; and when she came, she touched; and when she had touched, she felt; and then she came forth and confessed Christ! She got all she wanted. She was healed immediately she touched the Saviour. So would you be, if you were to do as she did. Jesus then said "Who touched me?" And the Lord, looking down from glory, now says, Who is touching Me? And will you not touch Him, dear friend, and get life from Him? And now, poor dear blundering Peter puts in a word about the multitude, and says, "Master, the multitude throng thee, and press thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me?" In all this throng, Lord, how can You ask who it is that has touched You? But Jesus said, "Somebody hath touched me; for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me." That is always the way; if you only get near enough to touch the hem of His garment, virtue will go out from Him, and you will be healed, you will get all you need. The Lord will never shake you off; He will encourage you

to come forth and confess Him. Only try Him, — just come to Him, and touch Him. The virtue that comes out of Him always heals the soul that just simply touches Him in faith. The woman comes out and confesses what she had done, and why she did it, and what the effect of it was. She had faith in His goodness, faith in His heart, faith in His person; and see what the Lord says, "Daughter, be of good comfort: thy faith had made thee whole; go in peace." Peter learned a good lesson that day, that a throng might press his Lord and yet nobody really touch Him, whereas the faintest touch of faith secured the fullest blessing.

Next, in Jairus's house Peter gets another lesson, as he stands by and sees the Lord annul the power of death. He had seen Him heal his mother-in-law, he had seen how faith must be in exercise if blessing is to come, and now he learns that He is the One who quells the power of death, that death cannot be in His presence. Jesus has power over death. He only met it to annul it, for He was the Lord of life. The thieves who were crucified with Him could not die till He had died; and when He died, He annulled the power of death, broke its bands, demolished the bars of the tomb, and came up out of it. Hence it is to a victorious triumphant Christ I call on you to come now, One who is alive for evermore. I have to do with a victorious Saviour, One who went into death that He might annul it, and did so by dying. He took my sins on Him as He went into it, and put them all away.

Peter was learning blessed lessons of the moral power and glory of his Master, as in Jairus' house he first saw how He dealt with infidel scorers, viz., "put them all out," and then heard Him say, "Maid, arise!" and bid her be fed. This scene is a striking foreshadowing of what will yet be. A day is rapidly nearing when He who overcame death in the house of Jairus, will deal with it finally and for ever. "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." This we see effected in Revelation 21:1-8. Happy will they be who are then the witnesses of the Saviour's final triumph. No scorners shall see it. All such are judged and "put out" in Revelation 20:1-15 by the judgment of the great white throne. Peter will witness the Lord's final victory over death; so too, through infinite grace, shall I. Will you, my reader, be a delighted witness, or a judged scorners in that day?

06. CHAPTER 4 — WALKING ON WATER.

CHAPTER 4 — WALKING ON WATER.

Matthew 14:1-36

TURNING to Matthew 14:1-36, we get another very blessed lesson taught. Peter walks on the water in this chapter, and we will inquire what led to it. Herod had beheaded John the Baptist, "and his disciples came and took up the body, and buried it, and went and told Jesus." What a right and suited action! Have you been burying some dear one? And did you too go and tell Jesus, pouring out your sorrow into His sympathising ear? These disciples did. I think I can see two roads that day, and the two companies who were on them. On one road come up the sad disciples of John, who had lost their master; on the other, the disciples of Jesus return, flushed with success, from their first missionary tour (see Mark 6:30-31). The two companies meet in the Lord's presence. The Lord says to them, "Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest awhile." How morally lovely is this call! Alike to successful labourers, and to disheartened disciples, is it made. By each alike it was needed, but a desert with Jesus can be no desert.

Then comes the feeding of the multitudes, and the way in which the Lord sends the multitudes away, — a very different sending away from what it would have been if the disciples had had their way. They would have sent them away to buy bread for themselves, — sent away hungry thousands to be witnesses, as it were, against Christ. He sent those many thousands away happy, satisfied, so many witnesses to the tenderness of His heart, and the divine glory of His person. While the Lord does this, He constrains His disciples to take ship and go to the other side.

I can see the Lord's beautiful wisdom in sending His disciples away, at that moment, out of the way of an element for evil, for John 6:14-15, tells us that the multitudes would have taken Him by force to make Him a king, and the disciples too were intent on the kingdom. They would have heartily entered into the thought of the multitude to exalt their Master on an earthly throne (see Matthew 20:20-23; Acts 1:6). But the Lord could take no kingdom, nor could He reign, while sin was here, not put away from God's sight. The disciples' constant thought was the earthly kingdom. Not so the Lord's! He knew He must die, and accomplish atonement, ere the day of the kingdom. So now He sends His disciples away out of temptation. The Lord is always so wise, we may well trust Him — trust His love and His wisdom in all His ways with us.

He Himself went then up into a mountain to pray. That really is where He is now, as it were on the mount, in intercession, for Scripture says, "He ever liveth to make intercession for us" (Hebrews 7:25). The disciples, dismissed at eventide, were by this time on their way to Capernaum, "tossed with waves" and "toiling in rowing," as Mark 6:48 informs us. The Lord came to them "in the fourth watch of the night." The distance they had to go was only about ten miles, but they had been nine hours doing "five-and-twenty or thirty furlongs" — a little over three miles. We make little progress if we have not the Lord with us. The Lake of Tiberias is well known for its sudden and violent storms, and they were caught in one. The gravity of the situation, and the difficulty of the disciples

in making headway is easily apparent, when we picture their position, with a knowledge of their surroundings. Sudden and furious hurricanes are common on inland lakes. I remember crossing Lake Como one brilliant summer afternoon, when the surface was like glass. Within an hour a storm burst, which raised so furious a commotion on the waters that no small boat could live therein, and we had to wait till quite late in the evening and get to our destination by steamer.

Travellers in Palestine furnish a similar report; and Dr Thomson, in his well-known work, gives a graphic account of his experiences at the Lake of Tiberias. He thus writes: — "The sun had scarcely set when the wind began to rush down towards the lake, and it continued all night long with constantly increasing violence, so that, when we reached the shore next morning, the face of the lake was like a huge boiling cauldron. To understand the causes of these sudden and violent tempests, we must remember that the lake lies low — six hundred feet lower than the ocean; that the vast and naked plateaux of the Jaulan [Golan] rise to a great height, spreading backward to the wilds of the Matron, and upward to snowy Hermon; that the water courses have cut out profound ravines and wild gorges, converging to the head of this lake, and that these act like gigantic funnels to draw down the cold winds from the mountains. On the occasion referred to, we subsequently pitched our tents at the shore, and remained for three days and nights exposed to this tremendous wind. We had to double pin all the tent ropes, and frequently had to hang with our whole weight upon them to keep the quivering tabernacle from being carried up bodily into the air. No wonder the disciples toiled and rowed hard all that night." ("The Land and the Book.") But in all their difficulties and dangers the Lord had His eye upon His own. He was above in intercession, and in the fourth watch He comes to them. He never forgets His own in their difficulties. "Touched with a feeling of our infirmities," He is "able to succour" (Hebrews 2:18), able to sympathise (Hebrews 4:15), and "able also to save to the uttermost" (Hebrews 7:25). He does all three in this scene. That He is able to "succour," is evidenced in divine power as He is seen "walking on the sea" to their rescue — His sympathy finds vent in His "Be of good cheer; it is I, be not afraid;" while His power to save, is touchingly seen in His action towards Peter, as he cries in distress, "Lord, save me!" Such is Jesus, our Jesus, as He now sits in glory, and these earthly incidents give us blessed glimpses of what He is. In the first part of this chapter (Matthew 14:1-36) you have the sympathy of His heart, and then, as He feeds the multitude, the power of His hand, displayed. Now, as they are toiling, storm-tossed and miserable, what music is in the voice that comes to them above the raging of the wind and waves, saying, "It is I, be not afraid." And as they heard the tones of His voice, Peter, ever energetic, fearless, and full of affection, says, "Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water." Look at the energy and the love of that man's heart. It is very refreshing. You have the Master going over the stormy deep, and then, in answer to the word "Come," you see the disciple imitating his Master, and Peter, upheld by divine power, "walked upon the waters to go to Jesus." Only faith and love will act thus. It is an action the Lord admires. This is a particularly fine scene in Peter's life, but nevertheless his action here has often been questioned. To the spiritual judgment there can be nothing but commendation of his pathway as he leaves the ship. Whatever motives might have been in his heart, they certainly seem all to his credit. Evidently he wanted to be near the Lord, and that was right. Caution and self-consideration would have kept him in the ship with his brethren. Affection and faith led him to leave all that nature leans on. Men with less zeal and less energy would have saved themselves possible failure and discomfiture, and said, "We will just wait where we are till He comes on board." Peter, assured that it was his beloved Master, — for his "If it be thou," I take it, implies no doubt, — and charmed

to see Him thus superior to the fickle element on which He trod so firmly, counting also on His love liking to have him near Him, says in his heart, "I'll go and meet Him, if He will let me." Heedless of all his words conveyed, and true to his natural character of unrestrained impulsiveness — for Peter was no hypocrite — he says, "Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water." Getting for his answer the single word "Come," he at once obeys. Not to have done so would have been disobedience. And "when he was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus." He was entirely right. He had a divine warrant for his action in the word "Come," and divine power he knew could not be wanting, since he was now in the presence of Him, who must be God to walk the waters so majestically as He did. And yet you will argue that he broke down. Quite true; but why? Because he foolishly left the ship? No, for it says, "he walked on the water, to go to Jesus." For the moment he was like his Master. Why then did he sink? Because he took his eye off Jesus. As long as he kept his eye on Him, all went well; the moment "he saw the wind boisterous," down he went. The wind was as high, and the billows as rough, ere he abandoned the ship. The moment, therefore, he left the deck, it was a question of Christ sustaining him or drowning. Had he kept his eye where he first fixed it, as he stepped overboard, — viz., on the person of the Lord, — all would have gone well; but the moment he let the circumstances of his surroundings intervene between him and the Lord's blessed face, he began to sink. It must always be so. So long as I have God between me and my circumstances, all is well; the moment I let the circumstances come in between my heart and God, all is wrong, and "beginning to sink" may well describe the situation.

Faith can walk on the roughest waters when the eye is on the Lord. "Looking off unto Jesus" must ever be the motto of the soul, and the momentary habit of the heart, if this blessed pathway of superiority to circumstances is to be rightly trodden. Peter's failure carries its lessons for us doubtless, but I believe the Lord greatly estimated the love that led him to do as he did, so that I think the point of the presage to note, is not so much that he broke down at last, but that he was really immensely like his Lord till he broke down. "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me," said another servant in a later day. But to return: "When he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and, beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me!" Why did he sink? Was the water a bit more unstable when boisterous than when calm? Certainly not. You could not walk on the stillest mill-pond a bit better than on the stormiest wave that ever surged, without divine power. The power of Christ can sustain you and me in the most difficult circumstances, and nothing but the power and grace of Christ can sustain us in the most easy circumstances. Then, as Peter cries out, the Lord "caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" Peter had faith, though it was little. Have you and I, dear reader, as much as he? The exquisite grace of Christ in this passage is incomparable. Peter quite failed to get to his Lord, but the Lord did not fail to reach him in plenty of time. His very failure had brought him to his Saviour's feet, and in the moment of his deep distress he finds himself in his blessed Saviour's arms. His appeal, "Lord, save me," was heard, and answered at once; and cannot many of us bear witness, in just the same way, to the tender pity and compassionate love of that same precious Jesus, when in our exigencies and distresses we have cast ourselves upon Him? Ten thousand witnesses, repeated myriad-fold, reply, "Yes, yes, indeed! for He is 'Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and for ever.'" As soon as the Lord got into the ship the wind ceased, and John 6:21 adds, "Immediately the ship was at the land whither they went." How beautiful! How calm everything is as soon as you get into the presence of the Lord! And now they worship Him, saying, "Of a truth thou art the Son of God." Peter had learnt Him as Messiah in the

1st of John; he had learnt Him as Son of Man, and Lord over the fish of the sea, in Luke 5:1-39; and now, as he sees more of the moral glories of His person, he gets another most precious lesson, that this One who is the Messiah, and the Son of Man, is also the Son of God.

Let me ask you, my friend, have you ever been bowed in worship before the person of the Lord Jesus? Have you ever cried out to Him, "Lord, save me!"? And, if He has saved you, have you ever gone down on your knees and worshipped Him, saying, "Lord, of a truth thou art the Son of God!"? May the Holy Ghost lead out your heart and mine to worship the Lord Jesus, as Son of God, in a fuller, deeper way; and if you, my reader, have never really worshipped Him yet, may He lead you to bow down before Him today, and praise Him, and worship Him for all that He is, and all that He has done, and thus glorify Him, for He says, "Whoso offereth praise, glorifieth me" (Psalms 50:23).

07. CHAPTER 5 — A MODEL PRAYER.

CHAPTER 5 — A MODEL PRAYER.

Matthew 15:1-20.

DECLARE unto us this parable!" This petition falls from Peter's lips, as he hears the Lord discourse in this chapter on that which surpassed his comprehension. It is truly a model prayer, the style of which we might all well imitate. Montgomery has well said —

"Prayer is the soul's sincere desire, Uttered, or unexpressed."

Peter sincerely desired to understand the parable, and in the simplest language sought it. For brevity and directness this prayer, for such it is, cannot be surpassed, though it reminds one of the prophet's prayer, "Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see" (2 Kings 6:17). Both Elisha and Peter remember to whom they are speaking, and waste no words. They know exactly what they want, and they each say just that to the Lord, and stop. This is real prayer. Any more would be mere verbiage, to be deplored and deprecated, no matter from whose lips.

It would be a widespread blessing if this were borne in mind by those whose voices are heard in prayer, whether in the household, the assembly, the prayer-meeting, or the preaching-room. Long prayers are a mistake, and an evidence of weakness, in all these scenes. In the closet, where no eye sees, and no ear hears but God's, there would appear to be no restriction in Scripture. But in public long prayers are only referred to, to be condemned.

There is a remarkable word from the pen of Solomon which bears on this subject, "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God. . . . Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few" (Ecclesiastes 5:1-2).

Peter was heeding this counsel as he simply says to the Lord, "Declare unto us this parable." How refreshing is the brevity and directness of his prayer. Observe, too, that he gets his request straightway.

What led to Peter's prayer is instructive. The Pharisees had challenged the Lord's disciples for eating with unwashed hands. Jesus replies that God is looking at the heart, not the hands — at the inside, not the outside. The Jews, full of externals and tradition, — as men are, alas! today, too, were using God's name, and, under pretence of piety, actually sinking lower in its use than the laws of natural conscience.

Hear the Lord's charge. God commanded, saying, "Honour thy father and mother: and, he that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; and honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition" (Matthew 15:4-6). For a child to neglect his parents under appearance of devoting to God

— in temple sacrifice, I presume, the priest bettering thereby what was due to them, was held to be all right. They had only to cry, "Corban," 1:e., "It is a gift," and the parent might be forgotten. The Lord calls them "hypocrites," and quotes Isaiah's solemn verdict, "This people draweth nigh to me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me."

Thereon the Lord calls the multitude, saying, "Hear, and understand, Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man." He has done with Judaism, and the truth comes out that man is lost. With this the Pharisees are highly offended, and on the disciples informing the Lord thereof, He adds, "Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up." There must be a new life from God, not an attempt to improve the old; that day had gone by. "Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch." Such was the state of Israel's leaders at the moment. Utterly blind, they knew not Jesus, nor their own need, and their state and their end is thus tersely described. Fancy "the blind leading the blind." Can anything more sad be conceived? Yet has it its counterpart today, when Romanism and Ritualism, with their blind leaders, are leading a blindfold host to the ditch, the means by which blind leaders guide their blinded followers being nothing but the exhumed and refurbished paraphernalia of a defunct Judaism, which had its death-knell sounded by the Lord in this chapter, its death-blow dealt by God at the cross, and its funeral executed when the Romans swept temple, altar, Sacrifices, and earthly priesthood all away at the destruction of Jerusalem.

Christianity is a system of another order. Its spring is in the last Adam, not the first. Its centre and circumference is Christ Himself personally. His love, His work, His blood, His sacrifice, yea, Himself — all that He has, and is, are its Alpha and Omega. Now it is no longer the blind leading the blind, nor even the seeing leading the blind, but the seeing leading the seeing. But this light had not then fully shone, so one can understand Peter saying, "Declare unto us this parable." That he should call plain truth a "parable," 1:e., "a dark saying," is strange, but to him, as yet full of hopes in the first man, the doctrine of the Lord doubtless sounded strange, and was evidently unpalatable. The Lord's answer only revealed to him his own moral blindness, as He says, "Are ye also yet without understanding," etc. He shows that all is a question of what man is in himself. The spring - the heart - is hopelessly corrupt, hence the streams can only be of the same sort. "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: these are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man." Man must be born again of water and the Spirit. Until a new life is brought in, all is useless.

What scandalised the self-righteous Pharisee, and appeared unintelligible to the disciples, was the truth, the simple truth, as to the heart of man, as God knows and reads that heart.

If Christ's witness be true — and it is true — it is all over with you, my respectable, religious, moral, and possibly self-righteous, reader. Your life may be splendidly clean outwardly, but your heart is corrupt in the essence of its being. You may possibly deny the most of the charge that Matthew 15:19 brings — and one is thankful to hear it — but will you venture to say that from your heart — your heart, mind — an evil thought never sprung? You tremble to assert that. You well may. God's verdict has rung out, "All have sinned." But, thank God, He also tells us His remedy. The ruin of my heart is met by the love of His heart. For my sin He gave His Son, and Scripture sweetly affirms,

"The blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth us from all sin."

I am very thankful, therefore, for Peter's prayer and its answer. It is an immense thing to know the truth, the worst about oneself. There is nothing so simple or satisfactory as the truth, when it is known. It puts one in right relation with God, and all else. Jesus is the truth, and He brings it out here most solemnly, but does not stop there. He is full of grace, too, so His death comes in later to meet the ruin that He has unfolded here. Still, I repeat, it is a great thing to know the whole truth about one's state, and Peter's prayer is what leads up to it here. The day of outward forms is past; man is utterly lost, and needs a new life. How he gets it is revealed elsewhere,

08. CHAPTER 6 — THE TWOFOLD CONFESSION.

CHAPTER 6 — THE TWOFOLD CONFESSION.

John 6:23-71; Matthew 16:13-28. IN these scriptures we have recorded Peter's dual confession of the Lord Jesus. It is a thing of the greatest importance to the soul to confess Christ boldly, for the Holy Ghost has said in our days, "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." Now when Peter made his confession in John 6:1-71, which I believe was previous to the confession in Matthew 16:1-28, the Lord Jesus Christ had not died, nor did Peter think that He was going to die. What is so beautiful to see, is that his heart was deeply attached to Christ. His was no mere head knowledge of who Jesus was; that is made quite clear by the glowing, burning confessions he makes.

We saw in a previous view of this affectionate man that when Peter walked on the water to get to Jesus, he did not quite get to Him, but that Jesus got to him, and that was what he wanted. His one desire was to get near Jesus. When the Lord was taken into the ship, immediately they were at the shore whither they would go, and the disciples then discovered that He was the Son of God. This was the day previous to that which we get recorded in the end of the sixth of John. In that chapter we find the Lord giving forth startling, yea marvellous ministry, as He says, "I am the living bread," and "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you."

Get hold of this clearly in your soul, my reader, that unless you have eaten the flesh of the Son of Man, and have drunk His blood, you have no life in you; and do not think that this means the communion — the Lord's Supper. Nay, nay, this is the substance; the Lord's Supper is the shadow. This is the reality, the communion is the figure. A man might eat the Lord's Supper a thousand times, and yet spend eternity in hell, but no man could eat the flesh of the Son of Man and not have eternal life. When the Lord said this, He knew that He was going to die, and to rise again and go, as man, to the right hand of God, — that He was going to do a work whereby man might be brought to God, a work which enables the believer in Him in righteousness to go to the spot where He now is; and therefore here the Lord presses the necessity of knowing Himself, of eating Himself, saying, "Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:54). Again, "He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him" (John 6:56). In plain words He says to the believer, We are one. In view of the gravity of this matter, let me ask you, my reader, Have you ever yet eaten the flesh, and drunk the blood of the Son of Man? That is a question that you must answer to God, and to Him alone.

It is a very happy thing to eat the Lord's Supper with the saints of God, but that is only the symbol; whereas what the Lord means here is, we must accept Him in His death, and feed on Him in death. Thereby only can we get life to our souls. The result of this ministry of the Lord's was that the Jews murmur; and He then says, "Doth this offend you? What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where He was before?" (John 6:61-62.) He has ascended, and consequently we

are immensely better off than if He were on earth. If He were on earth now — say in Jerusalem — He would not be also in Edinburgh; but being in glory, the Holy Ghost has come down to dwell among us, and to abide in each believer, and He gives us the sense of the Lord's presence no matter where we are located. The result then of the Lord's ministry was that "from that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him" (John 6:66). They had been looking for, and hoping that He was going to set up a kingdom, in Messianic power, and glory; and when He talked to them of His death, that did not suit them at all, and many left Him. Indeed, I suppose the defection was very great, for He turned round, and looking at the twelve, said unto them, "Will ye also go away?" (John 6:67.) To this query warm-hearted Peter fervently answers, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." Splendid testimony, grand confession, made too at the moment of general defection! Peter, as it were, led the forlorn hope, as he said, Go from you, Lord? Never! "We believe and are sure that thou art the Holy One of God" (New Translation). I wonder if you have ever confessed the Lord after this fashion, my reader. There was no "I hope," nor "I think," but "WE BELIEVE and ARE SURE." None of that half-heartedness of the nineteenth century, in which people are uncertain about everything, except that they cannot be certain about anything that relates to the Person of Christ, and to the things of eternity, was seen in Peter. Fatal folly is all such blundering in matters of momentous and eternal import.

Well might Peter say, "To whom shall we go?" Others had gone. Whither, we are not told. They disappear and are seen no more. So much the worse for them. It is a poor thing to turn away from Christ in a day of difficulty. This Peter felt, as he puts his touching and unanswerable query, Where in all the universe of God could One be found like his blessed Master? There was no other. He was unique, and Peter felt and knew it, though perhaps conscious how little he could rise to the height of His heavenly teaching. That was one thing; leaving Him was altogether another. He alone could fill the heart, pacify the conscience, calm the soul, and control the whole man. Leave Him then? Never!

Two things mark Peter's confession here, as he says, "Thou hast the words of eternal life," and "Thou art the Holy One of God." Peter had got deeply in his soul what He was, and what He had, as he said, "Thou art" and "Thou hast." What He is forms the stable resting-place of our souls as we pillow them on Him, and on His work. What He has forms the everlasting supply to our souls in all their varied need. He gives us all we need, and then becomes the object of our affections for ever. He gives us eternal life and eternal joy. What an immense mistake to let aught here eclipse Christ in the view of our souls! Do you believe after Peter's fashion, my friend, I ask, or are you a nineteenth century doubter?

There was one standing by that day who was detected by Peter's exclamation, for the Lord turns round as He heard the beautiful, burning confession of Peter's soul, and says, "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?" I believe in that moment when so many were slinking off, the thought in Judas's heart was, "It is time for me to go too;" but then he thought he would follow the Lord a little longer, and make gain ere leaving Him. He would put the Lord in such a position that, though of course. He would easily extricate Himself from it, yet he — Judas — would gain money by his act. Judas loved money, not Christ. His God was gold; his master, Satan; his end, an eternal hell. Is there one who reads these lines who loves money more than Jesus? Brother of Judas, thou art detected here. Beware, beware, God is giving thee thy warning. Wilt thou spend thine eternity with Judas, or with Jesus? Which?

Turn now, my reader, to Matthew 16:1-28. After this noble confession of Peter's which we have been considering, the Lord had gone up to the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, and there had blessed the daughter of the Syrophenician woman. Then he had gone to Galilee and Decapolis, and northward to Caesarea Philippi. This place must not be confounded with the Caesarea on the borders of the Mediterranean, the Roman seaport capital of Palestine, where Peter preached so successfully afterwards (see Acts 10:1-48). Caesarea Philippi — now known as Baneas — was a town outside the limits of the land of Israel, situated at the foot of Mount Hermon, close to the most easterly source of the river Jordan. The Lord had gone out, on to Gentile ground. In this outside place, He asks His disciples, "Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?" Jesus likes to know what men think of Him; whether the hearts of men had risen to the moment, and the occasion; if they had found out who He was — and so He puts the question. And they answer, "Some say that thou art John the Baptist; some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets." This was only supremely careless indifference. Men might have known, and should. Eighteen months before, John the Baptist had declared who He was, and crowds had flocked to Him; but now, after these many months, — in which He had visited "every city and village, preaching and showing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God" (Luke 8:1), months of unwearied testimony by lip, life, and miracle, that had proclaimed God, blessed man, and defeated Satan, — the tide had turned, and instead of receiving Him as the Messiah, they did not even know, or care to know, who He was! Alas, for poor, blind man!

Almost invariably in the Gospel narratives the Lord speaks of Himself by the title of the Son of Man. He calls Himself a King but once (Matthew 25:34). He was a King, but as yet uncrowned, and throneless. Unrecognised by the nation in His proper glory, He now asks His disciples, "Whom say ye that I am?" Your eternal destiny, my reader, depends upon the answer you can give to this question, "Whom say ye that I am?" Be you what you may, if you do not know and confess Jesus as the Son of the living God, you are still in your sins. You may be the most religious person in the world, and the most intelligent to boot, but what is all your knowledge worth if you do not know Christ? The person who is not right about Christ, is right about nothing. Ah! my friend, if you pass into eternity ignorant of Christ, yours will be an awful eternity. The Lord's query to you therefore, just now, is this, "Whom do ye say that I am?"

Peter comes magnificently to the front again, at this juncture of national indifference to the Messiah. In the buoyancy and fulness of his heart, as well as in real faith, and true attachment to the person of His Lord, he answers, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Heaven-born deliverance! and how grateful to the ear and heart of the blessed Lord it must have been. It was a beautiful confession, and carried with it lovely consequences. Equally so does confession of His name now, for "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved," is the word of assurance to us in this day. Blessing rich and full always follows simple and true confession of Christ.

Observe what the Lord says to Peter immediately on his confession, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." The soul that knows Jesus as the Son of the living God, He, Himself, declares to be blessed of the Father. No doubt Peter had learned much of the Lord, as he had followed that lovely, and blessed life of devotedness, and self-sacrifice, but the Father had taken hold of that uncultured, and unlettered Galilean fisherman, and taught him the truth, that the blessed Man he was following

was the Son of the living God. The Father Himself alone can teach you this blessed truth, my friend. No university curriculum, no human teaching, can impart to your soul this knowledge of the Son; but the Father loves to teach the willing, and Christ-seeking soul, the divine and moral glories of that rejected One, who is at once His eternal Son, the lowly Son of Man, and, blessed be His peerless name, the Saviour of the lost. Do you, my reader, confess that He, the spotless Son of Man, was God's Son, ever God's Son, though born here in time? Good indeed for you is it if you thus confess Him, for it is written, "Whoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God" (1 John 4:15). Note, it is the confession of His person, not of His work. There are many who know something of the work of Christ, and tell you they are clinging to the cross, but yet they are full of doubts and fears? Why? I believe the reason is that they have not a deep or adequate conception of the fulness of His person. They have not fully in their souls the sense of the divine glory of His person, as being the Son of the living God, as well as being a true, real, veritable Man, holy and sinless, and hence able to be a sacrifice for sin. To all such I commend the poet's lines: —

"How wondrous the glories that meet In Jesus, and from His face shine; His love is eternal and sweet, 'Tis human, 'tis also divine! His glory — not only God's Son In manhood He had His full part, And the union of both joined in one Forms the fountain of love in His heart."

It is the inscrutability of the glory of His person that is the guarantee to faith of the divinity of Jesus, divinity which His self-renunciation — in emptying Himself and assuming humanity — might have hidden from the eyes of unbelief. But His divinity, and the fact that He is the Son of the living God, is proved by His resurrection from among the dead. The life of God cannot be destroyed, and the Son of the living God cannot be overcome of death; nay, by going into it He overcomes and destroys it. Hence it is as risen from the dead that He begins the work of which He next speaks — the building of His Church.

After saying that the Father had revealed this truth to Peter, the Lord goes on, "And I also say" — not "And I say also," invert those two words, the Father had spoken, and now He Himself has somewhat of grave moment to say to Peter — "I also say unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." What did the Lord mean by this? He confirms Peter in his new name, a stone. But where was this stone to be built? On the rock. "Upon this rock will I build my church." Rome has tried to make out that Peter was the rock. A poor rock would Peter have been! Peter was far too much like you and me. No, no, Peter was a stone, but Christ was the rock, Christ, according to the confession of Peter here, the Son of the living God.

Peter is very fond of the word "living." In his epistles we get a "living hope" (1 Peter 1:3); "a living stone" (1 Peter 2:4), and "living stones" (1 Peter 2:5). It is a grand thing, in this world of death, to be introduced into a circle of living realities.

Observe that the Lord says to Peter, "Upon this rock I will build my church." It had not been begun to be built then. I think I hear you say, "But I thought the Church began with Abel." Not at all; there had been, without doubt, saints of God from Abel onwards; but when does the Church, the body of Christ, begin? The Church the Lord speaks of here could not be built until the rock — He Himself — had been laid as its foundation, that is, until He Himself had gone into death, annulled it, had come up out of it, and gone into glory, and from the right hand of God had sent down the Holy

Ghost to unite believers — now forming His body here — with Himself the living Head there on high.

Remark that it was not Peter who was going to build, it was the Lord who was going to build; and "I will build," not "I have been building," are His words. Christ's assembly, His Church, commenced to be formed on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Ghost came down; and from that day until the moment when the Lord comes into the air to gather up His people (see 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18), the Church is being formed. The Church was the peculiar thought of God from all eternity, but the truth about it never was fully unfolded until the apostle Paul's ministry. The first intimation about it that we find in all Scripture, we get, however, here from the lips of the blessed Lord to His beloved servant Peter. The Lord says further to Peter, "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven." How did Peter get these keys? By the sovereign grace of Christ undoubtedly, but nevertheless they are committed to a man that is evidently going on. He was a man that was earnestly going forward, and I believe that it is always the man that is earnestly going on, in settled affection to the person of Christ, who gets light, and gets further truth. Peter, of course, had a very special place given him by the sovereign favour of the Lord, and was in that sense "a chosen vessel," but the character of the man must not be lost sight of. But do you think, my friend, that Peter had the keys of heaven? God forbid! Peter had no more to do with the keys of heaven than I have; it is "the keys of the kingdom of heaven." This kingdom relates to earth, whereas the Church belongs to heaven. The kingdom of heaven is the administration of the Lord's things here on earth, while He, who is the King — as yet unrecognised, and disowned — is in heaven. In all the great pictures that men have painted you see Peter with the keys hanging at his girdle, and the sheep gathered round about him. But men do not feed sheep with keys, nor do they build with keys. The use of a key is to open a door, and when that is done the key has no more service. The figure has been misconstrued. The Lord Himself was going to heaven, but He was about to have a work carried on here on earth, and through Peter's administration "the kingdom of heaven" — a term only found in Matthew's Gospel, and there never said to be nearer than "at hand" — was to be inaugurated. I believe Peter used one of these keys when he spoke to the Jews in the second of Acts, and he used the other key when he went down to the house of Cornelius in the tenth of Acts. The keynote in Acts 2:1-47, when he spoke to the Jews, was "REPENT!" They had to judge themselves, and own their sin in crucifying their Messiah; but when he went to the Gentiles the ward of the key, that fitted the hitherto firmly locked door, that barred them from blessing was "BELIEVE." "To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." The Lord further says to Peter: "And whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven." This is a question of administration, on earth, and in the assembly, not of how a man gets to heaven. Peter gets a peculiar place of administration down here on earth, to act in the assembly for Christ, as the whole believing company does afterwards (see John 20:23).

If you want to go to heaven, you must get to Peter's Saviour, and let Him save you, as He did Peter; and if you get into His assembly on earth, you must be careful to walk rightly, or you may fall into that which will dishonour the Lord, and bring you under the solemn exercise of the authority thus committed to the assembly, to bind the sin upon you in putting you away from its midst (see 1 Corinthians 5:13). From this moment the Lord alters the character of the testimony concerning

Himself, and "charged his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Messiah." From that moment He forbade them to preach Him as being the Messiah. Why? He knew the nation would not believe, and He never likes to give more light when it is rejected, because the greater the light the greater the judgment. Then we read: "From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day." So far from taking the kingdom, He announces plainly that He is going to die. This Peter could not understand, so took Him, and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee." He could not understand that the Lord must die. How the one who could heal the sick, cleanse the leper, open the eyes of the blind, make the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak, still the storm, and raise the dead to life again — how He could die, Peter saw not, hence he says, "This shall not be unto thee, Lord."

What a volume of instruction is in the Lord's answer as "He turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan; thou art an offence unto me." A moment before it had been: "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona;" and now, favoured disciple as he was, the Lord treats him as Satan, because He saw behind this dear disciple's words, the temptation of Satan himself. Yes, it was the enemy using Peter as a vessel. Satan can often make even a servant of God do his dire work. But the Lord saw the author of the suggestion, and He says, "Get thee behind me, Satan." If we are going to follow Christ, we must accept His pathway of shame and sorrow here. If we refuse the cross, we shall not have the crown. If we refuse to follow a rejected Lord, we shall not know much of the joy of His company. "If any one will come after me," He then adds, "let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me." Poignant words for Peter to hear, and equally addressed to us.

Then Jesus says, "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul!" Oh, my friend, what will it profit you if you lose your soul? What shall a man give in exchange for his soul? Only think of the blackness of despair that must seize the soul that has lost everything. The things for which you have bartered your soul, you must leave them all, and then lose your soul too. Ah! my unsaved reader, you are paying a terrible price for those pleasures of sin which endure for a season. You are going on with the world, and the flesh, and the devil, and you are denying yourself heaven, and glory, and eternal joy, and the company of Christ. And the Christian, what is he doing? He is denying himself certainly the pleasures of sin for a season, but he is denying himself also a thorny pillow on his dying bed, he is denying himself the judgment of God, and denying himself an eternal hell. Surely, my friend, the Christian has the best of it. When are you going to be one?

After these pointed queries, the Lord reveals the future blessedness of those that are His, as He says, "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father, with his angels, and then shall he reward every man according to his works," adding "There be some standing here which shall not taste of death till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom." The meaning of these words we shall find in our next chapter.

09. CHAPTER 7 — THE TRANSFIGURATION, AND THE TRIBUTE.

CHAPTER 7 — THE TRANSFIGURATION, AND THE TRIBUTE.

Matthew 17:1-27 IN our last chapter the Lord, in speaking to His disciples, and telling them what the consequences would be of following Him, namely, that necessarily reproach and shame would be their portion, points them on to the future. In Matthew 16:27 He casts the eye of the one who would follow Him on to the future, in order to give a stimulus for devotion in the pathway now, saying, "When the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father, with his angels, then he shall reward every man according to his works." According to what we have been for Christ now, will be the reward in that day. If we have not been true to Christ now, He must withhold reward then, which will not be a joy to His heart, I need scarcely say. How necessary therefore to seek to be for Him now! In the last verse of chapter 16 the Lord had said, "There be some standing here which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom." (Matthew 16:28) Now this has been a difficulty to many. He has not yet come in His kingdom, and how then could any, who stood there that day, not taste of death till they had seen it? He has not yet come in His glory, and yet all who stood there that day have long since passed off this scene. I have no doubt that the first verse of Matthew 17:1-27 gives us the solution of the difficulty.

Three of those who stood there that day saw a picture of the establishment of the kingdom. The Lord did not say "all standing here," but "some." If you turn to Peter's second epistle you will be assured that the interpretation I have given of this is the truth. "For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount" (2 Peter 1:16-18). Peter here gives the explanation of what he saw on the holy mount. And what was it? They were "eyewitnesses of his majesty;" in other words, the Lord's words were fulfilled, that some of them should not taste of death till they saw the Son of Man coming in His kingdom. It was a little miniature view and foreshadowing of the coming kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord was rejected, but He was coming back to this earth to establish His kingdom, and He chose to show to those favoured three a picture of that kingdom.

It was a perfect miniature picture of the kingdom; Moses was there, a figure of those who have died and gone into the grave, and will be raised by the Lord; Elijah, a figure of those who will never die at all, but will be caught up alive — though changed — to meet the Lord in the air when He comes for His saints; and Peter, James, and John, figures of the living saints, on earth, in the millennial day. The account of the transfiguration is related in all the synoptic gospels. John does not give it, however. His gospel is full of the moral glory of the Lord, not that manifested external and visible glory which Matthew, Mark, and Luke all describe, but each with a little difference. Luke says, "It came to pass, about an eight days after these sayings" (9:28). Both Matthew and Mark say, "And after six days." Is there any discrepancy? Not a bit! Matthew, who is writing from a

Jewish point of view, where the seventh day is the day of glory, says "After six days;" Luke, who is looking at things from another, a resurrection aspect, which the eighth day indicates, says, "about an eight days." Both are correct. Matthew does not include the two terminal days, while Luke does so. Exactly six days — complete days — intervened between the prophecy and its fulfilment. There is no discrepancy or mistake in this, or in any other scripture. All the fancied mistakes are in those who read God's Word, not in the Word itself. When the Lord took His disciples up into the mountain it was night, and the disciples evidently had all gone to sleep, "for when they were awake," Luke says, "they saw his glory, and the two men that stood with him." Evidently this display of the Son of Man in glory had been going on some time before they awoke to see it. The Lord had gone up to the mountain "to pray," and while that lowly dependent Man prayed, His prayer continuing far into the night, His three disciples slept. While they slept, all this transcendent glory, "received from God the Father," shone around the blessed Son of Man. It was not the essential and divine glory of His being which was here allowed to break through the veil He had cast over it for so many years. No, it was the glory He had earned as Son of Man, that He then received from the Father. Peter, alas! was so little in communion with the Father about all this deserved glory, brighter far than sunlight, that he got his eyes on the two stars Moses and Elias, and spoke most unwisely, as we shall see.

It must have been a glorious vision! "Jesus . . . was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light" (Matthew 17:2). "His raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them" (Mark 9:3). "And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistening" (Luke 9:29). And when these three sleeping men are awake, they see their Lord thus transfigured, but not alone, Moses and Elias talked with Him. I think it is delightful to notice the sense that Moses and Elias had of what suited Christ at the moment. Poor Peter, waking out of sleep, spoke most unwisely, putting the Lord on a dead level with Moses and Elias. They were two heads of Jewish history. Moses was the lawgiver, and Elias the reformer. Moses had died, and been buried by the Lord's own hand; Elias had never died, but had been caught up to heaven in a chariot of fire (2 Kings 2:11). He had endeavoured to recall an apostate people to the law, which they had forsaken; but he failed, and fled to Horeb, from whence the law had been given, "and, requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers" (1 Kings 19:4). But God's answer was, so to speak, I'll take you to heaven without dying. Now, lawgiver and reformer re-appear together with the Messiah on the mount of glory, and speak "of his decease, which he should accomplish at Jerusalem." They speak not of His glory, nor of His kingdom, but of what they were in the sense of at that moment, namely, that He was going to lay down His life for those who were His. It is sweet to see how, in company with the Lord, the heart learns what suits Him.

You have then in Matthew 17:1-27 a miniature picture of the coming kingdom of the Lord Jesus. The heavenly side of it is typified by Moses, — the man who had died and been raised out of death; and by Elijah, — the man who had been taken up to heaven without dying. These two picture the heavenly saints, — some raised from the dead, others changed and caught up at the second coming of the Lord. Then you have the earthly side of the kingdom portrayed in Peter, James, and John, even as there will be earthly saints by-and-by, who, though not in the highest position, nevertheless will bask in the light of the glory of the Son of Man, when His kingdom is

established.

Moses and Elias are seen here occupied only with Jesus. Personal identification, one learns from this scene, will remain in the day of the kingdom, whether in its heavenly or earthly side, although much that marks us as men down here will have passed away, thank God. Still I take it we shall know each other, while being occupied fully and only with the Lord Himself.

Peter was not exactly in this state here, as the scene of glory bursts on him, for he said unto Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias" (Matthew 17:4). Luke adds, "Not knowing what he said" (Luke 9:33); while Mark reads that "he wist not what to say; for they were sore afraid" (Luke 9:6). This only shows how dangerous a thing it is for the saint to speak unless he has the assured sense that he has the Lord's mind in what he says.

Moses and Elias are talking with the Lord about His decease, to be accomplished, when Peter, "not knowing what he said" (see Luke 9:33), but evidently enraptured with the sight of Lawgiver, Reformer, and Messiah, standing together, desires the kingdom to be established then and there, so says to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles, one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias." But in this he is putting the Son of God, the Saviour, Moses, the lawgiver, and Elijah, the reformer, all on one dead level, and God could not stand that. Immediately, therefore, "a bright cloud overshadowed them," and a voice breaks forth from the cloud, and says, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him."

Peter no doubt rejoiced greatly when he saw the Messiah, the lawgiver, and the reformer, all together. What he would have liked was to perpetuate this blessed meeting. He desired that it should last. He got back much into the spirit he was in when the Lord had said to him, "Get thee behind me, Satan." Peter, who had fallen at the Lord's feet and worshipped Him, who had confessed "Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God," now seems as though all these lessons were lost, and he would put the Son of God on a dead level with His servants, beloved men though they might be. But the Father could not brook such an insult to His beloved Son, and all at once "a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him" (ver. 5). What was the bright cloud? I believe it was the Shekinah of glory, that which is the Father's house to us. Moses and Elias were enfolded by, and hidden in that cloud, which to us is the Father's house. And the disciples feared as Moses and Elias entered into that cloud. To be thus near to God was beyond their faith or expectation. But what a lesson is taught by this. Moses's day had gone by; Elijah's day had for ever rolled away; but there now is One, in whom the Father ever has His delight, and His voice says most emphatically, "Hear him." At His baptism the Father only said, "This is my beloved Son." He did not then say, "Hear him." It is supposed that every one would hear Him. But here, where rivals have cropped up, where others are put on a level with Him, the Father's voice is heard saying, "Hear him." At the present day men are not clamouring for three tabernacles, but, alas! they often cry aloud for two; for the law is frequently put on a level with Christ. But all truth now is focused in the Son of God. The law was the expression of the claim of God upon man, but the day of the law is gone by. It has to give place to the full and perfect revelation of all that God is, and of all the blessed relationships with the Father and the Son which flow from accomplished redemption. Hence Paul says, "Ye are not under the law, but under grace" (Romans 6:14). Is it the

Lord Himself that we are now to listen to? Are we yielding our hearts to be led by His blessed voice into nearness of intimacy with the Father?

Peter most certainly does not shine here. Moses was the lawgiver, but the law could not save a man. Elijah was the reformer, but reformation cannot save a man. Only Jesus, the Son of God, can save; but, blessed be His name, He saves any and every man that comes to Him. Will you not come to Him, my friend? God emphatically says, "Hear ye him." There is only one voice to be listened to now, and that is the voice of His beloved Son, "hear him." When Peter and his fellow-disciples heard these words they fell on their face, and were sore afraid, but Jesus touched them, saying, "Arise, and be not afraid." Why should they be? Looking up, "they saw no man save Jesus only." Of Him none need be afraid. Have you heard His voice yet, my friend? "The hour is coming, and now is," the Lord says, "when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live." The Lord grant that you may listen to His voice now, yes, hear, believe, and live. The voice of Moses may arouse you, that of Elijah deepen your sense of sin, but the voice of Jesus will sweetly calm your troubled heart if you hear it.

Peter, ere he writes his Epistles, has learnt his lesson; he is delighting in Him, and therefore he only quotes the words, "This is my beloved Son;" he does not add, "Hear him;" for really his heart was now fully in communion with God. I have an object, says God, down there upon earth, who fills my heart with joy and delight; and Peter's affections are fully responsive.

We think it strange to read that the disciples "feared as they (Moses and Elias) entered into the cloud." They had no need, for the more we know what it is to dwell in the Father's presence the happier for our hearts will it be. But the lesson they had to learn here was that, though they might disappear, Jesus abides. "And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only." Ah! that is very sweet. Moses may go and Elias may go, but if you have Jesus left you have everything your heart can desire. Have you found out yet what it is to have Jesus only for your heart, or is somebody or something else absolutely essential to your happiness? If so, it will be an awful day for you when that person is taken away. Your heart will be left utterly desolate then, for you have not found out what it is to have Jesus as the incomparable One.

If you have Jesus first in the bright day, you will have Him first, I need not say, in the dark day. The crash may come, you know not how soon, but if you have Jesus your heart cannot be desolate and lonely.

"And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead" (Matthew 17:9). Mark adds, that they questioned "What the rising from the dead should mean" (Mark 9:10). It is not the rising of the dead that they questioned, every Jew understood that, but His rising from among the dead, His being taken out from among the dead as the mark of the special favour of God, and as the firstfruits and pattern of those who shall also be thus taken out. The lesson which Peter learned of his Master's glory, and of His personal worth on the mount, is followed by a deep attestation thereof a little later. We will look for a moment at the incident connected with the tribute money in the end of this 17th chapter of Matthew. Capernaum (Matthew 17:24) is, I have no doubt, the city that is called the Lord's "own city" (Matthew 9:1). It is in a man's own city that taxes are levied on him. The tribute spoken of is not the tax the Romans imposed, but was temple tribute, a didrachma, a piece of money worth fifteen pence, which every Jew paid towards the support of the

temple; and the question put, as they that received the didrachma came to Peter and said, "Doth not your master pay tribute?" (ver. 24) was really this, Is your master a good Jew? My Master a good Jew? says the impulsive Peter, of course He is! Peter, anxious for his Master's reputation as a good and devoted Jew, immediately replies "Yes" to the collector's query. This question, and Peter's answer, both took place outside the house, away from the Lord; and when Peter comes in, the Lord demonstrates that He is far more than man, yea, that He is God, by showing what was in Peter's heart, and letting out that He knew what he was thinking about. The blessed Lord without giving Peter a chance to speak, at once says, "What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers? Peter saith unto him, Of strangers. Jesus saith unto him, Then are the children free" (Matthew 17:25-26). The Lord is going to show Peter now who the children are. Who was the Great King? God. And who was the Son of the Great King? He Himself was. But He is also going to show Peter that He and Peter together were both children of the Great King! He puts Himself and Peter together, as he says, "Lest we should offend them." And let me say there is a great principle involved here. Do you say, I must stand up for my rights? Then you must stand alone, the Lord will not stand with you. He was the Son of the Great King, and therefore free; but "lest we should offend," he says to Peter, "go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a stater: that take, and give unto them for me and thee" (Matthew 17:27). Go, He says, to the sea again, from which I called you, Peter, and you will find a fish, that will give you up the exact piece of money, that will pay your tribute and mine.

It is well to note that the stater, which Peter found in the fish's mouth, was exactly two didrachmas. Here Jesus puts himself and Peter once more together! He shows He knew everything, as He told what was in Peter's heart, and what had gone on outside the door; and He shows He could do everything, as He commands the fish of the sea to give up the tribute money. "The fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the sea," according to the eighth Psalm, were all under His control, and His direction. As Son of Man, and at the fitting moment, He can order the fish of the sea to give up what He needed at that moment. I know nothing more lovely than the way in which He puts Himself with Peter here, as he says, "That give for me and thee."

It is precious to see the way in which He shows that we are to be united to Him, and linked with Him, and therefore in the whole of our pathway we are to walk with Him, and to be led by Him. The lessons Peter learns in this chapter are very blessed, and very sweet for our souls too if we are prepared to learn them, and to walk with Him, and to go with Him. The Lord help us to for His Name's sake.

10. CHAPTER 8 — FEET-WASHING.

CHAPTER 8 — FEET-WASHING.

John 13:1-38 THIS chapter occupies a peculiar place in the Gospel. The Lord's earthly history is over, one might say, and He anticipates in this chapter, and the four that follow, the cross, and what were to be the legitimate results of the cross, on which He glorifies God fully. Here, when about to leave the earth, He introduces the disciples into association with Himself, into the new and heavenly place that, as man, He is about to take. They had thought of Him as the Messiah, about to set up the kingdom on earth: He the King, and they profoundly blessed with Him. That is now all over, and here in the thirteenth chapter, as passing out of the scene, He intimates to the disciples what He would be to them, and what they were to be for Him. On earth He had been their companion; He could be it in this sense on earth no longer. He is going to show them how He can take them where He is going, and fit them to be there.

Jesus here takes on Himself peculiarly the place of a servant. He is perfectly their servant; He who was Lord of all. He is never going to cease to be the servant of His people. "Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end" (John 13:1). There is no end to the love of the blessed Lord; His circumstances may change, but there is no change in His love.

We have the Lord here as the perfect antitype of the Hebrew servant in Exodus 21:1-36. He might have gone out free, but then must have left his wife and children behind. "If the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free: . . . then his master shall bore his ear through with an awl; and he shall serve him for ever" (Exodus 21:5-6). He will not be separated from those He loves, and that really is the meaning of John 13:1-38.

Jesus is going to take His loved ones, to be with Himself, in the place to which He is going, on the ground of redemption. There is a noticeable point in connection with this paschal supper, and the feet-washing viz., those who prepared it. Matthew informs us (Matthew 26:17-19) that the disciples inquired of the Lord where they should prepare for Him to eat, and He told them, but none are named. Mark, in relating the same occurrence (Mark 14:12-16), says, "He sendeth forth two of his disciples." Luke supplies their names: "And he sent Peter and John, saying, Go and prepare us the passover, that we may eat" (Luke 22:8). John, who had been associated with Peter in this sweet service, with his accustomed diffidence and hiding of himself, makes no allusion to the preparation of the supper, in which he had had a hand, but records the touching fact — and he is the only evangelist that does — that ere they partook, the blessed Lord Himself washed their feet, soiled doubtless in this very service, and, thus refreshed, rendered them the better able to enjoy it. Little doubt have I that Peter greatly enjoyed thus serving His Lord, though he shrank, as we shall see, from His lowly grace that sought to wash his defiled, and possibly wearied feet. This supper scene is replete with the grace and love of Jesus. It is the evening before His death, and "supper being ended" everything was ready: even the base turpitude of Judas was consummated. Jesus knew He was going to depart out of this world, so rising from supper He performs an action most blessed and instructive. "He riseth from supper and laid aside his garments; and took a towel and

girded himself," — 1:e., He assumes the place of the servant, — "After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded" (John 13:4-5). It was the habit of the country that if a man bade you to his house, the first thing he would do was to provide water for the feet. In Genesis 18:3-4, Abraham did; in Luke 7:1-50 the Lord reproaches Simon that he did not. The Lord takes here the place of host, and provides the water, and He takes also the slave's post, and washes their feet. The Lord of glory stoops down and washes the feet of these twelve men. It was perfect grace; He who was God stooping down and becoming a man, and then as man stooping to do an action few of us would have grace to do. Then, refreshed and comforted, He desired that His own should partake of the feast to which He had invited them. He ever desires to make His people profoundly restful.

Peter, true to his character, comes forward, and, speaking after the manner of men, says, "Lord, dost thou wash my feet?" It was incomprehensible to him. It was lowering Himself on the Lord's part: that was Peter's thought, the thought of man, for we do not know how to stoop naturally — only grace, only real loftiness can do it. But Peter's speaking out what was in his heart, becomes the means of developing, from the Lord, precious blessed truth. "Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter" (John 13:7). It was not till the Holy Ghost came down that there was the spiritual intelligence to learn the meaning of this action. All through the Lord's life His words were misunderstood. Until there be the possession of the Holy Ghost there will never be the knowledge of the mind and ways of God. The possession of life does not mean power, and intelligence — it is the possession of the Holy Ghost that marks the difference between saints now, and those of bye-gone times. The answer of Jesus discloses the spiritual meaning of what He was doing, a meaning Peter could not then understand, hence he says, "Thou shalt never wash my feet;" but "Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me." You see man was in a condition of sin and ruin here, with which Christ could have no part. You must be dependent on me, He therefore says, to fit you to be in the place to which I am going.

Unless I am cleansed by the blood of Christ in the first instance, and know the cleansing power of the water, I have no part with Christ. He died to make me clean, and He lives to keep me clean. Unless washed in His blood. first of all, there can be no link with Him, and unless there be the maintenance of this state, by the washing of the water, there can be no part with Him. Peter then says, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head," He is like many Christians now, they have been washed in the Saviour's blood, and know it: are forgiven, and know it; but if the conscience gets defiled, then they think they must go back and be washed again in the blood; but that would reduce the blood of Christ to a level with the blood of bulls and goats in Old Testament history. Now the blessed truth is that, "This man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins, for ever sat down on the right hand of God" (Hebrews 10:12). The efficacy of that blood always abides before God, and the possibility of the soul being re-washed in that blood is for ever precluded. It was the imperfection of the Old Testament sacrifice that made its repetition necessary. It is the perfection of Jesus' sacrifice that makes its repetition impossible. You say, What about the daily failure? That is what this chapter speaks of: that is the cleansing by water, not blood, and is by the Word of God. Water gives the sense of purification. Peter says, "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit," etc. (1 Peter 1:22). I do not doubt that water is the Word of God applied by the Spirit; it carries the thought of purification by the Word of God, which

comes to, and judges me thoroughly. This is brought out in the Lord's reply to Peter. "Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all. For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean" (vers. 10, 11).

There are two different words used by the Lord here for "wash." The first word carries with it the thought of cleansing by immersion in the great Roman bath, used in the morning for the whole body; but then, through the day, it was a constant and common thing to have the feet refreshed by being washed, and here the word used is that which applied to anything small. The water itself, employed here or elsewhere as a figure, signifies purification by the Word, applied in the power of the Spirit. When one is "born of water, and of the Spirit" (John 3:5), then the whole body is washed. There is a purification of thoughts, and of the actions likewise, by means of an object which forms and governs the heart. This is necessarily connected with the work of Christ on the cross, and the blood of atonement. If a believer at all, you are cleansed by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, — and you start "clean every whit," — whiter than the driven snow by the Saviour's precious blood. You have been bathed by that which has removed every trace of defilement, so that Christ can say "clean every whit"; but since we walk through a defiled, and defiling world, "he that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet." What do you understand by the feet? It is the walk. As we pass through this scene we do contract defilement. This does not suit God's house, and must therefore be remedied. The love of the Lord supplies the remedy. He washes our feet. He uses only water to do it too. Once the soul has been converted it cannot be repeated; once the Word has been applied by the Holy Ghost, the work is done, and it cannot be undone, any more than the sprinkling of the blood can be repeated, or renewed. I cannot be born again twice, or be washed from my sins in the blood of Christ twice. "Once" is the word Scripture uses in this respect: but I may sin and defile my feet, and my communion with God may be interrupted. Then it is that the Saviour's tender love is seen in restoration. He uses the basin and the towel now, although He is in glory.

How does He effect this? Always by the Word of God — water. How that Word may reach us is quite another matter. It may have been in private, when no eye was upon us but His own, and no voice heard but His, through the written page of Scripture; or, on the other hand, we may have been refreshed or comforted, or our consciences reached, through the public exercise of a brother's ministry. Where has the word come from that has touched our hearts? From the Lord; it is the present ministry of Christ. We are more inclined to look at the vessel He uses, — so to speak, that which holds the water, — the basin, but it is really the Lord who is ministering to us. He has his eye on each sheep, and He knows just what each sheep wants, and He knows how to speak the word which shall refresh the heart, and remove defilement. But perhaps some one will ask, "What is this thirteenth of John — this feet-washing — is it priesthood or advocacy?" The difference is important! Both offices have to do with Christ's intercession for us. Priesthood is exercised that we may not sin, advocacy is for sins that have been committed, that communion may be restored. Here it is more the character of advocacy. It is the ministry of His perfect love that cannot rest unless He has His people near Him, and unless He removes every thing that could keep them at a distance. Those you love you like to have near you, and your love is never more gratified than when those you love count on your love, and more, use it! For love likes to serve, and selfishness likes to be served. Love that serves always gets refreshed, and he that

waters others gets refreshed himself. The difference between the priesthood and advocacy of the Lord Jesus is very important to be clear about. Priesthood maintains the soul before God. It does not contemplate failure. I am maintained in all the strength of His shoulder, and the affections of His heart before God, in all the efficacy of the work that He did before He became a Priest, for he was not a Priest upon earth. In 1 John 2:1-29 : you find what an advocate is. It is the same word as is rendered Comforter in John 14:1-31; John 15:1-27; John 16:1-33. The Christian has two Comforters, one in heaven, and one in earth. In heaven the Comforter, the Lord Jesus, is before the Father. On earth the Comforter, the Holy Ghost, dwells in the body of the believer in the Lord Jesus. The Lord never ceases to love, and the Holy Ghost never leaves the believer. If I think of the Lord on high, or of the Spirit on earth, both are busy with the interests and blessing of those whom they serve. In John's first epistle we read that we are not to sin: "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1). In the seventh verse of the first chapter, it says, "the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." That is the continuously abiding character of the blood, that has made you clean, and keeps you clean. It is the blood that keeps you clean before God, in divine righteousness; it is the water that keeps you clean as to your conscience, and fits you for communion. "If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." If I say I have no sins, it is true, because Christ bore them and put them away; but if I say I have no sin, the truth is not in me, for that is my nature as a child of Adam, and the flesh is still in me. If it acts I at once have sins, of which God and the conscience are cognisant. How then do we as believers get rid of these daily sins? "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). That supposes the possibility of a Christian sinning, which necessarily interrupts his communion. What is the way for him to get rid of his sin? How can he get back? If he endeavours to go back to God, saying, as of old, "I am a lost sinner," he will never get restoration that way. Why? Because he is not a lost sinner, he is a defiled child, a naughty child. That soul never gets right till it comes back in the acknowledgement of its true relationship, which, thank God, its sinful ways have not destroyed, and says, Father, I have been a naughty child. The man that is right before God confesses his sin, and then he learns what forgiveness is.

Merely asking for forgiveness, and the confession of sins, are two different things. Confession involves real exercise, and brings with it blessing. The mere asking for forgiveness is often only skin-deep. Confession must be individual. It is the individual who has failed, and he confesses his sin to his Father. The man who says he has "no sin," has not the truth in him. This should cause some latter-day perfectionists to call a halt, and see the solemn ground they are really on. The man who says he has "not sinned" makes God "a liar" (1 John 1:10), for He asserts that "all have sinned" (Romans 3:23), and every person would do well to ponder this statement. But there is perfect relief here for the erring or backsliding saint, the one who has been a naughty child. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." He is faithful and just to Christ, who has died for these sins. The man who really seeks this relief says, "I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord;" and what did he find? "Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin" (Psalms 32:5). But there is something further than this. We ought not to sin, and there is no reason that we should sin. The flesh in you does not give you a bad conscience, but if you let it act, it gives you a bad conscience. "He that saith he abideth in him, ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked" (1 John 2:6). The Christian's life is Christ, and

his power is the Holy Ghost, and Paul says, "I can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth me" (Php 4:13). If I sin, the blessed Advocate on high does His intercessory work that I may be restored. He takes the initiative in grace, as we see in Peter's own case later on. The result of His advocacy I believe is that the Holy Ghost puts the sin on my conscience, communion is interrupted, and not restored, until I confess it to the Father, and thus get my conscience relieved, and cleansed through the purifying effect of the Word. Communion with God is then restored.

Before Peter sinned Jesus prayed, and when Peter sinned and denied his Master, the Lord turned and looked on Peter. The procuring cause of Peter's restoration was the Lord's prayer, but the producing means of Peter's restoration was the Lord's look on him in Pilate's hall. The washing of the feet therefore is a service with which Christ is now occupied for us. If negligent — for which there is no cause, or excuse, or need — we defile our feet, are thereby rendered spiritually unfit to enter into God's presence; Christ thereupon cleanses us by the Word, so that our communion with our God and Father may be re-established.

Having resumed His garments, we find the Lord urging on His disciples to "do as I have done to you." "If I then your Lord and Master have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet" (John 13:14). That is we ought to be able and willing to help each other. It is not feet-washing to point out the fault of another. If you are going to wash another's feet, you must get down low enough yourself. "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them" (John 13:17). I think the secret of a good deal of want of happiness lies in this. We are not doing this. If we were more desirous, in the spirit of meekness, to take the spot off some erring child of God, we should know more what this means. We are still called to wash one another's feet, to apply the Word in grace to the conscience of an erring brother or sister who needs it. But to really do this we must be in the humility of Christ, so blessedly shown in this heart-touching scene.

I am much struck with the way in which the history of Peter fills up the gospels, and how much of instruction, deep and blessed instruction, we owe to him. His questions, his mistakes, his assertions, and his varied impulsive actions, are all marked and striking means of drawing out from the Lord much that is blessed and profitable for us.

Some of these questions appear in John 13:1-38, but these, with others scattered through the Gospel narratives, we will reserve for our next chapter.

11. Simon Peter, 2 His Questions etc.

Simon Peter, 2 His Questions etc.

Section 2 of 5 (chapters 9-12) of:

Chapter 9 — HIS QUESTIONS Chapter 10 — SIFTED AS WHEAT Chapter 11 —
RESTORATION, AND A NEW COMMISSION.

Chapter 12 — PENTECOST, AND HIS FIRST SERMON

12. Chapter 9 — His Questions.

Chapter 9 — His Questions.

Luke 12:1-59, Matthew 18:1-35; Matthew 19:1-30, etc. In nothing is simplicity more evidenced than in a question. The number of questions which Peter put to the Lord, and which are recorded by the Holy Ghost, is very noticeable and instructive. He was evidently an exceedingly simple man. This the character of his queries evince, while, at the same time, they show what an observant listener he was to the discourses of his blessed Master, and how his mind pondered on the heavenly ministry he was daily getting. That this ministry was beyond his then comprehension seems often apparent; but the abrupt way in which he propounded some question which was exercising his mind, and which had always a distinct connection with the subject of the Lord's foregoing instruction, betoken an activity, as well as a reflective condition of mind, which the impulsive character of the man scarcely prepares us for. Of these queries many are related, and to them we owe much valuable instruction from the lips of the Lord. We will look at them in the order of their occurrence, so far as I can gather their sequence from the Gospel narratives.

RESPONSIBILITY AND RECOMPENSE.

QUESTION 1. — "Then Peter said unto him, Lord, speakest thou this parable unto us, or even to all?" (Luke 12:41). We may here well inquire, What is a parable? In Scripture it is often "a thing darkly or figuratively expressed" (Imp. Dict.). Thus, "I will incline mine ear to a parable: I will open my dark saying upon the harp" (Psalms 49:4); "I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old" (Psalms 78:2), said the sweet Psalmist of Israel, and from his language we gather that a "parable" and a "dark saying" were synonymous. That Peter regarded the lovely instructions of Luke 12:1-59 as a "dark saying" is pretty clear from his question, but how he could regard such plain and simple ministry as having anything of the nature of a parable about it is difficult to see, save on the ground that the Holy Ghost had not yet come down, and did not indwell the disciples. Let us glance at the chapter, and profit by the so-called parable, the beauty of which is very great.

Luke always groups his facts to form a moral picture. Neither chronological nor dispensational truth is his special point. Matthew gives us the latter, and Mark evidently is the chronological Evangelist. In Luke 11:1-54 Christ has been definitively rejected by the nation of Israel. Luke 12:1-59 therefore supposes His absence from earth, and His disciples set in the place of testimony on it in the power of the Holy Ghost (to come when He went on high), and the world in opposition to them. The snares and the resources of His own, during His absence, and the attitude they should occupy till His return, are the main points of the passage. 1st, Hypocrisy — want of reality — is avoided by the light of God.

All will be revealed (Luke 12:1-3). 2nd, The fear of man is cast out by a greater fear, — the fear of God, while the heart is filled with the sense of His protection, — the hairs of their head being actually counted (Luke 12:4-7). 3rd, Faithfulness to Christ would be acknowledged (Luke 12:8-11). 4th, The Holy Ghost would help them as to what to say if arraigned before synagogues (Luke

12:11-12). What motives and encouragements are here given! — God's light, God's care, Christ's reward, and the Holy Ghost's power! The Lord then, as rejected, refuses to be a judge; and, from the circumstance brought before Him, bids His own "beware of covetousness." Here He really speaks a parable concerning the rich man. Alas! what became of his soul? The remedy for the disease that afflicted him — covetousness — is being "rich toward God" (Luke 12:13-21). The great practical principles that are to mark His own are then unfolded. They are not to think of tomorrow, but to trust in God, "Your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things" is a lovely word indeed. If God's kingdom were sought, all else would be added. Precious instruction for our anxious hearts (Luke 12:22-31). Thus fear, covetousness, and care, three terrible foxes that spoil the grapes in God's vintage, are disposed of: the fear of man, by the fear of God — covetousness, by being rich toward God; and care, by the care of God. Thus does the blessed Lord set the heart free from earth, to enter into what is heavenly, and be occupied with Himself, while waiting for His return. But there is more than this: "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Our hearts might fear lest we had not a crust for tomorrow; His heart shows itself by giving us the kingdom. The knowledge of this lifts the saint up. He becomes practically a pilgrim, and a stranger. He can part with things here, for he has a treasure in heaven; and "where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Luke 12:33; Luke 12:31). The world's motto is "Slave, and gather." The Lord's injunction to His own is "Sell, and give." What a difference! But this the saint never will do until he has a treasure in heaven — even Jesus Himself. Do I hear you say? "I am trying to make Him my treasure." You will never manage it that way; but when you learn that He has a treasure on earth, and that you are that treasure, then, without an effort, you will make Him your treasure. "We love him because he first loved us." Moth, rust, and thieves sooner or later sweep away all we set our hearts on here. How good to have "a treasure in the heavens that faileth not"!

Notice that here three things influence the heart — the Father giving the kingdom, the prized treasure in heaven, and the expectation of the Lord's return. "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that, when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. Blessed are those servants, whom the lord, when he cometh, shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them. . . . Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not" (Luke 12:35-40). Until the Lord comes they were to wait and watch, the lamps burning, and all ready; the whole position expressive of expectation, while devoted service marked the waiting hours. When He returned, He would bring them into the Father's house, gird Himself, make them sit down to meat, and serve them. This, I take it, alludes to His ever remaining in manhood, in which He has already served us in love. Love it was that led to His incarnation, and to His death; and when He has His own in glory, He will yet serve them, for He will never cease to love. Love delights to serve; selfishness likes to be served. How great the contrast between Jesus and us oftentimes!

Now the teaching of this chapter seems plain enough, though confessedly it be difficult always to walk up to it; but evidently Peter was dubious as to its application, and so says, "Lord, speakest thou this parable unto us, or even to all?" The Lord's answer is plain enough, as He says, "Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give

them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath," etc. (Luke 12:42-48). Responsibility is the point here, connected with profession. All who profess the name of the Lord are clearly comprehended here. Whether true or false is not the question, although the issue to the false is sad in the extreme.

Two things are to mark Christ's disciples, — 1. They are to wait and watch for Him; 2. They are to serve Him till He return. "Occupy till I come" is the Master's word, and the loving labourer's motto. The true-hearted watcher, that waits with girded loins for His return, labours patiently till He arrive, and then finds his reward and rest in being with His Lord, is feasted by Him, — joy and happiness being ministered to him by the Lord Himself, — while his faithfulness in service gets its recompense by his being set over what belongs to His Lord. If there be professed servants, without reality, the end of such is detailed to Peter (vers. 45-48) in a way that I doubt not left its mark upon his soul, a mark that reappears clearly in his Epistles — especially the second — as we shall see in a future chapter. God requires of men according to their advantages. If this be so who will be so guilty as those who, while professing to be the servants of the Lord, neither do His will, nor wait His return? All Christ's professed servants would do well to carefully heed the Lord's reply to our apostle's earliest recorded query.

HOW TO FORGIVE.

QUESTION 2. — "Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times. Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but, Until seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:21-22). This query flowed very naturally out of what precedes it in the chapter, which contains principles of immense importance for the child of God. Matthew 18:1-35 supposes Christ to be absent, having been rejected, as Matthew 16:1-28 foretold, and the glory of Matthew 17:1-27 not yet come. It connects itself with chapter 16, in which, it will be remembered, two subjects are treated of by the Lord, — the Church, a new thing which He was about to build; and the kingdom of heaven, a well-known subject, the keys of which He promises to give to Peter. These two subjects the Lord again speaks of in chapter 18, unfolding the spirit which is to mark His followers, as suitable to His kingdom, and then the place which the church was to occupy on earth, in discipline, and in prayer. The meekness of a little child, unable to assert its rights in a world that ignores it, — the spirit of humility and dependence, — alone befitted the kingdom (Matthew 18:1-4). Carefulness not to offend these little ones is enjoined, combined with the most stringent severity as to self. To be a stumbling-block, or a snare, to one of the little ones that believed in Christ, was to ensure terrible judgment. Tender care for the weakest, and severe self-judgment, was to be the rule of the kingdom. If this existed, no stumbling-block would offend the least, and no snare entangle the disciple (Matthew 18:5-9). Further, the Father thought of these little ones. They were the objects of His favour. He did not despise them, but admitted them to His presence, lowly as they were; and His Son — the Son of man — had "come to save that which was lost" (Matthew 18:10-14). Moreover, if offence arose, if a brother trespassed; the fullest grace in forgiveness was to obtain. This is the spirit of the kingdom; it is the spirit of grace. On the one hand, the disciples were to be like little children in dependence and humility; and on the other, they were to imitate the Father, to be thus morally like Him, and thus to be truly children of the kingdom.

Christ having gone on high, the Church was to represent Him, and really to occupy His place on earth. Did a brother offend, the disciple was to gain his brother. Human pride would wait for him to humble himself; divine love goes after the evil-doer. This is just what God has done. When ruined, and far from God, what met our case? Did God wait till we did right? No! He sent His Son after the lost one. This is the principle on which the child of God is to act. God has so acted, and His children must follow Him. You belong to God, you are His child? Yes. What will you do if your brother wrongs you? Go after him, and set him right. It is love in activity. Love ever seeks the good even of the one who has gone wrong. Love is bent on gaining the erring brother.

It therefore goes quickly after him. "If he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother." Observe, it is not the offender, the trespasser, that is before the mind of the one who thus walks in Christ's steps. It is thy brother.

If he hearkened, the matter would be buried in the heart of the one who had been offended. Should he despise this grace, two or three witnesses were to go, to endeavour to reach his conscience. If all this were unavailing, the matter was to be told to the Church; and should he refuse to hear the Church, "let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican." This is not the public discipline of the assembly, but the spirit in which Christians are to walk (Matthew 18:15-18). Heaven would ratify that which the assembly bound on earth; and further, if two or three agreed on earth to ask anything, the Father would hear and answer, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them," says the Lord (Matthew 18:19-20). What could be more solemn, and withal more sweet and encouraging? Whether for discipline, or prayers, the Lord lays down the immense principle, that if only two or three be really gathered unto His Name, He is in the midst of them. Whether therefore for decisions or prayers, they were as Christ on the earth, for Christ Himself was there with them. The immensity of the truths thus unfolded evidently penetrated Peter's soul as he heard them, and the desire to clearly know the extent of the responsibility of acting in grace, where a brother was in question, led to his query, "Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?" The largest idea of grace that Peter had was "till seven times." That certainly was beyond the day of law, — which demanded righteousness, and knew naught of forgiveness, — and may be beyond the practical state of many of our souls, but it will not do for Christ. Peter's question was this: Suppose my brother sins against me, over and over again, how often am I to forgive him? The Lord's answer was: "I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but, Until seventy times seven." Under the reign of law forgiveness was unknown, it was "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth"; but in the kingdom of heaven, and under the rule of a rejected, a heavenly Christ, forgiveness takes its character from Him, and is to be unlimited. The Lord insists that practically there is to be no limit to it. It is to flow out constantly. It is the reflection of God's own ways with man.

It must be remembered that this is a question of sin against us, not against the Lord. The Church cannot forgive any sin against the Lord until He has forgiven it, and He only forgives on the confession of sin. But, as believers, we are to forgive each other unlimitedly. "Till seventy times seven" is to be the Christian's motto in this respect. This is really divine. God will not be outdone in forgiveness; but even a man on earth — a saint, of course — is called on to forgive after this heavenly pattern. May we all learn so to walk. If we only did so walk, what joy would fill our own souls, and what happy assemblies of saints would be everywhere found. Alas! we are very few of us up even to Peter's "seven times." We think we do well if we forgive once or twice; anything

beyond that could not reasonably be expected of us. Peter's question, however, reveals an altogether different line of conduct to be the command of our Lord. May we each one heed it.

DEVOTEDNESS AND REWARD.

QUESTION 3. — "Then answered Peter, and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?" (Matthew 19:27). Peter is painfully natural here, and his query robbed his devotedness of its value, for it showed that he valued it, and that he had not really counted all things but loss for Christ. Such is the flesh. It appears in one form in the young ruler, in another in Peter. The ruler had inquired, "What good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" (Matthew 19:16). He had not learned that he was "lost," so would fain "do" to gain life. The Lord takes him up on his own ground, saying, "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matthew 19:17-19). The Lord quotes the second table of the law. "The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?" What ignorance of himself, and of his own need! He really lacked every thing worth having, and what he possessed on earth was the greatest hindrance to his getting God's richest blessing. "Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me" (Matthew 19:21). The test of his reality was presented to him. Did he prize more, eternal life, or his possessions? "When the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions." These he loved better than Jesus. Alas! for man, the advantages of the flesh are absolute hindrances to the Spirit. Jesus knew his heart, and all his surroundings, and put His finger on the covetousness that really governed him, and was fed by the riches he possessed.

Riches are a hindrance when God's kingdom is in question. This the Lord distinctly declares, saying, "Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly (that is with difficulty) enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Matthew 19:23-24). It is beyond nature either for a camel to go through a needle's eye, or a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. "When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved?" (Matthew 19:25). The Lord's answer is absolutely perfect: "Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26). As far as man was concerned it was impossible; a profoundly solemn truth as regards his condition. If it be a question of man doing anything to get into the kingdom, riches are only a hindrance, for he would like to take them with him, as well as anything else that makes something of himself. All that is of man, however, is only an impediment to his reaching the kingdom, — nay more, it makes it impossible, as far as he himself is concerned. With God, however, all things are possible, and it is only by the actings of His grace that man does reach the kingdom.

Another has well said of men: "They cannot overcome the desires of the flesh. Morally, and as to his will and his affections, these desires are the man. One cannot make a negro white, or take his spots from the leopard: that which they exhibit is in their nature. But to God, blessed be His name! all things are possible." His hand is not limited, and, no matter what the difficulties, He can and does work. Hence we find a rich Zaccheus blessed, and a rich Joseph claiming the body of Jesus.

Again, in His sovereign love, He called some from Herod's house, and converted some in Caesar's palace; while the surrendered lands of a Barnabas showed what grace could do in his case, as well as in the devoted life of a Saul of Tarsus.

It was these instructions with regard to riches that gave rise to Peter's question, "Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?" (Matthew 19:27.) What is to be the portion of those who have renounced all for Thee, Lord? He had heard how hard it was for the rich to be saved, and thought he might now ask what they were to get who had become poor, that they might follow Jesus. The Lord's answer to Peter is tantamount to this, — You have done very well by following Me. He says, "Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life. But many that are first shall be last; and the last first" (vers. 28-30).

Sorrowful as it was, and manifesting as it did how the carnal mind may mix itself with the life of grace in the believer's history, Peter's question leads to instruction of a most blessed and cheering nature. Every one who has renounced anything for Jesus' sake will assuredly receive a hundredfold here, and inherit everlasting life, but, further, each will have his own place in the kingdom. The twelve apostles will have the first place in the administration of the earthly kingdom, when, under the reign of the Son of Man, there shall be an entirely new state of things, here called the regeneration. Each will have a reward answering to what the pathway has been for Christ here. The doctrine of reward is very clearly taught in the New Testament, not indeed as a motive, — that Christ Himself alone can be, — but as an encouragement. Reward, in Scripture, is always an encouragement to those who having from higher motives entered into God's way, are suffering shame and persecution therefor. It is the call of Christ that leads the soul out. He had called Peter and his fellow-disciples, and therefore says, "Ye which have followed me . . . shall sit," etc. They had found their motive in Himself — and they would find their reward according to their devotedness.

We must never confound the doctrine of grace with that of reward. Grace pardons our sins; and gives us a place in heaven; our ways practically will determine our place in Christ's kingdom. The doctrine of grace must never be used to deny that of rewards, but Christ Himself must always be the motive for the daily, hourly walk of the saint. Nevertheless we shall receive of the Lord according to that which we have done, whether good or bad (see 2 Corinthians 5:10). It is, however, good always to bear in mind the Lord's word, "But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first." This Peter needed to hear as he brings his devotedness under the Lord's eye. It was indeed a plain hint to Peter to be careful. May we each profit by the lesson which his all too fleshly remark brought forth.

PRAYER AND FORGIVENESS.

QUESTION 4. — "And on the morrow, when they were come from Bethany, he (Jesus) was hungry: and seeing a fig tree afar off, having leaves, he came, if haply he might find anything thereon: and when he came to it. he found nothing but leaves: for the time of figs was not yet. And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever. And his disciples

heard it And in the morning as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. And Peter, calling to remembrance, said unto him, Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away!" (Mark 11:12-14; Mark 11:21-22). Now this remark of Peter's, although not put in the form of a question, would appear to have much of an interrogative character about it. This we gather from the Lord's reply. While Simon only said, "Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away!" the Lord interpreted His servant's remark to mean, "Lord, what is the lesson we are to learn from this remarkable judicial dealing?" The Lord's reply is most instructive, both from a dispensational, and a moral point of view.

"And Jesus, answering, saith unto them, Have faith in God. For verily, I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that these things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them. And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any; that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses" (Mark 11:22-26). The dispensational lesson is plain. Israel, as a nation, was represented by the fig tree. The curse about to fall on the nation is exhibited in this remarkable figure. Israel was the fig tree of Jehovah; covered with leaves, but bringing forth no fruit, it cumbered the ground. The fig tree, condemned of the Lord, immediately withered away. So was it to be with the nation. Possessed of every advantage which man in the flesh could enjoy, this unhappy nation, spite of all the divine Husbandman's care and culture, brought forth no fruit for Him. Of Israel it is written, "To whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen!" (Romans 9:4-5). Spite of all these privileges, they bore no fruit to God, though the leaves — all the outward forms of religion — were abundantly manifest. But man in the flesh — man under the old covenant — in responsibility to bring forth fruit, never has yielded, and never can yield fruit. The ultimate evidence of this was the rejection of Jesus, and, in refusing Him, Israel signed their own death-warrant. The fig tree, then, is Israel as they were, man in the flesh, cultivated by God to the very uttermost, but all in vain. No fruit was apparent. Man's history is really over.

Some have found a difficulty in this passage from the expression, "for the time of figs was not yet," and therefore said, "How could the Lord expect to find them at such a time?" The inference drawn is that His judgment of the tree savours of injustice. Far be the thought! If the nature of the fig tree in its native soil is borne in mind, this difficulty at once disappears. A peculiarity of the fig tree is that it bears two crops of ripe fruit during the year, and, while one crop is ripening, another is just developing. Thus, no matter what time of year the eye rested on it, there should always have been some fruit; whether ripe or not, is not the question. It had no fruit. "Nothing but leaves" was its state. Hence the ground of its judgment. The Lord's word to His disciples regarding the mountain being removed, and being cast into the sea, — although it be a great general principle for faith, — I doubt not refers to that which, would happen to Israel through their ministry. Israel was the great hindrance to the Gospel going out. It was the mountain of obstruction. Faith would remove it. As a fact, looked at corporately as a nation on earth, it was to disappear, and be lost in the sea of nations — the Gentiles, — among whom it now is lost. But there is more than this dispensational

prediction in the Lord's reply, viz., the moral point, which we should carefully note. He assures His disciples that whatever they asked in faith should be accomplished, but that to ensure this they must walk and act in grace, if they would enjoy this privilege. If praying for a thing to be done, there must be forgiveness "if ye have ought against any." Now, I doubt not that the reason why we so frequently do not get replies to our prayers, is that our hearts are not really right before God in this respect. Some old grudge is kept up, instead of being for ever dismissed. To enjoy grace, and to utilise the privilege of prayer, we must constantly act in grace towards all men. This was quite an unlooked-for outcome of Peter's remark on the withered fig tree. The Lord grant us grace to heed this new lesson.

WATCHING AND WORKING.

QUESTION 5. — "And as he went out of the temple, one of his disciples saith unto him, Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here! And Jesus answering said unto him, Seest thou these great buildings? there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, over against the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled" (Mark 13:1-4). In the question which this passage records, it is observable that Peter is associated with others. His name heads the list, and there is little doubt, from the peculiarly prominent place he has, as a questioner in the Gospel narratives, that he was again the spokesman on this occasion. Be that as it may, the occasion was momentous, and to the query here put the Lord gives an immensely full reply, embracing a view of the early and later history of the Jews, the calling and the character of the Church, and finally the blessing and judgment of the Gentiles. The detail of this is more fully given in Matthew 24:1-51; Matthew 25:1-46, than in the passage above quoted from Mark, wherein Peter's name occurs. Matthew gives the development of the dispensation, and the ways of God with respect to the kingdom. Mark, on the other hand, — true to the character of his gospel, — takes up the service of the apostles in the circumstances that would surround them. This service the disciples would accomplish in the midst of Israel. They were to render a testimony against all persecuting authorities, and preach the Gospel among all nations before the end came. They were really to take the Lord's place as a witness here amongst Israel, and as preachers to render a distinct testimony, not only to that nation, but to all nations, and then He would return in power and glory. Of the hour and day of that coming no one knew, hence the special injunction given is, "Take ye heed, watch and pray for ye know not when the time is" (ver. 33). This command is followed by specific instructions to the servants, which are of general application, and of immense moral value to every one who loves the Lord. Let us quote them. "For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning; lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you, I say unto all, WATCH" (Mark 13:33-37).

Two salient points are to be observed. While watching is the attitude of the servant, working is his characteristic. How sweet to notice that the Lord has given "to every man his work." There is room for all, place for all, and work for all, that love Him. No two have the same work, nor can another really do that which is allotted to each. Therefore to know one's work, and then to stick to it, is of prime importance. Were we each to get really hold of this divinely important principle, how it would

foster the work of the Lord! What a cure would it be for the little petty jealousies that, alas! often spring up amongst the Lord's servants, and hinder His work. It is a happy moment in the soul's history when it can say: "I have my little bit of work from the Lord to do; I can do no one else's little bit, and no one can do mine." Coupled with the diligence and responsibility of service, how sweetly is here intertwined the call on the affections to "watch." Blessed Master, help us all to watch unremittingly for Thy coming; and, till Thou comest back, to work unweariedly in Thy harvest field!

INTIMACY AND ITS RESULTS.

QUESTION 6. — "When Jesus had thus said, he was troubled in spirit, and testified, and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, That one of you shall betray me. Then the disciples looked one on another, doubting of whom he spake. Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved. Simon Peter then beckoned to him, that he should ask who it should be of whom he spake. He then lying on Jesus' breast saith unto him Lord, who is it? Jesus answered, He it is to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it. And when he had dipped the sop, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon" (John 13:21-26).

We have here reached the close of the Lord's earthly pathway, when the question that revealed the traitor is put. The last supper, with all its attendant ministry of love, was in course, when the Lord's evident distress of spirit touched Peter to the quick. "One of you shall betray me," was surely enough to arouse every genuine heart; and, persuaded by the truth of His words, all the disciples looked one upon another, with the sincerity of innocence, save in one case. Nor is this all, for we read in another gospel that each, including even Judas, said, "Lord, is it I?" (Matthew 26:22-25). The Lord, although knowing who it was, evidently was slow in indicating the guilty one; and Peter, always ardent, thereupon beckoned to John "that he should ask who it should be of whom he spake."

Now we may well inquire, Why did not Peter put this question himself direct to the Lord? The answer seems pretty clear. John was near the Lord, Peter was not. He lacked that which John had, a concentration of spirit, and constant occupation of heart with Jesus, that kept him near His beloved Person. John did not place himself near the Lord in order to get this communication; but he received it, because at the moment when such nearness was a necessity, to get the secrets of the Lord's mind, he was, according to the habit of his heart, near Jesus. He ever speaks of himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." Counting on that love liking to have him near, he had laid his head on the bosom of Jesus, was conscious of the heavings of that breast, in a moment of such sorrow to the Lord, and therefore, was just where he could receive the Lord's communication. The love which Jesus bore to him formed John's heart, and moulded his life. It gave him beautiful constancy of affection for the Lord, and childlike confidingness in His delight to have His loved disciple near Himself. It was no other motive that put him so near the Lord, a nearness that others might have had, but did not take. Being thus near, he could receive communications from Jesus, but it was not in order to receive them that he placed himself close to Him. He was near the Lord because he loved to be near Him, and was assured that Jesus delighted in having Him near. This place of nearness we too may know, where the heart enjoys the affections of the precious Saviour, and where He can communicate to us what is in His heart. If we would have these communications, we must be near Him too. Nearness to Christ is the secret of all spiritual progress and power. It is after this sort, thank God, that we may yet learn to know Christ. The more

we know His love to us, the more shall we delight in getting and keeping near to Him. That Peter knew that the Lord loved him there can be no manner of doubt, and that Peter also loved the Lord is certain, but there was as yet, however, too much of Peter for intimacy, such as this scene unfolds. Later on, when he became a broken and self-emptied vessel, God might and did use him in service most blessedly; but to learn intimacy with Jesus, one naturally turns to John — and finds it — rather than to Peter.

SELF-CONFIDENCE AND ITS END.

QUESTION 7. "Therefore, when he (Judas) was gone out, Jesus said, Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God be glorified in him, God shall also glorify him in himself, and shall straightway glorify him. Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek me: and as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go, ye cannot come, so now I say unto you. . . . Simon Peter said unto him, Lord, whither goest thou? Jesus answered him, Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards. Peter said unto him, Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake. Jesus answered him, Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice" (John 13:31-38). The scene of this question is the same as the last — the supper table. Judas, detected, receives the sop, and the covetousness which governed his heart gained the day. Satan using this to his destruction, hardens his heart against all feelings of common humanity, and of man towards the man of his acquaintance, against every amiable sentiment of nature. Nearness to Jesus, if unaccompanied by faith, and if the heart be not influenced by His presence, only hardens in a terrible manner. Satan enters into that heart to yet further harden it, leads him to do the basest act conceivable, — to betray an intimate companion while covering him with kisses, — and finally abandons him to despair in the presence of God.

Morally all was over when Judas went out, and in the Lord's heart all the import of this unspeakably solemn moment is present to His spirit. "Now is the Son of man glorified," He declares. His soul views all that lay before Him on God's side, — not on that of His own wounded affection. He rises to the thoughts of God as regards the issue of Judas's perfidy. The base act of the latter was to be the means of introducing a crisis — the cross — which stands alone in the history of eternity, and on which all blessing from God to man depends, alike from the moment of man's fall to the introduction of a new heaven and a new earth. Holiness and love are both demonstrated and reconciled in the cross, — the holiness that must judge sin, and the love that can save the sinner. God having been there glorified by the Son of Man, straightway glorifies Him at His own right hand. But though the end of the path was glory, the pathway was through the cross, — no one could there follow Him. Who but He could pass through death, the power of Satan, the forsaking of God, as being made sin, the judgment of God, the billows of His wrath, the grave, and yet finally beyond all these pass into glory? Peter, not comprehending the unfathomable purport of His Lord's words, says, "Lord, whither goest thou?" The Lord answers, "Whither I go thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards." Implying, as it did, his own martyrdom, this should have sufficed him; but, ever ardent, as well as self-confident, he continues to query, saying, "Why cannot I follow thee now?" and without waiting for the Lord's reply, insists, "I will lay down my life for thy sake." Every one will see the gravity of the Lord's reply to Peter. It was an absolute statement as to the impossibility of his, or any one's following Him then. It should have sufficed Peter to be thus told of the Lord that he could not follow Him, but ever

full of himself, though really attached to the Lord too, he is betrayed by his natural fervour into the asseveration of devotedness which the Lord can only read as being the energy of flesh, and not the power of the Spirit. To have heard that he could not then follow should have sufficed him, instead of prompting to bold declarations of devotedness. Boasting is always easy, but ever sad work. The Lord rebukes him by sadly announcing his fall. What a lesson to us all to walk softly!

13. CHAPTER 10 — SIFTED AS WHEAT.

CHAPTER 10 — SIFTED AS WHEAT.

Luke 22:31-34; Luke 22:54-62. THE contrast in Simon's history between Luke 22:1-71 and Matthew 17:1-27 is exceedingly striking. Our apostle in Matthew 17:1-27 was on the mount of transfiguration, where he was in the presence of all the brightness of the glory of the Son of Man, and where his heart, always impulsive, was really desirous of doing his Master honour, for, in spite of what we read in Luke 22:1-71, Peter loved his Master dearly.

Here we have something very different, but it is a scene that is of the deepest moment for us, perhaps of deeper moment than that which took place in Matthew 17:1-27, for we shall never, in our earthly pathway, behold the Lord, as Peter beheld Him that day on the mount, but we shall all have the temptation, some day or other, to do as Peter did in Luke 22:1-71, that is, to deny the Lord.

There are many things very interesting in the history of Peter between Matthew 17:1-27 and Luke 22:1-71 which we have glanced at with profit, but we come now to the moment in this man's history, when, forgetful of the Lord, full of himself, and tripped up of Satan, he drops into a course which every upright mind must reprehend.

Scripture gives us these sorrowful details for our profit, and herein lies the difference between Scripture and every other book. As a rule biographers tell us only the good, the sweet, the attractive side of a character. They think they should draw the veil of charity over the defects, and shortcomings of the one whose memoir they are writing, and this often has a very depressing effect on a young person, who, reading the life of a godly man, gets up from it and says, "I must give it all up, for I can never be like him." But Scripture invariably gives us the dark side, as well as the bright; and what does this bring out? Only the grace of the Lord, who can take a saint out of the slough into which he has fallen, and make him a more useful vessel than ever before; for this fall breaks the neck of Peter's self-confidence, and he learns not only what he is, and what he can do, but he also learns, as never before, what his Master is.

If there could have been an occasion when the Lord needed the loyalty of those who loved Him, this was the moment. The Passover day had come, and the Lord knew He was going to die. Judas, six days before, had sold his Master for thirty pieces of silver, the price of the meanest slave. Judas, alas! loved money, and lost his soul for ever, and many a man today does the same, puts money before Christ. Do not you, I beseech you, my dear friend, follow Judas' example, and share his fate for ever.

It is an intensely solemn fact that every man or woman, who is not in the company of Christ, is in the clutch of the god of this world, and sooner or later, must learn the power of the evil one. In this scripture the Lord would teach us that even a saint, away from Christ, is in the power of Satan. Up till this moment the Lord had flung His sheltering wing over His disciples, but now He says to them, as it were, You must shift for yourselves, I am going away (Luke 22:35-38); and to those who

come to take Him in the garden He says, "This is your hour and the power of darkness" (Luke 22:35).

Judas, doubtless, before the Passover, had his feet washed, when the others had theirs (John 13:1-38), and at the supper he received the sop from the Lord, and then he passed out to consummate his wretched work of betrayal. Thereon the Lord turns to Peter, and addresses these words to the disciple whom He knew would deny Him, but whom He loved; and further, knew that in spite of everything, that disciple loved Him devotedly.

"Simon, Simon," the Lord says, "behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not; and when thou art converted (restored), strengthen thy brethren" (Luke 22:31-32). Simon got his warning here; 'if he had only taken heed to it, what a different sequel would have been recorded! If he had only been chaff, and not really "wheat," Satan would not have wanted to sift him: it was because he was the real wheat that Satan desired to get him in his power. Satan does not tempt an unconverted person, he tempts a child of God, but he governs and controls entirely the unconverted — drives them before him at his will. Man talks about being a free agent, but there is no such thing as being a free agent. Man does not see that he is in the power of Satan while still unconverted. Man is blind, and does not see his danger. A blind man sees nothing of his circumstances, he may be on the edge of a precipice and be quite unmoved, because he does not know his danger. Such is the condition of the unawakened, and unsaved reader. The episode in Peter's history now before us, is that of a child of God, and shows what depths he can fall into through self-confidence.

First observe that the Lord warns him. Then note two other most touching things, the Lord's prayer for him before he fell, and the Lord's look at him after. "Satan hath desired to have you," is divinely met, in grace, by "but I have prayed for thee." The Lord made use of Satan to break the self-confidence which was the cause of Peter's fall, but the Lord's controlling hand was upon the enemy, even so, and he was allowed to go so far and no farther; and I believe that when the day of Pentecost came, and Peter, restored, and happy in his Master's love, was the means of three thousand souls coming to Christ, and being saved, the devil was heartily sorry that he had not left him alone in the high priest's hall. But for that bitter experience he would never have been enough broken down, humbled, and self-emptied, for the Lord to use him in that marvellous manner.

See what follows the Lord's warning. Peter answers, "Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison and to death." Think of that! No sooner has the Lord said, "Satan hath desired to have you," than Peter says, "I am ready." You get the secret of Peter's fall in these words. Had Peter been right, instead of saying, "I am ready," he would have prayed, "Lord, do Thou keep me; Lord, do Thou help me; Lord, do not let me fall under Satan's power," but he was self-confident, and self-confidence is, I believe, the cause of all our failure, whereas self-distrust is the secret of our getting on with the Lord.

If Peter had learnt not to trust himself, but to cling to his Master, and keep near his Master, what we are looking at here could never have happened.

After this solemn warning we have the lovely teaching, from the Lord's lips, which we find recorded in John 14:1-31 to John 16:1-33. Then the wonderful prayer of John 17:1-26 fell on Peter's ears. The Lord thereafter went over the brook Cedron, with His disciples, and then, taking with Him the

favoured three, Peter, James, and John, who had been with Him when He raised Jairus' daughter, and were with Him in the holy mount, and had there seen His glory, He went apart to pray. When in the garden, we read, He "began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy, and saith unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death: tarry ye here, and watch. And He went forward a little, and fell on the ground and prayed." When He comes to the disciples He finds them sleeping. Think of it! The Master praying, and the servants sleeping. The Master is agonising before God, showing the perfection of human dependence, in that moment of unparalleled sorrow, while the servant is sleeping. Such is human nature. Peter slept in the presence of the glory of the Lord, on the Mount of Transfiguration, and he is sleeping now in the presence of His sorrow. Well can we understand His rebukeful query, "Simon, sleepest thou? couldest not thou watch one hour? Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation" (Mark 14:37-38).

Then He adds, "The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak." That is exquisite grace. He sees these three disciples sound asleep, at the very moment when He might have expected them to be watchful with Him in His sorrow, though they could not share it. He longed to have those He loved with Him. But His plaint on the cross was, "Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness" (Psalms 88:18). Sadly therefore does He say to Peter, "Simon, sleepest thou? couldest not thou watch one hour?" And then He tenderly adds, "The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak." The day of the Holy Ghost had not yet arrived when they would be strengthened to suffer for Him under every circumstance. The Lord having gone away and prayed for the third time, Judas, the betrayer, comes again on the scene, and with him a band of officers and men, with swords and staves. Peter now takes up a sword, and cuts off the ear of Malchus, the high priest's servant. Then they surround the Lord and take Him, while His last act, ere they bind His blessed hands, is to touch the wounded ear of the servant and heal it. Then they bound Him, and led Him away, and "all the disciples forsook him and fled," though all had said they would never deny Him, and Peter had vowed, but a little before, "I am ready to go with thee both into prison and to death." Ah, how little Peter knew of himself! When the Lord, in perfect human dependence, was with God in prayer, His poor disciple was sleeping, when he should have been watching and praying; then afterwards he was fighting, when he should have been quiet; and now he is running away when, if ever there was a moment that he should have stuck to his Master, this was the moment, but "they all forsook him and fled." Afterward we see Peter following "afar off," and then again we see him in the high priest's hall, where there was a fire, and he warms himself by it.

Peter and John both follow Jesus, but John, known to the high priest, went in with Jesus. Then he sees Peter at the door, and speaks to the maid that kept the door, and thus gets Peter in, and I cannot but believe that when John and Peter were again inside, John made straight for his Master, to get as near to Him as possible. May the Lord keep us near Him too! To be near Him is the only place of safety for the soul that knows Him. I believe, had Peter been near Him that day, he would never have fallen.

First we read that Peter "followed afar off," and then when he got inside the high priest's hall, where the servants and officers, who had taken Jesus, had kindled "a fire of coals," Peter sat down among them, as though one of themselves, and warmed himself with the servants.

What steps we see in Peter's downward course, leading to his denial Of the Lord he loved! First, declaring he was ready to die for Him, although the Lord had just told him that Satan was desiring to have him, and that He was praying for him; next, sleeping when he should have been watching; then fighting when he should have been quiet; then following afar off when he should have been near; and now sitting down, side by side, with the enemies of Christ, and warming himself! With such a prelude one can only expect what followed.

I believe the little maid to whom Peter first denied the Lord questioned him at the door as he came in, and then followed him up to the fire and questioned him again, and that then Peter went and sat down at the fire among them all as though he were not interested in what was going on. There he was, among the enemies of the Lord, far away from Jesus. No wonder Satan was too strong for him; and if we, who are the Lord's now, will go among worldlings, and seek to warm ourselves at the world's fire, we can only expect to be tripped up by Satan too. A fearful position, indeed, was it for Peter to be sitting at the fire among those who had just taken his Master prisoner, and, having bound Him, were plotting for His death. Well did the old Scotchwoman say, "He had nae business there among the flunkies." No, he had no business among the servants of those who were going to murder his Master. The various accounts given by the four Evangelists, of this sad scene in Peter's history, have presented a difficulty to some minds, that will disappear if we bear in mind the well-known form of an Eastern house. Those of any importance, such as the high-priest's palace was sure to be, were usually built in the form of a quadrangle, having an interior open court. Access to the house was had by a porch or arched passage from the front, closed, as regards the street, by a heavy, folding door or gate, containing in it a wicket for foot passengers, and kept by a porter. This entrance to the court would appear to be what Mark (Mark 14:68) calls "the porch." The interior court was usually open to the sky, and here it was that they "made a fire of coals; for it was cold" (John 18:18). In Luke we read that they "kindled a fire in the midst of the hall" (Luke 22:55). The word here rendered "hall" is aule, signifying an open court, or courtyard. As regards the house most of its ground-floor rooms opened directly into the court. Some of these rooms were large, and formed a place of audience, quite open to the court. It was therefore most probably in a chamber of this sort, open behind to the court, that Jesus stood before the high-priest, and thus we can easily see that, when He "turned, He could see Peter in the court among the servants, — the crowing of the cock possibly reminding Him of His servant's fall. The order of the incidents which led up to Peter's threefold denial of the Lord would seem to be as follows. His first denial took place in connection with his admission by the damsel to the court through the wicket-gate. John tells us (John 18:15-17) that the damsel who kept the door was the first to challenge him; Matthew (Matthew 26:69-70) says she came to him as he "sat without in the palace" — while both Mark (Mark 14:66-68) and Luke (Luke 22:54-57) inform us that the first denial took place as he sat by the fire. There is no inconsistency in these statements, the facts, I conclude, being that the damsel began to assail him at the door, and followed him to the fire-place, where others would join in her banter. The second denial, as recorded by John (John 18:25), took place as Peter stood and warmed himself, when it is evident he was set upon by more than one at a time, for the statement is, "They said therefore unto him." Matthew (Matthew 26:71-72) leads us to judge that after the first denial Simon had moved away from the fire, and gone to the porch, where "another" saw him, and said, "This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth." Mark says (Mark 14:68-70) that after the first denial he went out into the porch, and there a maid — probably the same as first attacked him — says, "This is one of them." In Luke we merely read that "another saw him," etc. (Luke 22:58).

What would appear to have been the case was, that the apostle was assailed by quite a number of different foes, who followed him about the court. The replies he made to the various attacks are substantially the same in each case, though the form varies, and in one case, as Matthew informs us, was accompanied by an oath. As regards the third denial, Matthew (Matthew 26:73-75) indicates that many had a hand in the assault on the already bewildered Simon, and pressed home their charge of his association with Jesus, by alluding to his Galilean accent. Mark (Mark 14:70) follows Matthew's account, and Luke (Luke 22:59-60) practically does the same, naming, however, but one assailant. John (John 18:25-27) mentions the crowd as attacking Peter, and adds the fact of his recognition by one of the high-priest's servants, who was a kinsman to Malchus, whose ear Peter had cut off in the garden. His fleshly action there it was that aided in his detection at this moment. But, again, if several assailants are borne in mind, all here too is easy to be understood. A careful review of all the scriptures leads one to think that Peter's denials of the Lord were not merely on three occasions, and to three separate persons. On the contrary, it would appear that on the latter two occasions he was generally set upon by a number of persons, who all questioned him as to his association with Jesus. To the company of servants gathered in the high-priest's palace that night he was regarded as a good object of attack. Doubtless they enjoyed the joke, which Satan helped them to carry out, that thus really God's work might be done in this self-confident man's soul. Bearing all these circumstances in mind, we can the better understand the nature of the temptation before which poor Peter fell. Nothing could be more exasperating than to be baited and taunted by a set of unfeeling priestly servitors, who mingled their own coarseness with the venom and hatred of their masters against Jesus, and any who should confess Him. These were indeed powerful foes to be in conflict with, but it was Peter's own previous condition that really made him their victim. John, who kept near to Jesus, escaped scatheless. In truth Peter had fallen before he got into the high-priest's palace. Self-confidence was his ruin. The Holy Ghost has been careful to record his sayings at the Supper Table. The Lord had warned His disciples, "All ye shall be offended because of me this night" (Matthew 26:31). What does Peter say? "Though all shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended. . . . Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee" (Matthew 26:33-35). Again, "But he spake the more vehemently, If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise" (Mark 14:31). Again, "Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death" (Luke 22:33). More, "I will lay down my life for thy sake" (John 13:37). Boastful words indeed were these, and doubtless when he said them he felt them, for manifestly Peter was no hypocrite; but his self-confidence flung him off his guard, and took him away from Christ. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" had no place in his mind, and so, failing to pray to be kept out of temptation, though bidden of the Lord to do so, he slept when he should have been gathering strength, and fell an easy prey to the enemy's stratagems, in the moment of temptation, when he should have humbly, yet boldly, confessed his Lord. So will it be with any of us, if self-confidence, or a spirit of boastfulness be found in our hearts. The day that a saint falls is the day that he ceases to fear to fall. So long as the fear is in the heart the feet will be kept of God. No doubt much banter went on, as they asked him, again, and again, if he were not one of His disciples, and at last Peter denied with oaths and cursings that he had ever known the Lord. Poor Peter! Old habits are easily revived. Fishermen and sailors, notoriously, are great swearers, and what had probably been Simon's style of language by the Sea of Galilee, before the Lord called him, comes out again now.

When, for the third time, Peter has denied his Master, whom at bottom he really loved, the cock crows again. The cock had already crowed once, and Peter should have remembered the word that Jesus had said to him, and been warned by it. I ask you, my Christian reader, Is the cock crowing for you today? that is, Is the Word of the Lord speaking home to you today about something? Oh, if so, give heed to it, get nearer to Jesus; may God draw you nearer to His blessed Son, that you may not go on, as Peter did, to still greater lengths. Peter heeded not the first crowing of the cock, but went on to deny Him again, with oaths and cursings; and then I think I see that man, as the cock crowed a second time, and he pulled himself up to remember that he had done the very thing his Master had said he would do.

Peter loved his Master in spite of everything, and now, as the cock crew, and he called to mind what Jesus had said, he turned toward Him, and "the Lord turned and looked upon Peter." What did that look say? Was it a look of anger, or withering scorn? Did it say, as it were, Contemptible miscreant, can you deny Me at such a moment? No, no, I believe it was a look of unutterable, albeit wounded, love. That look said, Peter, do you not know Me? I know you, Peter, and I love you, notwithstanding your denial of Me. It was a look, I believe, of tender changeless love; and more, I believe Peter lived on that look for the next three days, till he met his Master again in resurrection, and communion was restored.

Peter went out then, and "wept bitterly." Repentance did its proper work in his soul, as he saw his folly and sin in the light of his Lord's love. Here is the difference between repentance and remorse. Repentance is the judgment of my sin that I have in the light of love, and grace known. Remorse is produced by viewing the sin in the light only of its probable results. Repentance begets hope, remorse leads only to despair. Repentance leads the soul back to God, remorse drives it to deeper sin, and further into Satan's hands. This is all illustrated in the consequent pathway of Peter and Judas. Judas, who did not know what grace was, went out and, in remorse over his consummate wickedness, hanged himself; Peter, who did know what grace was, and who knew better than ever then how deeply the Lord loved him, went out and wept bitterly. The last thing Peter had done was to deny his Master, and the next thing his Master did was to die for Peter; and if He had not died for Peter, he never could have been restored nor saved. Are you saying, my reader, But I do not know if He died for me? Listen, He died for sinners! Are you a sinner? Then you may look back and see how, when betrayed by a false friend, and denied by a true one, and forsaken by all, — yea, at last, forsaken by God also, — He died for sinners; and if you know that you are a sinner, and you want Him, you may know also that He died for you.

Peter must have been very wretched as he wept that day, and learned later on that those that stood by smote Jesus, and derided Him, and sent Him bound from one high priest to another, and then on to Pilate. Before him they clamour for His blood, and Pilate, reluctantly enough, but afraid of Caesar, finally sends Him forth to die.

What were the feelings that filled Peter's heart, as he learned of, or saw the death of his blessed Master, Scripture is silent regarding, but they can well be imagined. Of one thing we may be certain, that the Lord's look, and the Lord's words, "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not," must have in some measure comforted his heart, amid the pitiless siftings it went through at Satan's hands, and under the writhings and ploughings of a conscience that upbraided him with ingratitude, unfaithfulness, and cowardice. Amid all the bitterness of these days, that look, and

these words kept him from despair, and from following Judas. Repentance was doing its holy work in Peter's soul; remorse had already destroyed Judas. The moral lessons for each of us from this sad episode in Peter's history are many and plain. It should teach us to walk softly, prayerfully, and ever keep near to the Lord. It shows us too, as in many other instances in Scripture, that the very trait that distinguishes a servant of Christ is just that in which he is liable to break down. Now Peter was eminently courageous, and devoted to the Lord. He betrays cowardice. The real strength of a chain is that of its weakest link. What we would think our strongest point is in reality our point of weakness, and it is just that which Satan will attack. Moses, the meekest man on earth, lost his temper under slight provocation. Abraham, noted for faith, fails signally therein. Elijah, a truly bold man, flies from a woman. Job, remarkable for patience, breaks down therein. John, the man of love, would have fire come down from heaven on the Samaritans. Paul, the living expositor of Christianity, dropped back for a moment into Judaism.

There was but one perfect Servant. He was lovely in everything, and equable in all things: as dependent, as devoted; as loving, as holy; as faithful, as tender. Precious Saviour, Master, and Friend, teach us all more simply to cleave to Thee, and thus be more like Thee!

Without doubt the place of prominence that Peter had in the Lord's service carried dangers therewith. He was a marked man by the enemy. The devil delights to pick off, or trip up the leaders in the ranks of the Lord's army. A place of prominence therefore is a special place of danger. The way Satan attacked the Lord Himself, may well make us watchful, in the assurance that he will not leave us alone. No security whatever is assured by success in the Lord's work, and, if the Lord is using you in His service, depend upon it that Satan's sifting is determined of him. The only path of safety therefore is found in keeping as near to the Lord as we can, and as far away as possible from all that savours of the world, and from the heat that is generated at its "fire of coals." To be "hail fellow, well met" with the servants of the devil, is to ensure being tripped up by their master. Sure am I that Peter gave all the servants of the high priest, and the warmth to be got in their company, a wide berth, from that day forth.

14. CHAPTER 11 — RESTORATION, AND A NEW COMMISSION.

CHAPTER 11 — RESTORATION, AND A NEW COMMISSION.

John 20:1-31; John 21:1-25. NO part of the Gospel narrative is perhaps more fraught with interest than the resurrection scenes, and the lessons they involve. The death of the Lord Jesus is the basis and groundwork of all blessing, but His resurrection is the evidence of His perfect victory over death, Satan, and the power of the grave. The testimony to His resurrection is very complete. He was seen certainly on not less than ten separate occasions after He rose from the dead; and, with singular grace on His part, we find that amongst the earliest to meet Him was the erring, and deeply penitent Peter. The circumstances connected with the earliest of the Lord's appearances are of thrilling interest, as they show how, above all things, He values the constancy of affection that misses Him from the scene, and cannot, so to speak, do without Him. This is specially manifest in the case of Mary Magdalene, to whom He first appeared. The next to see Him were the Galilean women, her companions; and then, next, clearly Peter was sought of the Lord. Next to the devoted heart that beats true to Him, and pines for His presence, and which He will always visit first, is the dejected and sorrowful backslider, whom, in His tender grace, He ever seeks to restore to a sense of His favour. The Lord of glory was crucified between two thieves, and died, praying for His murderers, and atoning for their sins. Then His body was taken down by hands that loved Him, and they buried Him in a new tomb. The whole Sabbath-day He lay in the grave. But the resurrection morning comes, and Peter and John, told by Mary Magdalene that the Lord had been taken out of the sepulchre, run both together to the sepulchre, and Peter is outrun by John. I know some tell us that Peter was an older man than John, but I do not believe that was the reason that John came first to the sepulchre. I believe the remembrance of his denial of his Lord was what made Peter's footsteps slack then. A bad conscience and an unhappy heart ever tell on the Christian's pace.

It would appear that Mary Magdalene, accompanied by her friends, had gone out very early to the sepulchre. Finding it empty, she had fled to the city, and told Peter and John. As her less ardent sisters hang about the sepulchre, and finally enter it, they hear from the angel who yet guarded it, — "Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him. But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you" (Mark 16:6-7).

Obedying these instructions, they depart, and at this juncture Peter and John, closely followed by the weeping Mary, arrive on the scene.

Reaching the sepulchre the two disciples find it empty, for an angel had come down and rolled away the stone from the door of the sepulchre. To let the Lord out? Far be the thought! Not so, but to let you and me look in, and see an empty tomb, and know that we have a risen, a victorious, a triumphant Saviour, who has taken the sting from death, and robbed the grave of its victory.

John did not at first go into the sepulchre, he only looked in; but Peter went right into it — as a Jew defiling himself — in his desire to know the full truth. He found everything in perfect order. There had been no haste. The napkin that had been about the Lord's head was wrapped together in a place by itself. Furthermore, "he beheld the linen clothes laid by themselves, and departed, wondering in himself at that which was come to pass" (Luke 24:12).

Neither Peter nor John are held to the spot by the same attachment to the Lord as marked Mary, who had been the object of such a special deliverance on the Lord's part. Out of her He had cast "seven demons" (Mark 16:9), and personal love for her deliverer was her characteristic. The two disciples, on the other hand, "saw and believed," and then "went away Again, unto their own home." They saw, and thus, resting on visible proof, they believed, but their affections are not manifestly engaged. Satisfied that Jesus was risen, they go away to "their own home." They had one, without Jesus; Mary really had none, save the spot where last she had seen her Saviour; and therefore, when the others had gone, she "stood without at the sepulchre weeping." She could not do without her Saviour, and the way in which He now reveals Himself to her has a touching beauty that cannot be equalled.

Blinded by her love to the fact of the resurrection, which Peter and John seem to have believed, and led by affection rather than intelligence, she thought of Him as still dead, and only loved Him the more deeply because she had Him not. Accosted by angels, she turns her back on them. Most of us would have had a good look at them, — as they are not often seen, — but she is supremely indifferent. Jesus alone entranced her soul. When He inquires of her why she wept, she, supposing Him to be the gardener, thinks that He must surely know the object she desired, as she says, "Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away." She fancies every one will be thinking of her Lord, so only speaks of Him as "Him" — giving no name. This is the acme of love! Then the Lord in one word, "Mary!" reveals Himself to her. The sheep knows the Shepherd's voice, and says, "Rabboni! my Master" (John 20:16).

We can little wonder that the Lord Jesus, first of all, showed Himself to this devoted heart. He enjoyed and prized her love, we may rest assured. The next whom He saw were clearly Mary's companions, the Galilean women, who were on their way to Jerusalem carrying the angelic message to the disciples, and to Peter. He met them with "All hail! And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him. Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me" (Matthew 28:9-10). The third to meet the Lord on this first day of the week was Peter, without doubt. Much as he may have desired to meet his wounded Lord, far deeper was the desire in His tender loving heart to have all put right in the conscience and heart of His failing, and, assuredly, sorrowing servant.

If any doubts still lingered in Peter's mind as to the fact of the Lord being risen, they were shortly after fully dissipated by the touching message which the "young man" gave the Galilean women to carry to him. The Lord Himself, one feels assured, knowing His servant's sorrow, inspired the heavenly communication: "Go your way, tell his disciples, and Peter, that he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him, as he said unto you" (Mark 16:7). In Luke 24:1-53 we read that two were going to Emmaus that same day, and "Jesus himself drew near and went with them," as they talked about Him. Arrived at home, for I take it they were man and wife, they constrained Him to come into their house, and He then made Himself known to them "in the breaking of bread."

Although shortly before it was "toward even, and the day far spent," so that they judged it too late for their wondrous companion and teacher to go farther that night, it was not now too late for them to return at once all the way they had come, right back to Jerusalem — some eight miles — to tell the disciples the wonderful news they had to impart. Like bees that have done a good day's gathering, they return to the hive to share the spoil. They "found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them," and had their joy confirmed, as they were met by the news, "The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon." What passed that day between Simon and the Lord I know not. God has flung a veil over this interview in resurrection, between an erring servant, and a Master incomparable in grace. This I know, that confidence between Peter and the Lord was perfectly restored as the result of this meeting. Do you ask me, How do you know? Because, in John 21:1-25, to which we will now turn, when the seven disciples had gone fishing, instead of simply waiting for Jesus, and, after a night of fruitless toil, saw Him in the morning standing on the shore, as soon as Peter knew it was the Lord he was in a very great hurry to get to Him. He could not even wait till the boat got to the shore, but cast himself into the sea, the quicker to get to Him; and he would not have been in such a hurry to get near the Lord again, if he had not been fully restored to Him in his conscience, with the full sense of perfect forgiveness. Luke 24:34 records what I should call his private restoration. John 21:1-25 gives us his public restoration, but I would not give much for the public restoration of any one to privilege, either in service, or at the Lord's table, if there had not been full private restoration to the Lord Himself first. Communion and intimacy with the Lord are of the greatest importance for the saint. Nothing can make up for their lack. The advocacy of Christ had been all-prevailing in Peter's case. "I have prayed for thee" found its answer in deep contrition after his failure, and then, at the first opportunity afforded, confession was followed by full forgiveness, and restoration. We should ever remember that contrition and confession, real and genuine, must be the prelude to forgiveness and restoration. But "I have prayed for thee" was the procuring cause of Peter's restoration, even as the Lord's "look" was the means of producing the right moral state that led up to it.

Two exceedingly interesting interviews with His disciples follow the appearance of the Lord already referred to, at both of which Peter was present, but no reference was made by the Lord, in either case, to what had taken place in His servant's history (see John 20:19; John 20:26). But the Lord's care of His servant will not allow all the failure of the past, so well known by all, to slide into oblivion without His giving him, in the presence of his brethren, the assurance of His forgiveness, and restored confidence. The way in which this is brought about is peculiarly lovely. As we have seen, the Lord had bidden the disciples go into Galilee with the assurance that there they should see Him. Acting on this injunction they repaired to the Sea of Tiberias. The Lord kept them waiting a little. He would evidently test their hearts, as He does ours. In presence of old associations old interests and old occupations, that once commanded them, can they, can we, wait only and simply for the Lord to come? This really should be our position now, as outside the religious world, Judea, and finding themselves in Galilee, a despised place, was their position then. The disciple of Jesus has to occupy just a similar position now, as he waits for the return of his Lord. The test, however, seems to have been too great for them, and when the ever-active, impulsive Simon Peter said unto them, "I go a fishing," the rest were not slow to reply, "We also go with thee." It was very natural, but it was not what the Lord sent them there for. Waiting for Him, was trying work, so to while away the time, the old and long-since-abandoned business was resumed afresh. How easy, if our hearts are not full of Christ, to resume worldly relations, revive interests, drop into habits, and

get beneath influences which we absolutely, rightly, and, as we supposed, for ever had escaped from, when we at first came to Jesus, and were rejoicing in the greatness of His love, newly tasted.

Thus was it by the Lake of Galilee. "There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathaniel of Cana in Galilee, and the two sons of Zebedee, and two other of his disciples. Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a-fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee. They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing" (John 21:2-3). It was not a simple coincidence that they caught nothing. If we are in a wrong pathway, lack of success is certain. Our God and Father has His eye upon us, and His mighty controlling hand is sure to be felt, though perhaps we see it not at the moment. But the dark fruitless night of toil passes, and, in the morning, One stands on the shore, who says, "Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No." Again He speaks: "Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes" (John 21:6). Years before, on the same spot, had some of these men had a precisely similar experience, of toiling all night, and catching nothing, and, at Jesus' bidding, had let down the net, and caught such a multitude of fish that the net brake. It was doubtless the recollection of this that led the intuitively perceptive John to say to Peter — "It is the Lord." Of course it was! Who else could it be? The effect on Peter was immediate. "He girt his fisher's coat unto him. . . . and did cast himself into the sea." His object is clear. He wanted to get near his Lord as quickly as possible, and his rapid action, in thus swimming to the shore, to effect this object, is the most absolute proof of how thoroughly he was restored to the Lord as far as his conscience was then enlightened. Had it been otherwise he would have taken the more deliberative route of his brethren, as they rowed the two hundred cubits, dragging the net with fishes (John 21:8). The sight that met the eyes of the disciples, as they neared the shore, is very instructive. "As soon as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread. Jesus saith unto them, Bring of the fish which ye have now caught. Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three: and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken. Jesus saith unto them, Come and dine. And none of the disciples durst ask him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise. This is now the third time that Jesus showed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead" (John 21:9-14). This statement, as to the "third time," refers only to the disciples as a whole. It was the seventh time, if individuals be regarded, but from John's point of view it was the third. The first was on the day of His resurrection, the second a week after, when Thomas was there. These two occasions in figure present, first the Church, and secondly the godly Jewish remnant — who believe when they see the Lord. The scene of John 21:1-25 brings in the Gentiles. The throwing in of the net, and getting a mass without the net breaking, is just a little picture of what will be at the end. It is a millennial scene. In Luke 5:1-39 the net broke, and the ships began to sink. Not so here, and the Holy Ghost marks this as distinctive. Christ's millennial work is perfect. He is there after resurrection — and what He brings to pass does not rest, in itself, on man's responsibility — the net does not break. At the beginning (Luke 5:1-39) the disciples gathered a mass, but the net broke, the administrative order that contained the fish could not hold them according to that order. The presence of the risen Saviour here alters all that — the net does not break. Again, when the disciples bring of the fish which they have caught, they find that the Lord has already some there. So will it be at the end. Before His manifestation Christ will have prepared a remnant for Himself on the earth, and after He appears He will gather out of the sea of nations a

multitude that no man can number.

After this mysterious scene the Lord publicly and fully restores Peter's soul. And what sight could be more calculated to lead up to this than that which here meets his eye, viz., "a fire of coal, and fish laid thereon, and bread"? How Peter must have thought of that moment when he stood by "a fire of coals" and denied his Master! And now, as he sees not only the fire of coals, but the fish and bread, would he not be feeling — "See how the Lord loves and cares for me"?

"Come, and dine," says the Lord, but not a word about his failure is at that moment addressed to Peter. I daresay his brethren may have looked askance at him. There is a proverb among men "Never trust a horse that has once fallen;" but it is just the reverse in Divine things, and it is just when a man has been thoroughly broken down, that the Lord can trust him. This we shall now see beautifully illustrated in Peter's history. The Lord does not reproach him with his fault, nor condemn him for his want of faithfulness, but judges the source of evil that produced it — his self-confidence. He fully restores Peter by probing his heart to its very core, and making it known to himself, so that Peter is compelled to fall back on the very omniscience of the Lord to know that he, who had boasted of having more affection for Him than all the rest, had really any affection for Him at all. The Lord's question, thrice repeated, — though differing a little each time, — must have indeed searched his heart to its depths. It was not until the third time that Simon says, "Thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee," but Jesus did not let him go, till his conscience and heart alike were thoroughly exposed to himself. When the springs of self-trust are dried up, the heart is ready to trust the One who in love and grace only waits for such a moment, to deeply and abidingly bless the soul by revealing His unchanged grace to it. When they had dined, the Lord says to Peter, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?" referring, I suppose, to the other disciples, for Peter had said, "Though all should deny thee, yet will not I." The word the Lord uses for "love" implies love in a general sense. Peter replies, "Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee." Here Peter's word for love implies special attachment to a person. The Lord thereupon gives him a charge, saying, "Feed my lambs," but follows it by a second query not so comprehensive as the first. This time it is merely, "Lovest thou me?" and no comparison with others is suggested. Again Peter answers, "Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee," still sticking to his word implying special affection. The Lord thereon says unto him, "Shepherd my sheep." Then the Lord again changes the form of His question, and saying the third time, "Lovest thou me?" uses Peter's own word for "love," — "Hast thou indeed this special affection for Me?" is its meaning.

Three times Peter had publicly denied Him; three times the Lord asks him if he loves Him. And now Peter is broken down entirely, and replies, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." He, as it were, says, "Lord, Thou canst look into my very heart; Thou knowest whether I love Thee or not; though all else might doubt my love, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I do love Thee." It was enough: the springs of self-confidence and self-esteem, so ruinous to us all, had been touched; and now the Lord fully restores him, and, as publicly as He had been denied by him, puts him in a place of confidence and approval, as He sweetly says, "Feed my sheep." He says to him, as it were, "I can trust you now, Peter; I am going away, but I put into your care those I love best, My sheep and' My lambs, to shepherd them, and to feed them."

It was perfect grace that acted thus towards Peter, and for his good. Before he felt his need, or committed his fault, this grace had prayed for him, and now it shines in brightest perfection as it expresses its full confidence in him. Most would have thought that the utmost that could happen would be that he should be forgiven of the Lord, and be readmitted to the apostolic circle; instead of that, grace is lavished on him to the uttermost. Humbled by his fall, and restored to the Lord through His grace, that grace now abounds towards him, and commits to his care what it most prized. Such is grace! Such is God! Such is our Lord Jesus Christ?. Truly His ways are not as man's ways. Grace creates confidence just in proportion to the measure in which it acts towards us, and in us. It produces trust in Him who is its source. We cannot trust ourselves, but we can trust the grace that forgives our faults, and will trust us when we are broken down and humbled, as Peter was here.

How well Peter fulfilled that trust, his after-life proved. No greater proof of confidence could a friend show me, than to commit to my care, in his absence at the antipodes, those his heart loved best.

Jesus was going away. His sheep were most dear to Him. Where can He find a true, real, and loving shepherd, to whose care and guidance He can commit them! Peter is the chosen one. Infinite grace, matchless love! "Peter is the last man I should choose" — his fellow-man might say, — "Peter is the very man I can implicitly trust," is Christ's answer in grace. This then was Peter's public restoration; and not merely was it his restoration, but the Lord giving him a special charge, thus showing His full confidence in this now humbled, self-emptied, and restored man. What could be a fuller proof of the confidence the Lord had in him? Let us not forget that He is ever the same, so we may well sing:

"Astonished at Thy feet we fall, Thy love exceeds our highest thought, Henceforth be Thou our all in all, Thou who our souls with blood hast bought; May we henceforth more faithful prove And ne'er forget Thy ceaseless love."

It is important to apprehend the nature of Peter's new commission in this scene. The lambs and sheep he was to feed and shepherd, would appear to be particularly the Jewish believers in Jesus. We can all profit by Peter's ministry, but they specially are before the Lord's mind, I doubt not. The links existing between Peter and Christ, known on earth, made him specially fitted to pasture the flock of the Jewish remnant. He feeds the lambs by showing them, as he does in the Acts, Jesus as the Messiah, and shepherds the sheep — the more advanced — by guiding them into the truth, and giving them suited food, as seen in his two epistles. It must be borne in mind that Peter was the apostle of the circumcision. He had committed to him the ministry of the circumcision. The earth was the scene of this ministry, and the promises its object, while at the same time leading individually to heaven. This testimony was to be rejected by the nation, and really terminated with Peter's death. It was different with John. His ministry, in his writings, goes on to the end — to the Lord's coming again. But the grace of the Lord to Peter does not stop with giving him this new and most precious commission. Doubtless he still felt the sorrow of having missed a grand opportunity of, for a third time, again confessing the Lord, at a critical moment. Twice he had done this, as we have seen, but to save his life, in the high priest's hall, he had thrice denied his Lord. What immense comfort, therefore, must it have been to his heart to hear the Lord now say to him, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird

thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me" (John 21:18-19). He had failed to follow the Lord in the energy of his own will; he should be allowed to follow Him by the will of God. This grace to an erring saint is not always granted. That which we have lost through want of faith and devotedness, is not always given back. Grace restored it to Peter. To go to prison and to death for Christ's sake, which he had offered in his own strength to do, and utterly failed in, he would yet accomplish by the grace and will of God. The real effect of grace is to teach us that we have no strength. This Peter learned. Feeling his own inefficiency, and depending on the grace of Christ, he would eventually do what he pretended to be competent for, when the Lord told him the contrary. At that moment his fancied strength proved only to be weakness, before the power of the enemy; at some time to come, the grace of God would strengthen him to suffer, and die for his Lord. Then, however, it would be a matter of submission to others, and not a question of his own will, and as a result God's grace would sustain him in faithfulness even to death. The truth is, that when we have no strength, and no will, we are in a state for God to take us up, and give us to follow the Lord, and to do His will. But Peter is Peter right on to the end, and even here again he appears as we read, "Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved, following. . . . Peter, seeing him, saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do?" (John 21:20-21). John, without doubt, is meant here, and having heard the call to Peter, himself follows Jesus. What Peter was bidden to do, John does. The Lord's answer is enigmatic, but highly instructive — "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me." It is enough to know our own path, we are not called on to inquire as to our brother's. "What shall this man do?" is too often on our lips. The Lord's reply is rather of the nature of a rebuke. It meant, "Leave your brother alone, Peter, and follow thou Me. You keep your eye on Me, not on your brother." How good, how salutary, such a word! One can hardly conceive that under such circumstances, with his fault just only forgiven, and his death foretold, that Peter could have put such a question about another. But as we read the record we can only say, "That is Peter to life." No matter where you find him, he is always the same impulsive man. Discretion had little part in his composition, while warmth ever marked him, and I doubt not it was his affection for John that led to his last indiscreet question. All his others we have seen elicited valuable truth from the Lord, and this is no exception. The Lord's reply, "If I will that he tarry till I come," did not mean, I judge, what the disciples drew from it, viz., that John should not die. The Lord did not say so, hence it is important not to impute a meaning to His words, instead of receiving one therefrom. This latter the Holy Ghost alone can afford, for taken literally such a meaning might be drawn as the brethren then drew. I apprehend the meaning of the Lord's words to be that, in his ministry John went on to the end — to the coming of Christ personally to judge the earth. The assembly, the Church, as the house of God, is, in the Acts, formally recognised as taking the place of Jehovah's house at Jerusalem. The destruction of Jerusalem ended the history of the assembly as thus being an earthly centre, and also ended the Jewish system connected with the law and promises. With this Peter's special ministry closes, and what is left is the heavenly assembly, of which Paul is the minister. He treats of God's counsels in Christ, and of His work which introduces us into heavenly glory. John's ministry reveals, in his Gospel and Epistles, the Person of the Son of God, and of eternal life come down from heaven, and then in the Apocalypse the government and judgment of God at the manifestation of the Lord. He remains after Paul, and he has linked the judgment of the assembly, as the responsible witness on earth (see Revelation 2:1-29; Revelation 3:1-22), with the judgment of the world, when

God, in government, shall resume His relations with the world, and send back His now rejected Son. The "till I come," therefore, of which the Lord speaks here is not His coming for the Church — the rapture of the Saints — I apprehend, but His public manifestation, or appearing on earth in glory, and John, who lived in person until the close of all that the Lord saw fit to introduce in connection with Jerusalem, continues here in his ministry, until the manifestation of Christ to the world. As a saint and servant he evidently lived a long while, and served the Lord, and his latest writing — the Revelation — carries us up to the return of the Son of Man in glory. It is in this sense, I judge, that he fulfilled the Lord's word: "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? "

Whether the explanation of this be clear to our minds or not, the last word of the Lord to Peter, "Follow thou me," is abundantly plain. May our hearts, each one, heed it to the full, and so please and serve Him, fully and untiringly, till He come!

15. CHAPTER 12 — PENTECOST, AND HIS FIRST SERMON.

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Acts 1:1-26; Acts 2:1-47.

WE left our apostle, in the end of John's gospel, on the banks of the Sea of Galilee, sweetly and happily restored to the favour and sunshine of the presence of his blessed Master. There we saw what really made Peter a servant. And now the Spirit of God, in the opening chapters of Acts, brings before us this servant doing a wonderful work. The difference between Peter in the high priest's hall, and Peter on the day of Pentecost, is this: in the high priest's hall, where you have him denying his Lord, Peter was full of himself; in the second of Acts he was "full of the Holy Ghost" — and there is an immense body of truth underlying such a statement. A man full of himself God must humble, whereas a man full of the Holy Ghost God can trust, and use for His glory. I can, therefore, quite understand, though the Lord had said to him, when He called him to follow Him, "Henceforth thou shalt catch men," why we do not hear of his catching them till Acts 2:1-47. But then what a catch! Three thousand men in one day! Let us see how it came about. The writer of the Acts of the Apostles is the same as the writer of Luke's gospel — "the beloved physician" of that name. In fact, the Acts is an appendix to that gospel, and written to the same person — the high-born Theophilus. Let us turn for a moment to the Gospel of Luke. In the last chapter we find the disciples had got back to Jerusalem, and the Lord, addressing them after His resurrection, said, "These are the words which I spake unto you while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning me." That means the then whole revelation of God, the whole of the Old Testament Scriptures. The Lord thus puts His stamp of approval on the Old Testament Scriptures from end to end; and if you do not believe in them implicitly, it is clear that you are not keeping company with Christ. Then we read that He "opened their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures." That is beautiful! Before the coming of the Holy Ghost, too, observe it is that He opens their understanding to understand the Scriptures; and I doubt not it was this opening of his understanding that enabled Peter to do as he did in the end of the first of Acts.

Then the Lord goes on to say, "Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer." It was the necessity of love that He must die if man were to be brought to God. There is but one doorway into heaven, and that is the doorway of death; not your death, but the ever memorable death of the Son of God. And consequent on that death and resurrection, "repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." Begin, says the Lord, at the very worst spot, the spot where they would not have Me, the spot where they scorned and spit upon, and slew Me; begin there, but go out to all nations. Then the Lord led the disciples out as far as Bethany, and "lifted up his hands and blessed them; and it came to pass while he blessed them he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven." His hands, uplifted in blessing, have never gone down since. In Exodus 17:1-16, where it was a question of conflict between Israel and Amalek, if Moses held up his hands Israel prevailed, but if Moses' hands fell

Amalek prevailed; so that we read that Aaron and Hur stayed up Moses' hands. But with our Jesus, blessed be His name, no one has any need to hold up His hands, they are kept up eternally in blessing. He loves to bless. It is His joy and delight.

Now let us turn again to the Acts of the Apostles. When Luke wrote his gospel, he began, "Most excellent Theophilus;" when he wrote his second letter, he began simply "O Theophilus." I do not for a moment think that Luke was a Radical, or a society-leveller in the least, but I take it he knew that Theophilus thought far less of his worldly position and title, when he last wrote to him, than when he got his first epistle from him. The knowledge of a rejected Saviour alters entirely a Christian's estimate of things — right enough in themselves — here below. The Lord had been taken up, as we have seen in the end of Luke; in the first of the Acts we have this re-stated with a little more detail. We read there that the Lord, after His resurrection, and before His ascension, was seen of His disciples for "forty days, speaking to them of the things concerning the kingdom of God." All that He says and does is "through the Holy Ghost." I believe we see here what the Christian will be in the eternal state — full of the Holy Ghost, and acting entirely by Him; and, further, what he should be even now, as "dead indeed unto sin, and alive unto God in Christ Jesus" (Romans 6:11). We have recorded in Scripture that the Lord was seen ten times in resurrection, five times on the first day of the week, and five times afterwards. He showed Himself for forty days. Why forty? Because forty was the full time of probation and testing. And there is thus the most absolute testimony as to the truth and reality of the resurrection — now, alas! so frequently denied. This time being over, the Lord tells them not to "depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which ye have heard of me" (see John 14:1-31; John 15:1-27; John 16:1-33). He then said to them, "Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth." Look how beautifully the Lord defines the circle now. The fact is, the Cross, with all its wondrous fruits for God and man, having been accomplished, every dispensational barrier had been thrown down; and salvation, like a shining river, could go out to the ends of the earth, beginning at the guiltiest spot of all, but ever widening and flowing out and on till, thank God, it reached us benighted Gentiles. If you do not yet know and possess God's salvation, my reader, I have grand news for you. You may have that salvation today. Take care you do not miss it; for if you do, you will inevitably taste damnation, and that for all eternity. From the Mount of Olives the apostles go back to Jerusalem, and assemble in the upper room, and you have the roll-call once more named, and Peter again heading the list. And while they wait, what do they do? They have a prayer-meeting! There was blessing coming, but, while waiting for its coming, we find them praying. Now let us not miss the meaning of this. If there is to be real blessing in the Church, or among the unsaved, we must have the moral condition of soul that leads up to it; you must have the heart bowed constantly in prayer if the life is to witness for God.

Peter then stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, "This scripture must needs have been fulfilled," and he quotes from the 69th and 109th Psalms.

I understand, says Peter, from Scripture, that some one else must come in to take up the "ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place." He must be chosen from the ranks "of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us." How lovely that is! Look at the beautiful intimacy of Jesus with His own. The expression, "went in and out among us" breathes volumes for the affectionate

heart.

Then they select two men, and turn and look to the Lord for the expression of His choice, and, according to Jewish order, they cast lots. Peter bases his action on the known Word of God, and I have no doubt God approved the action, founded on His Word, as it was, Matthias being chosen.

Now we pass on to the second chapter. What peculiarly marks the day of Pentecost is the coming of the Holy Ghost personally to earth, to abide in the believer, and in the assembly. This is the kernel of Christianity. By the death of the Lord Jesus the way had been laid open, back to God. Sin had been put away, the grave opened, death annulled, and the Lord Jesus having ascended to the right hand of God, as Man, and anew received the Holy Ghost in that place of exaltation, the way was prepared for the Holy Ghost to come to earth to take the place of Jesus, and reproduce the life of Jesus in His disciples here below. So we read that "suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost." The house was filled, and they were all filled. You have the indwelling of the Spirit of God in them personally, and also the Holy Ghost dwelling amongst them collectively, a truth of the utmost importance alike for this day, as for that. I doubt not the cloven tongues indicated that God's testimony was no longer to be confined to the Jew only. His testimony was to go to the ends of the earth, hence a divided tongue, and of fire, because it was to judge all that was contrary to God (fire is ever a symbol of judgment), to break man down, break up his pride, and consume what is opposed to God.

While we have the tongue of fire sitting on these men at the beginning of this chapter, we find the tongue of fire doing its work in the three thousand men at the end of the chapter, pricking them to the heart, and bowing them down low before the Lord in confession of their sins, and of His name.

Then follows a wonderful scene, as "they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:4). The manifest contrast with Genesis 11:1-32, in which, because of the pride of man, we find God confounding men's tongues, is very remarkable. Here, because of the perfection in obedience of the humbled Man — Jesus — who, in every possible circumstance, and with utter will-lessness, had been absolutely devoted to, and had perfectly glorified God, there was a temporary reversal of Babel, and the apostles, empowered by the Holy Ghost, could speak in all sorts of languages that they had never learned, and all the various nationalities who were in the city came up, and had to hear about Jesus. God, so to say, rang the bell in this remarkable way just to gather souls to hear of His Son. Blessed, indeed, are the ways of the God of all grace.

Now we see what follows. Those that hear are amazed — as well they might be — and say, "What meaneth this?" While some inquire honestly, What means this? — and it is most blessed to inquire honestly what does God mean — yet, alas! others mocked. How sad, my friend, to be ranked amongst the mockers, either then or now. Do not forget that if you mock in the day of His grace, God can do similarly in the day of your calamity. (See Proverbs 1:20-33.)

Now, hear what Peter has to say, "Ye men of Judea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken unto my words." There is something perfectly beautiful in the bold way this man speaks. He has such a sense of his Master's love, and grace, and pardon, that he

can stand up now and face the whole world for his beloved Master. So he continues, "These are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel." The devil will invent any reason to get rid of the testimony of God, but usually shows his folly therein, and specially so here, for it was the custom among the Jews not to break their fast before the morning sacrifice, therefore they had not eaten, much less had drunk. Peter says, as it were, This is the first instalment of the prophecy of Joel. He knows now how to handle the Scriptures, and thus he cites from, rather than directly and literally quotes, Joel. I have no doubt the complete fulfilment of Joel's prophecy (Joel 2:28-32) remains for a future day, when the Jews are again in Palestine — a restored people — hence Peter is careful not to say it is the fulfilment. Just before the Messiah, the Son of Man, comes out in judgment of the earth, Joel's prophecy will be fulfilled. But you, my reader, if you miss salvation now, will never come in for it then. You will never be converted, when the Lord comes by-and-by to set up His kingdom upon earth, if you refuse to take Christ now. The day of blessing, of which Joel speaks, is for those who have never heard the Gospel of a heavenly Saviour. All present rejecters of Him will be judged, not blessed, then.

Peter then goes on to give a lovely testimony to the Lord — "Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know." He calls attention to the beautiful life of his Master: what He had been doing, how on every hand He had been blessing men, as they well knew. But then what a charge he makes! He charges boldly home on them their guilt. "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel, and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." Terrible impeachment! They were guilty of the murder of their Messiah, and of the refusal of the Son of God. Only seven weeks before they had refused to have the Lord, and had chosen Barabbas, a robber and a murderer, instead of Him. They had cried, "Away with him, crucify him," even though Pilate, the Roman governor, had declared Him innocent.

You may say, my unsaved reader, I never cried, Away with Him! But have you ever taken your stand on the side of the Christ whom the world rejected then, and rejects still? This day it is true for you that you must receive or reject Him. You did not help to nail Him to the tree, with your hands — true; but what about your sins, which helped to place Him there? And has He not been standing at the door of your heart, knocking, and saying, Let Me in? Yes, and you have refused to let Him in till this moment; you have refused to give Christ His right place in your heart. God have mercy on you! God save you! The mob said in that day, "Let him be crucified" — that is, get rid of Him. And what does your attitude to Christ now mean? Many a time you have had Him presented to you for your acceptance, and up till now your desire has been to get rid of Him; and you have managed to put Him away from you. Peter's solemn charge has a terrible application to you, dear unsaved reader. But the Man whom the world refused, God has raised from the dead, and seated at His own right hand. Peter could remind his hearers that they had crucified Him; gambled for His garments under His dying eyes; turned carelessly away when they saw He was dead; set a seal upon His tomb — and, when it was found empty, had paid "hush-money" to godless watchmen, to say they slept while His disciples stole His body. The watchers took the money and did as they were taught. The lie was believed for seven weeks, but now God sends Peter to proclaim that He is alive! He could not be holden of death; He went into it, but came up out of it, annulling its power, and gaining title to set its captives free.

Then Peter quotes David, and shows how Psalms 16:1-11 could not refer to him when it said, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in Hades, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption," for David had seen corruption, but the flesh of the Lord saw no corruption. Death had no claim on Him; but when God gave His Son, and man in his wickedness killed Him, by dying He annulled the power of death, and put away sin, which brought in death. As death came in by sin, so sin was put away by death; and the Man who died — and died for me, I am thankful to say — God has raised from the dead, "whereof," as Peter says, "we all are witnesses." If you were to seek for them, my friend, you could easily find twelve witnesses now to the fact that there is a risen Saviour. But Peter continues: — "Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens, but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand until I make thy foes thy footstool; therefore, let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." The work of redemption is done, the power of the devil is broken, and the Holy Ghost has come down to let us know this, and that the Lord sits on high till He makes His foes His footstool, and meantime He is gathering out His friends. Are you among His friends, my reader?

There is direct variance, Peter urges, between the house of Israel and God. They put the Lord in the tomb, and God has put Him on His throne in glory; and there He is in heaven till His enemies are made His footstool. Peter opened the door of the kingdom of heaven that day, as he unfolded, the truth that the King is in heaven. He was commissioned to unlock the Jewish leaf of the door that day, and what is the result? "They were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" They are awakened to a sense of their guilt, sin, and danger; and in reply to their query Peter says, "Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, for the remission of sins" — that is, judge yourselves, own your guilt, acknowledge your true state, "and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." If you own the Lord I own, you will get what I have got. "For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." The Gentiles are brought in there; God is sovereign in His grace; and how we should bless Him that it is extended to us, and that He has called us, who were indeed "afar off."

Peter then adds, "Save yourselves from this untoward generation." But you say, "How can I save myself?" By coming to Jesus, who is the living Saviour, and clearing out of the world which is under judgment. "You are in wrong company this day," Peter as it were says; "come out from among them."

It was a noble address, and much blessed of God, for we read, "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized; and the same day there were added about three thousand souls." This was grand fishing, indeed: and how Satan must have bewailed the hand he had in fitting the fisherman for his glorious work!

There is a lovely contrast I would here note between the reign of law, and that of grace. The day that Moses brought down the law, graven on tables of stone — only to find it broken already — three thousand men died by Levi's sword — three thousand law-breakers were hurled into eternity unblessed (Exodus 32:28). The day the Holy Ghost came down to witness to an ascended Saviour, three thousand souls were brought to that Saviour, and were blessed and saved by Him;

three thousand took their stand boldly for the Lord, having judged themselves, believed the truth, and received forgiveness of sins, and the Holy Ghost as the seal of their faith.

What follows is noteworthy. "They continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." This is very charming. I believe if you had gone to the breaking-of-bread meeting you would have found them all there, and, if you had gone to the prayer-meeting, you would have found them all there too. At the start of Christianity the prayer-meeting and the breaking-of-bread meeting were co-extensive. The activity of the grace of God was lovely. They were so fresh and so happy in the Lord's love that they could not get on without meeting daily. And they had wonderful testimony outside, for they were "praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." This then was the result of Peter's right use of "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God," and of "the keys of the kingdom of heaven" that day. And now, my reader, may you be like one of these three thousand — believe the Saviour, receive the Saviour, and confess the Saviour, and then you will know in your heart that you have received the forgiveness of your sins, and that the Holy Ghost dwells in you, as the seal of that forgiveness.

16. Simon Peter, 3 The Cripple etc.

Simon Peter, 3 The Cripple etc.

Section 3 of 5 (chapters 13-19) of:

Chapter 13 — THE CRIPPLE, AND THE BUILDERS Chapter 14 — TEMPTING THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD Chapter 15 — SIGNS AND WONDERS Chapter 16 — FIFTEEN DAYS WITH PAUL Chapter 17 — CORNELIUS AND HIS HOUSEHOLD Chapter 18 — PRAYED OUT OF PRISON Chapter 19 — WITHSTOOD AT ANTIOCH

17. Chapter 13 — The Cripple, and the Builders.

Chapter 13 — The Cripple, and the Builders.

Acts 3:1-26; Acts 4:1-22. In Acts 3:1-26, if I may so say, God rings the bell the second time to gather the people together, that He may continue His testimony to His beloved Son. In the second chapter it was by the coming of the Holy Ghost, and the miraculous gift of tongues, that this testimony was produced. Now we shall see how it was maintained.

Peter and John, evidently bosom friends, and peculiarly linked together all through the gospels, went up together at the ninth hour of the day to pray. They had been partners in business in olden times, had caught fish together on the Sea of Galilee, and now they were partners in a new business, and go out together, not to catch fish, but men.

These two men were the complement one of the other. What Peter lacked John possessed. The latter was in the main as calm as the former was impulsive. John was evidently a quiet, restful, meditative man, with deep affection, resembling Mary of Bethany, while Peter was the counterpart of Martha, among the apostles. That John could thunder was evident, for the Lord, when he called him and his brother James, "surnamed them Boanerges, which is, The sons of thunder" (Mark 3:17). Peter was always thundering, his torrential character carrying him resistlessly along, and sweeping all before it. Nevertheless in John was the greater moral power. Real power is always quiet. But the two were evidently devoted to each other, as to their common Master, and we never read of a hitch between them. Theirs manifestly was a friendship with a holy, and consequently an abiding basis, and well would it be for us if all our friendships had a substratum of a similar nature. In the work of the Lord it is of all-importance to have a well-chosen companion, a true yoke-fellow, as was John to Peter, and Timothy or Epaphroditus to Paul (see Php 2:22, Php 4:3).

It is here well to mark that Peter and John go up together to pray. It is sweet to see how frequently prayer is recorded as ascending to God in the Acts. In the first chapter we find the disciples continuing "with one accord in prayer and supplication," and then praying about the choice of a fresh fellow-worker. In the second chapter we find the disciples continuing steadfastly "in prayers." In this chapter — Acts 3:1-26 — we have Peter and John going up to the temple at the hour of prayer; and in the fourth chapter we find them praying again, and being "all filled with the Holy Ghost" (Acts 4:31). (See also Acts 6:4, Acts 7:60, Acts 8:15; Acts 8:22, Acts 9:11; Acts 9:40, Acts 10:2; Acts 10:9; Acts 10:30-31, Acts 11:5, Acts 12:5; Acts 12:12, Acts 13:3, Acts 14:23, Acts 16:13; Acts 16:25, Acts 20:36, Acts 22:17.)

I believe we have here the secret of the power of the moment. The servants and the saints were continually dependent upon God. They looked to, Him to work, and He did work most blessedly. The incident in chapter 3 is familiar. "And a certain man, lame from his mother's womb, was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple; who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms." The next chapter tells us that this man was forty years old. Forty, we have seen, is in

Scripture the number of perfect probation. Every one knew him, he was no longer a child, and he was in a condition that no one could meet or reach; and now he is met by the power of the Name of Jesus. Forty years old, and well known, no one could dispute the fact of his being healed. A notable miracle was to be wrought, and God takes care to have it well attested. The poor lame beggar is the type of a sinner who has got nothing if he has not got Christ. "And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us. And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them." I have no doubt his heart beat high as he heard Peter's words. Doubtless he thought to receive something of them, and he did not know what that something was. He was like many a one now casting about to get money. Look what the Lord gives him. "Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk." How his heart must have sunk as he heard the words, "Silver and gold have I none," and thought — They are two paupers, just like myself.

But, observe, that ere he has time to be thoroughly depressed, Peter goes on to bid him to "rise up and walk." And then we read that Peter "took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength." The power of the Name of Jesus is manifested in the healing of the physical disability. The power of that Name thrills through him, "and he, leaping up, stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God." I understand his radiant joy, and I can understand too the immense joy that a sinner feels, when the Gospel meets him, and he finds his sins forgiven — washed away through his Saviour's blood. It is beautiful to see it in each respective case, and this man goes into the temple "walking, and leaping, and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God: and they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him." And if you were to become converted, my friend, all your friends would be amazed. If you appear as a totally new man, would they not be thoroughly surprised? and what a testimony would it be to the power of Christ! I do not know anything more powerful, as a testimony to the grace of God, than the fervent joyous life of a devoted Christian.

Then you find that the man holds on to Peter and John. He knows where the power is, and I do not wonder at his keeping close to them. The next day, when they were taken prisoners, this man goes boldly into the council, and although silent, becomes a witness to the power of the Name of Jesus, for he was the one who was healed. In the next verses of our chapter Peter again charges home the guilt of the nation on their consciences, but at the same time shows how the grace of God can override the guiltiest act of the guiltiest nation on the face of the earth. Observing how the masses marvelled, for "all the people ran together unto them, in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering," Peter says to them, "Why marvel ye at this?" It was only what Christ was worthy of. Peter had this in his soul, My Master is worthy of anything, there is no limit to the power of His name. The people marvelled because they had no faith; and the reason why Christians so often marvel now, when the Lord works mightily, is because they have so little faith. They were looking at the instrument, — a very foolish thing to do in things divine. God almost always uses base and foolish things to work His ends. It was at the blowing of trumpets of rams' horns that Jericho's mighty walls fell down. It was into the hands of the three hundred men that lapped, that the Lord delivered the hosts of Midian, in the days of Gideon. What we want is what Peter had here. He was full of the Holy Ghost, and his heart was full of Christ, as to his affections and

confidence, and this is exactly what we want now.

Then Peter tells his tale. "The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus," or rather his "servant" Jesus it should be. You do not find Peter preaching Jesus as the Son of God. That was reserved for Paul. Peter preaches Him as God's servant Jesus. When we come to the ninth chapter of the Acts, where Paul is converted, he at once begins the ministry of the Son of God. "And straightway he preached Jesus in the synagogue, that he is the Son of God" (Acts 9:20).

Peter's point here is clearly this — Jesus is in glory, the One who was once here on earth, is now in the glory. Then he comes down on their consciences, as he says, "Whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go." He does not speak of Judas, though no doubt Judas was the immediate instrument of delivering Him up. "But ye denied the Holy One and the Just"; they denied the One whom he asserts to be the Messiah, and whom God declares to be the Holy One and the Just.

See how fearlessly he proclaims the truth as he says, "Ye denied the Holy One." It is possible some one may have retorted, "Why, Peter, you are very bold, it is only a few weeks since, that, in the high priest's hall, you denied Him." Yes, Peter would say, alas! it is true that I denied Him, but I have bitterly repented of my folly and sin; I have met Him, and owned it all to Him, and He has forgiven me. I have had it all out with Him, and I have learnt that He has died for me, that I might be forgiven, and I am forgiven. I have met Him, and have had an hour alone with Him — yes, alone with Him — and all is forgiven, and effaced.

How charming and effectual is the work of grace in a real heart. Peter illustrates this beautifully, for now that he is cleansed, and forgiven, his conscience is purged, and though it was only seven weeks and a few days, since he had denied his Lord, yet now he can fearlessly turn round and charge his hearers with the sin which he himself had been guilty of. "Ye denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go." They helped to seal Pilate's doom, as well as to murder their own Messiah. "Ye denied the Holy One and the Just" is a terrible charge against them, while withal it is a precious testimony as to who and what his Master was, the Holy One of God. Face your sins, Peter, so to speak, says, go down before God, and face your iniquities. "Ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you, and killed the Prince of Life." Terrible indictment! But you, my reader, may say, Surely you do not charge me with such an awful sin? Well, I ask you, have you ever taken your place on the side of the murdered One? If not, you are still on the side of His murderers. "He that is not with me is against me," the Lord says. It was the world or Jesus, in that day; it is the world or Jesus, in this day. I appeal to you, how does it stand with you, my friend? When Peter says, You "killed the Prince of Life," I can imagine their souls trembling, because they knew it was true. There was no gainsaying this charge of the Holy Ghost's. What an indictment! "Ye killed the Prince of Life." True, He suffered Himself to be slain; but Peter says, You killed Him. And now look at the chasm between the world and God. Look how opposed are the thoughts of the world, and God's thoughts of Jesus, "whom God raised from the dead." Could there be a greater contrast? — You killed Him, but God raised Him from the dead.

Now then, my dear reader, on which side will you range yourself, on God's side, or the world's? There is no middle ground between the world and God, not one step. Satan would like to make

you think that there is. He does not mind your being religious. If you do not get converted, and come to Christ, you may be as religious as you like, for he knows that you may be a professor of Christ, while not a possessor of Him; that you may be a perfect encyclopaedia of Biblical knowledge, and yet go to hell. Every man goes there that is not savingly converted. If you have been a formalist till now, just turn to the Saviour now, at once, just where you are, and as you are, and learn His grace. There is no satisfaction, or salvation in mere religiousness, you must know Jesus.

Peter, you will observe, informs the Jews that day, that they and God had taken two quite opposite courses. You put Him into a grave, God took Him out of it, "whereof we are witnesses," — and further, He has put Him into glory. Nor this only, "His name through faith in his name, hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know. Yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all" (Acts 3:16). And only faith in His name can do anything now for you, my friend. It is His name, and faith in His name alone, that secures blessing for the soul. This man rose up, and walked in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, and, my unconverted reader, I say to you, In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise out of your bed of sins, and come to Him. You may be saved this very moment if you have faith in the name of Jesus. At this point of his discourse, Peter brings in the balm of grace as he says, "Brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers." On the cross Jesus had prayed, "Father, forgive them," and now Peter, following in his Master's steps, is led to proclaim forgiveness. Here is the way of escape he opens, "Repent ye therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." Do you want your sins blotted out, my friend? Nothing but the blood of Jesus can blot them out. And how can you get this blessing? By repentance, and turning to God, having faith in the name of the Lord Jesus. What is repentance? Repentance is this: I judge myself. What is conversion? Conversion is this: I turn round to the Lord. This is all illustrated in the parable of the prodigal son. He was convicted when he said, "How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger." His conviction was of a double nature, there was goodness in his father's heart, while there was badness in his own. This conviction altered his whole course, and turned him round. "The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance," we read (Romans 2:4). It is His goodness that leads man to repentance, and not man's repentance that leads God to goodness. This conviction ends in his conversion. He was converted when he arose and came to his father. He was confessing his sins when he said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee." He was repentant when he said, "I am no more worthy to be called thy son."

Repentance is the judgment which the soul passes upon itself in the presence of God, believing the testimony of God. Repentance is not the stepping-stone to conversion. Repentance is taking God's part against myself, and judging that what God says of me is true, believing His testimony. Faith is the soul's reception of a divine testimony: repentance is the result in the soul of that reception. Some one has well said, "Repentance is the tear drop in the eye of faith." Very wisely and rightly then did Peter preach and press this wholesome moral process upon their souls, with this end in view, "that your sins may be blotted out." That "God before had showed by the mouth of all his prophets that Christ should suffer," was no excuse for the nation's guilt. God really sent Jesus to be a Saviour, Peter says, and you showed your guilt, and the evil state of your hearts by murdering Him; but God knew what was needed, and what He had foreordained. Christ must needs suffer, the Scriptures said, "it behoved him to suffer." It is all fulfilled now, therefore repent,

and believe, and get your sins blotted out, and then God will send Jesus Christ back again. There is a splendid character about Peter's exhortation at this point. "Repent ye, therefore, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and he shall send Jesus Christ, who was foreordained for you; whom heaven must receive until the times of the restitution of all things" (Acts 3:19-21). A lovely Gospel for repentant sinners to listen to was this indeed, and the next chapter shows that two thousand souls at least turned round to the Saviour, and got forgiveness of their sins. The Word was mixed with faith in those who heard it that day.

We must bear in mind that the Jews were always looking for the kingdom, the millennial reign of the Messiah. Very well, says Peter, the millennium will come, but it will come in connection with that Jesus whom ye have crucified, and "whom heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, of which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." If you are going in for the kingdom, you must have God's King — the Lord Jesus.

Then he presses on them some scriptures. Jesus was the One to whom all the prophets gave witness; Moses had said unto the fathers, "A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things, whatsoever he shall say unto you." Even on the mount of transfiguration God had said concerning Jesus, "Hear ye him," but alas, they did not. Yet see how grave are the issues that hang upon hearing the voice of this Prophet, "And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people." Now, that Jesus was this indicated Prophet is plain, for Peter goes on to say, "Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel, and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days." Everything depends, he says, on how you hear Him. Nothing could be plainer. To hear Jesus is to secure salvation. To deafen the ear, and harden the heart against Him, is to seal the soul's eternal doom.

Listen, my undecided readers, to this warning voice, for Peter's sermon was not only for the people of Judea, in that day, it is meant for you and me today. It is world-wide in its application. You know, my unsaved friend, that you have turned a deaf ear to the Lord's voice up till now. Do you say, I have made up my mind not to be converted? Then, you may, at the same time, make up your mind to be eternally damned, for Peter warningly says, "It shall come to pass that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people."

Then he goes back to quote the beautiful covenant word of God to Abraham, "And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed," and with the most touching grace thus concludes his address, "Unto you first, God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities." It was a charming peroration, and contained the most beautiful Gospel that could possibly fall on their ears. Little wonder that many of the people believed. But not so the leaders, as the next chapter tells us. In Acts 4:1-37 we find that the priests, and the captain of the temple, joined with the Sadducees in persecuting the apostles. Two very different companies were these, the priests, and the Sadducees. The Sadducees did not believe in resurrection, angel, spirit, or in a future state, in fact, they believed nothing (see Acts 24:8). They were the Rationalists of that day, and if you are like these Sadducees, my friend, you have nothing to rest your soul upon. But the devil will put these two opposing sections together, in order to fight against the truth, and the servants of God. These men were preaching a risen

Saviour, One who had gone into death, and annulled it, and come up out of it: and that One, I rejoice to say, is my Saviour. No wonder that the devil, and all his servants, were "grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from among the dead" (ver. 2), for the soul who knows a living, triumphant, and victorious Saviour, for ever passes out of Satan's clutches.

"Howbeit many of them that heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand." It says nothing about the women and children, and if we may judge of the companies who heard the Word in that day, by the companies who listen to the Word today, there must have been a grand lot of conversions, for there are usually far more women and children than men ready to hear, and, thank God, to believe the Gospel too.

Men often think the Gospel is only for women and children, but what fools such will look in eternity, who, having despised the Gospel now, then find themselves, when too late, eternally damned. Oh, be a man for Christ now, come out boldly for Christ now! The common people had the Gospel presented to them in the third chapter, the leaders are going to get it now in the fourth. "On the morrow, their rulers, and elders, and scribes, and Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this? Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, if we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole." The secret of Peter's power here was, that he was full of the Holy Ghost. But did you ever hear of such utter folly as putting a man in prison, and trying him for a good deed — healing a cripple? God brings the man in, as it were, to give witness to that council. I do not expect he was invited by the council, for he was an awkward witness. Look at him now, whole! Yesterday he was a poor cripple until three o'clock, now he is a hale man. And what had done it? The power of the Name of that Jesus "whom ye crucified," that was their guilt, "whom God raised from the dead," there was God's righteousness. And now for the application, "This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner." And what was the stone? Christ, of course, but Christ in glory, as the Head Stone of the corner. Here Peter is in conflict with these poor, foolish builders, and there are plenty of them in our days, people who are building without Christ. The Lord had said, speaking of Himself as the Stone — (see Matthew 21:44) — "Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder." The corner stone, about to fall, is the exalted Christ, coming by-and-by in glory, and destroying the godless Gentiles in the day of His wrath. Those who fell over it and were broken, were the Jews, stumbling over Jesus in His humiliation. Ah, take care that you, my friend, are right as regards that Stone, for Peter goes on to say, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name, under heaven, given among men whereby we must be saved."

You yield your heart to Jesus now, and you will find your sins blotted out, and that you are pardoned and forgiven; yea, built then on the Rock that can never be shaken, because you are built on Him who died and rose again, and you will find that His Name is everything to you now, and will be your joy for ever, the Name of Jesus. The Lord give you to know, my reader, the power

of that Name. God will have that Name to be honoured, the Name of the glorified Saviour. The Lord give you grace to trust Him now, and know that you are saved by Him, and by Him alone, the Chief Corner Stone. The one only Name "given among men whereby we must be saved" will then be your delight, and you will learn to sing truly and joyfully: - "There is a name I love to hear, I love to sing its worth;

It sounds like music in mine ear, The sweetest name on earth.

Jesus! the name I love so well, The name I love to hear, No saint on earth its worth can tell, No heart conceive how dear."

Peter's statement, "There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved," evidently staggered the august council before whom he and his fellow-apostle stood. They pause in their opposition, and have a secret conference what to do. "The boldness of Peter and John" (Acts 4:13) impressed them, and "beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing" (Acts 4:14) — they were silenced. Faith and facts are two stubborn witnesses. Both attest God's grace. The outcome of the conference was — "That indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it." They admit defeat, and then, calling in the apostles, "commanded them not to speak at all, nor teach in the name of Jesus." This command raised the most important question possible: Was God to be obeyed or man? The apostles permit of no ambiguity as to the course they judge right to adopt, for we read, "Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye." The prohibitory injunction of man had no weight with them. God had commanded them to preach Christ — to preach the Gospel, and "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" is their emphatic, and bold rejoinder. The religious leaders of Israel were not now the expositors of the will of God — they were opposed to His will. The path of Peter and his companions is plain. God must be obeyed rather than man.

It is to be noted here that the action of the apostles is in no sense opposed to the scripture that enjoins: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God. The powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God" (Romans 13:1-2). Again, Peter himself said at a later day, "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as 'unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well" (1 Peter 2:13-14). In the case before us it was not a question of the king or of the civil power, — which the saint ever recognises as the sword of God, put into man's hand, — but of ecclesiastical and priestly arrogance, which has no claim on the conscience for allegiance. There is a principle of immense importance here, viz., that a child of God is never supposed to disobey God, in order to obey man. The civil power may make regulations which deprive the saint of privileges he would like to enjoy, but the latter must never disobey God, in order to conform to the will of the former. He may have to endure deprivation of a privilege, but never can disobey a divine command. This Peter's action here makes abundantly clear.

"And being let go, they went to their own company." This is a fine word. There was a separated people, who all knew each other, and to them the liberated apostles repair. When set free from earthly toil, or bonds, do we each know what it is to find out this company day by day? They did so

in Peter's day, and had a prayer-meeting with great results.

18. CHAPTER 14 — TEMPTING THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD.

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Acts 4:23-37, Acts 5:1-16. THE connection between the early part of Acts 5:1-42 and the end of chapter 4 is easily apparent. In the fourth chapter we hear of the apostles, and those with them, having a prayer-meeting, and we get the result. "When they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4:31). This was the normal condition of things at the beginning of Christianity. Every one possessed the Holy Ghost, and knew it. As a Divine Person He was on the earth, and dwelt in every believer. The Church was a large company by this time. Five thousand men had been converted, but we do not hear of the introduction of a woman till the fifth chapter. Afterwards we hear of numbers of men and women being added.

It must have been a lovely spectacle that met the eye, in these Pentecostal times, recorded in the end of Acts 4:1-37. The Church then made everything of Christ. It was not a community, formed and maintained, on a dead level, by law, but the result of the working of the grace of God in the heart, so that every one was thinking of everybody else — no one of himself. It was the spontaneous outcome of Divine love in the believers, as they found out the place of blessing and privilege they had in Christ. We read that, "With great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus; and great grace was upon them all" (Acts 4:33). Great power and great grace are here seen, and the two ever go together; wherever you have great grace, you will find great power.

"Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the price of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need." I have little doubt there was a common fund. Very likely many a young believer lost everything by becoming a Christian, but they counted it all joy to suffer shame for Jesus' name. Yet none were allowed to lack, for all were supplied by the love of the rest. Those who had goods came and laid them down at the apostles' feet, as they liked; there was nothing to compel, it was all voluntary. This you have Barnabas beautifully illustrating (Acts 4:36-37). He makes a beautiful start, for there is the complete surrender of all that he had to Christ. I Wonder if you, my reader, have started so. I do not believe there is a real start, if Christ has not become everything to the soul. The beauty of this scene is great. It is a sort of spiritual Eden. But, alas! as the serpent entered that scene of joy, so does he enter this. Eden was the habitation of man, with God as a visitor. Satan entered to spoil it. The Church is the habitation of God by the Spirit, who has formed it by His presence. It is here seen in its first beauty as formed of God, and being His habitation. The Holy Spirit of God dwelt there, and ruled for a while. Alas! the flesh soon entered, for Satan could not bear to see unbroken communion, and unalloyed attachment to Christ. In Acts 5:1-42 the imitation of this lovely attachment of heart to Christ is before us. Undoubtedly Barnabas was looked on as very devoted to the Lord. Things among men are often merely imitative. We have such hearts that even the

desire to seem devoted may be imitated, and, evidently, Ananias and Sapphira desired to appear as devoted, in the eyes of men, as Barnabas really was. Alas! they did not think of how their actions would appear to the Lord. Ananias posed as one who would appear more devoted than he really was; but God will not be mocked. Ananias appears in the guise of a man devoted to the interests of Christ. Peter comes to the front again, and, led of God, at once detects this unreal state of matters.

"A certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, and kept back part of the price, his wife being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?" Did that man tell a lie? We do not read, at that moment, of any words being spoken. He came and laid down his money at the feet of the apostles, for the common need of all. But God was there, and He could not be deceived. Peter simply says, "Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost" (Acts 5:4-5). This man wanted to appear to possess a devotedness that was not real, but God was in the midst of His assembly, and the unreality was detected, exposed, and judged by Him. How solemn! Yet, if there be anything that it is truly blessed to learn, it is that God is in the midst of His people, in the bosom of the assembly, and He will have reality. What burning thoughts must have possessed Ananias's soul at that moment, as he felt — God has detected me!

"I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified," God had long ago said, as He judged the impiety of Nadab and Abihu (see Leviticus 10:3). They offered strange fire, and died. Again, Achan took of the accursed thing, and died too (Joshua 7:1-26).

Here Ananias dies, for the Lord will have reality. The two priests betrayed impiety; Achan, cupidity; Ananias, unreality. These are solemn lessons. The Lord would have every one of us weigh them in His presence, and feel that it is a solemn thing to enter God's assembly, and to take His name upon our lips. I believe the nearer we get to the truth, the more sure we are to be detected if we are not real. If you want to have mammon inside, with a cloak of religiousness outside, do not you come to the Lord's table. Do not come near the place where the Lord is, for you will be detected. Such is the lesson of Acts 5:1-42. A little later Sapphira comes in, "And Peter answered and said unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much." She is bold, and defiant in her lying. "Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord?" God knew what had taken place — they had talked over the matter, and made an agreement. What did Peter mean by tempting the Spirit of the Lord? How could they do that? Israel tempted God in the desert, saying, "Is the Lord among us, or not?" (Exodus 17:7.) They were not sure of His presence among them. Ananias and Sapphira, evidently, were not sure if the Lord was in the assembly after all. But God was there! The great, the grand truth of the Acts is, that a Divine Person is dwelling on earth in the bosom of God's assembly. The Lord showed that His Spirit was there, by unveiling the heart of both husband and wife to His servant Peter, and then judging the evil and the evildoers.

God is ever intolerant of evil in His assembly. He judges evil amongst His saints, just because He is amongst them. He cannot allow evil even where He does not dwell; how much less where He does dwell. The more His presence is manifested, and realised, the more intolerant is He of what

is unsuited to Him. It cannot be otherwise. God is holy, and He will have holiness among His saints. What makes this scene so sad is the subtle way in which the evil came in to at first corrupt the Church. Ananias and Sapphira pretended to follow an impulse of the Holy Ghost, whose actual presence they disregarded — yea, even doubted, — and they fall dead in the presence of Him whom in their blindness they forgot they could not deceive, though they might deceive His servants. No testimony to the presence of God in the assembly could be more mighty, albeit that it be most painful in its effects. The presence of God in the midst of His own is a truth of the deepest importance. Its seriousness is only equalled by its blessedness.

But, you ask, had Ananias and Sapphira been really converted? Were they Christians? I do not know. They were, outwardly, members of God's assembly on earth, and they were unreal in the position they occupied. The hand of the Lord came upon them in judgment; and, as a direct result, "great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things." The assembly itself, and those outside it too, were greatly moved. All felt God's presence was there, and, as a holy consequence, "of the rest durst no man join himself to them." People were not in a great hurry to come into God's assembly in those days. Those who wanted to be thought something of, said, It will not do to go in there; if we are not real, we shall be found out. I fancy I see a number of half-hearted souls, hangers-on round the divinely gathered company of that day, and when the news comes out that God would not have unreality, they feared to go in.

"And of the rest durst no man join himself unto them; but the people magnified them," is a striking word. "The rest" were clearly those who had some place in the world; religious or otherwise. They fear to offend the world that has given them a position; for the more place man gives us the less we like to forfeit his approval. "The people," — the common people, I presume, — however, were not so affected by the world's favour, or its fear. They had nothing to lose, and everything to gain by receiving Christ; and being simple they received the truth. Among them were found plenty of real souls. "Multitudes both of men and women," "were added to the Lord." Here, after Sapphira, we have the fact noticed of the introduction of women into the assembly, and they come in, in multitudes.

I believe the lesson we have to learn from such a solemn scene is, that God's eye is on us. He keeps a long look-out, and eventually always deals with unreality; but if a soul is simple and honest, it says, and loves to say, like the Psalmist, not only, "O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me," but adds, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalms 139:1-24). The simple and dependent soul that clings to the Lord is always safe, and always kept.

19. CHAPTER 15 — SIGNS AND WONDERS.

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Acts 5:12 — Acts 9:1-43.

ALTHOUGH God never repeats Himself, there is often to be observed a similarity in His ways, at the beginning of a new dispensation, with His actings in that which preceded it. This is observable in the section of Peter's history now before us, in connection with the establishment and progress of God's new work — Christianity, — the essence of which is the presence and power of the Holy Ghost. When the Lord Jesus began His public ministry, His divine, as well as Messianic attributes, were attested in a remarkable way. We read, "And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease among the people. And his fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them. And there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judea, and from beyond Jordan" (Matthew 4:23-25). Most of His miracles of healing — and all His miracles, be it noted, were miracles of goodness, not judgment, as sometimes was the case in God's actings through His servants — were wrought in the early days of His earthly ministry. The object is plain. Attention were called to His presence, and mission. A divine person, the Son of God, was on earth, in human form. The same thing is to be noted in the Acts, in connection with the presence of the Holy Ghost here, as actually come to earth, and indwelling the assembly, and the servants of God. Thus signs and wonders — the exercise of the "gifts of healing" of which we read in 1 Corinthians 14:1-40 — were to be expected, and they are not wanting. A divine Person, the third Person of the blessed Trinity, though invisible to mortal eyes, was here, and here in a new way, and His presence was thus attested. Hence we read, "And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them. There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one" (Acts 5:12; Acts 5:15-16). In truth it was the fourth of Matthew over again, the Spirit of God replacing the Son of God, and using as the vessels of His power the apostles, and Peter apparently chiefly. This miraculous testimony to the power of God had a double effect; people came from far and near to profit by it, and Satan began to tremble for his kingdom, and his servants were "filled with indignation" (Acts 5:17). Peter is evidently greatly used, as the Lord's messenger, both for the healing of the bodies of men and the blessing of their souls. Bitter opposition rises, and he and the rest of the apostles are cast into the common prison. But the Lord would not have His work put a stop to by Satan's servants. God, in providence, watches over His work, and, acting through the ministry of angels, frustrates all the plans of the opposers of His grace.

He had been working miracles through His servants, now He works miraculously for them, so the angel of the Lord opens the prison doors by night, and brings them out, and says, "Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life" (Acts 5:20). Oh, what a commission! How beautiful for the angelic messenger of God to give these dear men this lovely message. "Speak all the words of this life." Do we know the words of this life? Then we too have a lovely commission, which takes in the whole circle of truth, as our testimony. "All the words of this life." It means all about Christ, all about redemption through Him, all about forgiveness of sins, all about sanctification, and the presence of the Holy Ghost, all the things that belong to Christ.

There is immense power in this charge, "Speak to the people all the words of this life." The Gospel was, and is, the power of God. It alone can meet man's necessity. All other agencies are really futile. We live in a day when education, equalisation, social elevation, and temperance reformation have each and all their many advocates. They all fail to meet the case. Man's condition as a sinner away from God, and sunk under sin, and the power of Satan, is alone met by the Gospel of Christ, which quickens him out of death, gives him a new nature, a new life, a new power, and a new object. To attempt to patch up, improve, mend, or reform the old nature is a hopeless, and God-forbidden task. "Go, stand and speak to the people all the words of this life", is the divine commission now. This is God's panacea for the hopeless ruin, and moral pravity in which the whole human family is sunk. A dead man needs life. "Dead in trespasses and sins" exactly describes man's condition. How sweetly suited to his state is the remedy the servants of God are to use, "the words of this life." Let us see to it that we use only this divine remedy. It is all powerful. Like Goliath's sword, "there is none like it." The Lord's command is plain. Ring out the Gospel. Preach it "in season and out of season." It alone will lift man up to God, as, in it, God has come down to man.

Peter and the apostles gave immediate heed to the angelic injunction, and go to the temple and preach.

Meanwhile the council gathers, and sends officers "to have them brought." The officers go, and return, saying, "The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers without before the doors; but when we had opened, we found no man within." Well might the council be puzzled, and doubt "whereunto this would grow." They had to deal with God, not man, and had left Him out of their reckoning. This is ever the way of the world. Their confusion is added to at the moment as "then came one and told them saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people" (Acts 5:25). Again the preachers are taken, but without violence, for the officers feared the people.

After this Peter and his brethren stand before the council again, and the high priest asks them, in a supercilious way, "Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name?" Ah! my friend, you will have to own "this name" yet. God has raised Him who bears it from the dead, and the day is not far distant when every knee shall bow to Him, angels, men, and demons. Have you confessed His name yet? The day is coming when you must, if you have not. You had better do it now, willingly, in the day of grace, and be saved, rather than be compelled to bow to it in the day of judgment. The high priest says, "Ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine" (it was lovely doctrine, for it was all about Jesus), "and intend to bring this man's blood upon us." Oh, Satan is a crafty master. He knows how to urge a man on to a deed of darkness, and then come and give him

good reasons for it. This high priest was the very man who had condemned the Lord, and round him were the people who, in Pilate's hall, had clamoured for His blood, saying, "His blood be on us, and on our children" (Matthew 27:25); and now he says, forsooth, "Ye intend to bring this man's blood upon us." Ah! my friend, His blood must be upon you, either as a shelter from judgment, and as bringing you to God, or, as crying for vengeance, because of His murder! Had not these men clamoured for the blood of the Saviour? Yes; and, as far as they were concerned, had brought about His death, and they now wished also to put His servants to death. The high priest remonstrates with them on the ground of his former prohibition, but the contemptuous language used is very notable. He will not name Jesus. He only speaks of "this name" — "your doctrine" — "this man's blood." Peter's reply, in name of the apostles, is the expression of a settled purpose, rather than any attempt to remonstrate, or to give light to those who need and seek it. This his audience did not desire. They were utterly opposed to God — Peter and his friends were for Him.

Observe now Peter's answer, given by the Holy Ghost, — "We ought to obey God rather than men." These religious leaders of men were opposed to Christ. The apostles were not setting themselves up against the civil power. That a Christian must never do. But Judaism was an ecclesiastical principle, judged of God, and set aside, and here acting in opposition to Christ.

Then Peter once more boldly presses home their sin upon them, saying, "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things: and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him" (Acts 5:31-32). Let me draw you, my friend, from the toils of the god of this world, and bring you bended low at the feet of this Prince and Saviour now. Is not a Saviour just what you want? It is! and what you need God sends to you. He is a Saviour in glory today for every anxious soul that wants Him. God gives repentance, and forgiveness of sins through Him, not to Israel only, but to any needy sinner that will bow to Him. Believe Him now, and get these two deep blessings, — repentance, and forgiveness of sins. Have you never bowed to, never owned Him yet? Are you still a guilty sinner, an opposer of Jesus? Ah! it is high time you were brought to repentance, for there is something else coming — judgment! It is looming in the distance, but, mean time, we preach repentance and forgiveness of sins.

What is repentance? Owing that what God says of you is true. Repentance is the judgment that the soul passes on itself. It receives the testimony of God, and when a soul believes there is a Saviour in glory, and that it has never yet bowed down to that Saviour, I believe an arrow of conviction goes through that soul.

Peter was repentant when he said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Job, when he said to God, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee," was repentant, for he adds, "Wherefore I abhor myself" (Job 42:5-6).

Never let us forget that, "Repentance is the teardrop in the eye of Faith." If you are brought to repentance, self-judgment, and contrition now, I know the hand that will wipe that tear from your eyes. It is the hand that was nailed to the tree for you! I know whose voice will whisper, "Fear not, thy sins are forgiven thee." But if you go on heedless and unrepentant, O sinner, and wake up in hell, you will have tears in plenty, but no hand there to dry them.

There is forgiveness of sins now. When I see my ruined and lost condition, and bow to Jesus, I get forgiveness, and then the Holy Ghost sheds abroad the love of God in the heart.

Peter's testimony cuts his hearers to the heart; but, alas! they did not repent. This is proved by what follows, for "they took counsel to slay them." At this juncture Gamaliel steps in with his advice, "Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to naught: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found to fight against God" (Acts 5:38-39). To this they agree in measure, beat the apostles, command them that they shall not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. They, in no wise depressed, or dejected, depart, "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name." Affliction for Christ's name, and joy in the Spirit ever go together. What a happy company they were that day! Would that we were all more like them. Weak in themselves they were maintained of God, and consequently "daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ" (Acts 5:42). The opposition of the high priest and his followers towards the apostles and their work was only checked for the moment, and not extinguished, as events show. If we turn now to Acts 7:1-60, we find Stephen witnessing for Jesus, and martyred for his faithfulness. Thereafter a general persecution broke out against the saints (Acts 8:1-4). I have no doubt Satan thought he had done a good stroke of business when he sent Stephen out of the world, but Satan always outwits himself. Numbers went out preaching the Word. Philip, who had been among the seven deacons, ordained by the apostles to look after the poor in Jerusalem, found his office interrupted by the persecution. But he evidently had a gift from Christ, and a warrant to preach from the Lord. He made such good use of his gift, that in the Acts 21:1-40 : we find that he has graduated, and had a degree conferred on him. There he is called "Philip the Evangelist." A noble degree indeed! Here, in the eighth chapter, Philip, turned out of diaconal work, begins a far higher service, and, going down to Samaria, preaches Christ. As a result — and it is just the right one — "there was great joy in that city" (Acts 8:8). Yes, when Christ is preached, and Christ is believed, there is always "great joy" — and if you have not great joy, it is because you have not given Christ His right place in your heart. The man that is happy in the Lord has the right to look bright. Some believers in Jesus are joyless, because they are so little looking to Christ. They are occupied with themselves, their circumstances, their bodies perhaps, something that is not Christ. They have too much of Christ to be able to enjoy the world, and too much of the world to enjoy Christ.

Next we have the devil coming in to imitate God's work, so he gets Simon the sorcerer, to profess conversion, that he may spoil it, and cast discredit on it. But the devil is always outwitted. Simon's case does not really fling discredit on Christianity at all. What does a bad bank-note prove? That there are plenty of good ones. Even so, a false professor of Christ is really a testimony to the truth, of which he knows nothing, but which tons of thousands rejoice in, or he would not have falsely essayed to join them.

Simon Magus was a miracle-lover, and lived to influence the people's minds thereby. But Philip was preaching Christ, something that met the deep need of the heart of man, and Simon was distanced. "Then Simon himself believed also; and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done" (Acts 8:13). But the faith of a man who sees miracles and believes is not divinely produced faith; for what I believe, because I see it with my eye, is not faith at all. I have no doubt when Simon confessed the Lord, and Philip baptized him, that Philip thought he had caught a great fish, and would have brought him into the

assembly; but the Lord had His eye on His assembly, and on His dear servant, as well as on this daring sinner, so, by means of Peter, He brings out his real state.

Evidently, before Philip reached Samaria, Simon Magus had by his sorcery gained an immense hold on the Samaritans. We read that he "bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one; to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God" (Acts 8:9-10). But the ministry of Philip, meeting, as it did, the deep need of the conscience and heart, delivered numbers from Simon's influence. His sorceries were dispelled from their minds by the truth and light of God. Seeing the way the current ran, I take it, Simon thought the best thing he could do was to go with the tide, and see if he could not yet keep his position. Carried by the strong current, it is quite possible his intelligence assented to the authority and power of the name of Jesus, whom Philip preached. That his conscience and heart were not reached is manifest, as the desire for his own glory is his uppermost thought. This reveals the profound moral darkness of his soul. Light — God's light — he could not have had; as the reception of that always leads the new-born soul to have, in measure, thoughts which are according to God. Simon had nothing of this about him; and Peter is instrumental in saving the assembly from the introduction of a hypocrite, that Satan sought to foist in, and whom the warm-hearted evangelist Philip appeared prepared to welcome. The apostles Peter and John had come down from Jerusalem and having laid their hands on the Samaritan believers, they had received the Holy Ghost. "And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God." How solemn for any one who is a mere professor of Christianity? Are you only a mere professor of Christianity? "Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter," is a Spirit-blown trumpet note that may well awaken you from your awful delusion. With what divine clearness does Peter look into the man's soul, as he says, "Thy heart is not right in the sight of God." I ask you, Is your heart right with God? Shirk not this plain question, I beseech you. Peter's last words to Simon are, "Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity." And when Simon gets these solemn words said to him, what does he do? Fall on his knees, and cry to God for mercy? No; he would have his praying done by proxy, like thousands in Christendom today. "Pray ye to the Lord for me," is his answer. You pray for me, Peter, he says. I do not hear that Peter did pray for him, and we hear no more of him. I fear he had a grand opportunity of salvation, and missed it. Do not imitate him!

Simon Magus is like a buoy, affixed to a sunken rock by the hand of God, to keep passing ships off it. He is a solemn warning to all false professors. To all such I would say, Learn this lesson — that neither baptism, nor making a profession of Christ can save you. He was baptized, and professed to follow Christ, and sought entrance into God's assembly. That he was not then saved is clear; that he ever was saved is doubtful. Nothing will do but the real possession of Christ.

Ananias and Sapphira, we see, were detected inside the assembly; Simon is detected outside it, never getting in. May I ask, my friend, Is your soul right with God? If not, do not sleep tonight till this question is happily settled in the affirmative. Are you still in the gall of bitterness, or are You in

the happy position of a child of God, having Christ as the joy of your soul? If you have Christ as your life, your object, and your guardian, going through this scene, learn also that He is the coming Bridegroom, and soon He will take you up to be with Him.

If you have never known Him in this way yet, the Lord grant that this day may be the beginning of your thus knowing Him, and of your having the joy of that knowledge.

20. CHAPTER 16 — FIFTEEN DAYS WITH PAUL.

CHAPTER 16 — FIFTEEN DAYS WITH PAUL.

Acts 9:1-43; Galatians 1:1-24.

AFTER the solemn incident recorded in our last chapter, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the Gospel in many villages of the Samaritans on the way (Acts 8:25). Their presence there was doubtless necessary, to help and cheer the assembly in that city, still passing through great persecution, and further, God was about to introduce a work, and a workman of another character, into the scene of His operations.

Before we hear anything more of Peter's history we get the interesting account of Saul's conversion. This event took place apparently soon after Peter's return to Jerusalem. Not there, however, where Saul, afterwards called Paul, was well known, did it occur, but afar off, and for a wise purpose was this. Saul had been a witness of, and was consenting to Stephen's death, and "yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that, if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem" (Acts 9:1-2). He becomes the apostle of Jewish hatred against the Lord Jesus, and His dear followers. Thus engaged in his sad missionary enterprise he nears Damascus, when a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, dazzles him with its overwhelming glory. Falling to the ground, he hears a voice saying unto him, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" That glory and that voice end his career of self-will for ever. Subdued, and humbled in his mind, he meekly asks, "Who art thou, Lord?" He knew it was God's voice, but what was his surprise to learn that the speaker was Jesus, that He was the Lord of glory, and that He acknowledged His poor disciples — whom Saul would have marched off to Jerusalem to imprison and slay — as being Himself.

"I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest," carried volumes to his trembling soul, and now awakened conscience. Supposing himself to be doing God service (John 16:2), he found out that he was the enemy of the Lord, and the chief of sinners. On the other hand he learned that the saints are one with Christ in glory. This latter truth formed his life from that moment. Utterly smashed up in all the springs of his moral being, and habits of thought, he discovers a new standing altogether, where he is neither a Jew, nor a Gentile, but "a man in Christ." From that moment his life and his ministry flow from the sense of being united to, and having association with, a heavenly Christ.

"Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" is the question with which he begins his new career. Directed by the Lord to go into the city he goes. Although "his eyes were opened, he saw no man; but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink" (Acts 9:8-9).

Then, in a vision, Saul sees a man called Ananias coming to him, and restoring his sight. Ananias, sent of the Lord to him, goes, and "putting his hands on him, said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me that thou mightest

receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost."

What a thrill of joy must have gone through the blinded man's soul as he hears himself called "Brother Saul"! But a "brother" he was most truly, and at once begins to testify of Jesus. Driven out of Damascus by the fury of the Jews, who would have now slain him, Saul is dropped over the wall at night, and, when he gets to Jerusalem, finds his way into the assembly by the help of Barnabas. This event, I gather, took place some time later than the record in Acts 9:1-43: might, at first sight, lead one to think. Reference to Galatians 1:1-24 shows that it was not at the moment of his conversion that Saul went to Jerusalem. These are his words: "When it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in (not to) me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood; neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days. But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the, Lord's brother" (Galatians 1:15-19).

What took place in these fifteen days God has not been pleased to record, but we can, from our other knowledge of these two dear men, safely conjecture what that meeting meant. A good deal can be learnt in a fortnight's residence with a brother in Christ. The time was not long, but surely long enough for the apostle of the circumcision, and he of the uncircumcision, to mutually get to know, and love each other in the Lord.

Possibly Peter, with a keen remembrance of the part Saul had played in Jerusalem at Stephen's death, and the fact that he had been so long of presenting himself at what Peter doubtless regarded as "Headquarters," may have been reserved. That the assembly as a whole was chary of receiving him, is clear from verse 26 of our chapter, "And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple." (Acts 9:26.) But Barnabas came to his rescue, and heartily commended him as a sincere believer and disciple. When confidence was established, communion was assured. Peter's was not a nature to harbour suspicion, and Paul was so simple and straightforward, that the former's heart, we may well be assured, was soon gained. That it was so is certain, as we hear him speak, at a later date, of "our beloved brother Paul" (2 Peter 3:15).

How much of surpassing interest would Peter have to tell Paul of the Lord's earthly life, and of all that had taken place up to the date of their meeting. With what interest, too, would Peter listen to Paul's tale of his unique conversion, of his seeing Jesus in glory, and of the special commission he held in regard to the Gentiles. The meeting of these two remarkable men has a peculiar interest to one's heart. Neither they, nor those about them, knew how much was to be connected with their ministry. One thing is certain, that of all the men that then lived, these two are the best known today. Others may have had a passing notoriety, or possibly a place in the page of history; these two have honourable mention, and a marvellous record in the eternal pages of God's Word. Their words and testimony for Christ were the means of the conversion of thousands of precious souls, while they lived, and their writings have been the priceless heirloom of the Church. Untold millions, in hundreds of languages, have had the faith of their souls imparted, fed, and nourished by the words of God, which, as His "chosen vessels," they received and indited, and the Holy Spirit has applied. Thank God for Peter and Paul! Their reward will be great in the kingdom of the Lord

Jesus; and a poor outlook has that man who has not an assured place in that kingdom. In face of this, who would not be a follower of the Lord Jesus? The soul who declines this blessing, and this honour, will have eternity in which to repent of its folly. But the fifteen days Paul spent with Peter were not idle days; for we read, "He was with them coming in and going out of Jerusalem. And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed with the Grecians; but they went about to slay him" (Acts 9:28-29). To save his life, the brethren sent him away to Tarsus, his own town. The conversion of Saul must have caused immense joy, as well as relief, to the Christians; and we can understand how thanks went up to God concerning him, as they said to each other, "He which persecuted us in times past, now preacheth the faith which he once destroyed" (Galatians 1:23). At this moment, under the good hand of God, the persecution against the saints began to lull, and the assemblies throughout Judea and Galilee and Samaria having rest, were edified. Peter thereupon again comes on the scene outside of Jerusalem, and passes throughout all parts of Israel (Acts 9:32). This circumstance the Spirit of God relates after Paul's conversion, and before the record of his special work, without doubt to show the spiritual and apostolic energy still existing in Peter, at the very time that God was calling a new apostle, who should bring in much new light, and commence a new work. What God had done by Peter, and what He was about to do by Paul, are thus intermingled, to preserve the unity of the Church, and, although Paul be the apostle of the Gentiles, it is Peter who is first instrumental in bringing them into the Church. This we shall find in our next chapter. But first we have the peculiar place which Peter occupied in the Lord's work strikingly attested by the healing of Aeneas, and the raising of Dorcas. There is something exquisitely beautiful in the record of the last few verses of Acts 9:1-43, because that which comes before us occurs among the saints, and not out in the world as such. It is noticeable that this title "the saints" is first found here, in the New Testament scriptures, as applied to believers in the Lord Jesus. Most people when they speak of "saints" think of the dead, and are apt to limit the number of those who are worthy of the title to a few bright examples, such as John, Peter, etc. That those who have died are so called is clear from Matthew 27:52. But in Acts 9:1-43 thrice is the term applied to the living (see Acts 9:13; Acts 9:32; Acts 9:41). It belongs to all who are born of the Spirit, and washed in the Saviour's blood; all such are set apart to God, as belonging to Him by redemption. All through the epistles it is the common term applied to God's children. I know many dislike to accept the term. Why? Because they rightly connect practice with it, and say, "If I were to acknowledge that I was a saint, you would want me to walk like one, and that I know I can not do." The great thing is to find out what you really are before God, and then to be it practically. Thus was it in our chapter.

While at Lydda, a town lying about ten miles east of Joppa, between it and Jerusalem, Peter finds one who had been eight years in bed, sick of the palsy. "Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole; arise, and make thy bed," suffices to at once heal him, and all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron turned to the Lord. God can use a miracle like this to convert a district, as easily as the preaching of His Word. "Jesus Christ maketh thee whole," was gospel to the sinners of Lydda and Saron, as well as to poor Aeneas.

While Peter is yet at Lydda he is called to Joppa. This town, now called Jaffa, was, and is the most important seaport of Judea. It is situated on a sandy promontory jutting out into the Mediterranean, south of Caesarea, and about thirty miles from Jerusalem. The occasion of Peter's call was the death of Dorcas. She was a remarkable woman, "full of good works, and alms-deeds which she

did." Here was a practical saint, if you like. As a result she was deeply beloved of the saints, who greatly mourned her loss. On his arrival Peter got the fullest testimony as to the ways of Dorcas, whose name meant "Gazelle," both in the Greek, and in the Syro-Chaldaic form, Tabitha. Whether the weeping widows and others at Joppa expected what took place, we are not told, but God had His purpose in the event. Putting all forth, Peter first entreats the Lord in prayer, and then "turning to the body, said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up. And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive." In this miracle, for such it was, God doubtless desired to attest outside Jerusalem the power of the Name of Jesus. Beyond this it gave our apostle, as a vessel of God, both in the eyes of the saints, and of the world, a place that was, at the moment, called for. Added to this, one sees the grace of the Lord in stepping in to comfort those that mourn, in a manner unlooked for, and unknown in that day, save at His own blessed hand, while treading the earth. The effect without was great — "and it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord" (Acts 9:42). A great awakening took place evidently, so much so that "Peter tarried many days in Joppa, with one Simon a tanner" (Acts 9:43). From this interesting scene, however, he is soon called to one of wider and outstanding importance, as we shall see in our next chapter.

21. CHAPTER 17 — CORNELIUS AND HIS HOUSEHOLD.

CHAPTER 17 — CORNELIUS AND HIS HOUSEHOLD.

Acts 10:1-48 — Acts 11:1-18.

THERE is a peculiar interest attaching to this section of the Acts of the Apostles, because it shows the way in which the Gentiles step into blessing. It shows the way in which you and I can get saved, and opens up the manner in which those who had no claim on God whatever get God's salvation.

It is a very interesting occasion when the Gospel comes out first to the Gentiles, and very beautiful to note the way the Lord sends to an anxious man the blessing he wants. Evidently the eye of God is on this scene, — on the man who was anxious for light, and on the servant who was to carry the light to him. We find that both were praying. Cornelius was praying when a vision came to him (Acts 10:30), and Peter was also praying when a vision came to him (Acts 11:15). A very interesting lesson this for preachers and listeners! Cornelius was, I believe, a truly converted man when he got that vision. He was, however, without peace, and without the sense of pardon, but deeply desirous of getting that which he had not yet. He knew nothing about the accomplishment of redemption, and the coming of the Holy Ghost.

Cornelius was a Gentile undoubtedly, and by his very connection with the famous Italian band must have been a man of noble birth. He had moral features, too, which were very lovely. He feared God "with all his house." There are very few people of whom that can be said. "With all his house" would include his servants and children. Added to this remarkable statement we find, moreover, that he gave "much alms to the people." He was a benevolent man, much interested in others; a man who thought of others, as well as of his own soul's need. Regarding that, we are told he "prayed to God always." This Gentile centurion, then, could not have been an unconverted man, for an unconverted man has no fear of God before his eyes. Cornelius, on the contrary, was a prayerful man, a man in whom the Spirit of God had worked, and had wrought in his heart spiritual desires. He is a type of hundreds and thousands of Gentiles today. He was an awakened man, — an anxious, pious, prayerful, and God-fearing man; but had you gone and asked him if his sins were forgiven, he would not have dared to say so, because the testimony of the Gospel, and the preaching of forgiveness to the Gentiles, had not gone out up to that moment.

It would have been as wrong for Cornelius to say, before he heard Peter's address, that he was forgiven, as for you and me now, if believing on Jesus, to say we do not know it. But although Cornelius knew not this great blessing, it is clear that most fervently he desired it, for he tells Peter that the angel had said unto him, "Cornelius, thy prayer is heard," (Acts 10:31). What does that mean? That God read his heart, and knew what he desired — light. Bear in mind that he was not a Jewish proselyte. He had not embraced Judaism, though the Jews evidently thought well of him; but clearly he had never bowed to the yoke of the law. Christianity had just begun to be heard of, and the Jews loudly claimed to be still under the law of God, so that I can understand this pious

man wondering where the truth lay.

Tidings of Jesus had gone out, — tidings of His death, and of His resurrection; for some time before the scene laid in our chapter, Philip had announced the glad tidings to "all the cities, till he came to Caesarea" (Acts 8:40). Cornelius, therefore, must have heard about Jesus; but evidently he had not heard the full truth, and I believe the prayer of that man was, Lord, give me light; and wonderful light for him was then in store. In this exceedingly interesting, awakened state, a man born of the Spirit (he could not have been acceptable to God otherwise, yet the angel said to him, "Thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God"), touched, anxious, wrought on by the Spirit of God, but not knowing the full truth of the Gospel, burning for light, desiring to have it, praying to God for it he got a vision. As he prayed, "a man stood before me," he says, "in bright clothing, and said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God. Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the seaside; who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee" (Acts 10:30-32). In order to be saved, he was not told to do works, but he was to hear words, when Peter came. "He shall speak to thee." And when Peter relates the tale in Jerusalem, he says that the angel had said to Cornelius, "Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter; who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved" (Acts 11:13-14). Mark that now! What God bids Cornelius do, is to listen to "words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved." Many souls think that if they are to be saved, it is by some kind of works; but, when God opens the way to the Gentiles, He precludes the thought of works, as He says to this anxious man, Send for my messenger, who shall "tell thee words." No man was ever yet saved by his own works: and no man was ever saved without believing words — the words of God. In speaking of being saved, I am using the word as Scripture uses it. By being saved, I mean, a man not only knowing that he is set free from his sins, and that he is pardoned, but that he is brought to God, — that he is united to a living triumphant Saviour, who died on the cross for him, and is ascended and accepted for him, and who has sent down the Holy Ghost to make his emancipation known to him. No sooner has Cornelius heard from God what he is to do, than he does it. This shows the earnestness and the fervour of the man. "Immediately therefore I sent to thee," he says to Peter. He will not wait a day. He does not say, I will think about it. Many a man has said, I will think about it, I will "hear thee again of this matter," and, blinded by Satan, and snared by procrastination, has gone to hell for eternity. Well did Rowland Hill say, "Procrastination is the recruiting officer of hell." Cornelius was no procrastinator.

Look at this earnest seeker! No sooner has the angel departed than he obeys the divinely given instructions (Acts 10:7-8). He feels that not a moment is to be lost; and, my reader, can you afford to wait another day to get the concerns of your soul settled? The moment this man hears God's word he sends off his three servants, on their forty miles' journey by the sea-coast, to Joppa. Travelling was not very rapid in those days, and they stayed no doubt somewhere for the night (Acts 10:9), but Cornelius was not long kept waiting. God loves to meet an anxious soul, and oftentimes does it straightway.

Now, let us see how the Lord was preparing His servant to meet this exercised and obedient Gentile. Peter went up to pray on the housetop; and he did pray, for he says in the next chapter, "I was in the city of Joppa praying." It was the sixth hour, noonday, not the time people generally go up to pray. Once Peter had been told to watch and pray, and he did not, with the result that he fell;

now we find him praying, and the Lord speaks to him in a vision. He "saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth; wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter, kill, and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. This was done thrice; and the vessel was received up again into heaven" (Acts 10:11-16). Some have imagined this to be the Church, but I do not believe that is the thought here. Peter was not the vessel through whom God was going to bring out the truth of the Church — that was given to Paul. I believe the vision was given to teach Peter the lesson, that the Cross had done away with all the barriers that had previously existed between Jew and Gentile, and that the grace of God was going out to each alike, and that the same cleansing power was to bring both into blessing. But Peter could not interpret the vision; and while he was doubting what it should mean, the men sent from Cornelius stood before the gate. At this moment, while Peter thought upon the vision, God does not send an angel — a servant — to call him and tell him about the messengers who stood before the gate; but "the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them" (Acts 10:19-20). How beautiful this is. I believe Peter now begins to get an inkling of what the Lord means by the vision. It was to teach him that with God there was henceforth to be no distinction between Jew and Gentile. Peter had been a good Jew up till this time; but the special thought of the Church is that "there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all" (Colossians 3:2); and Peter was the vessel chosen of God to begin this work, and to call in the Gentiles, although Paul was distinctly the Apostle of the Gentiles.

Under law, God had forbidden the Jew to mingle with the Gentile. Now the Lord taught Peter that that day had gone by, — that what God had cleansed, he was not to call common; and at once he began to carry out the truth, for we read that he called the men in and lodged them (Acts 10:23).

We have been observing that Peter was a very impulsive, ardent, incautious man, but it is striking to see how cautious he became here. He took with him six brethren (Acts 10:23; Acts 11:12) to be witnesses of what God was about to do; and I have no doubt these six men had a warm heart to Peter ever after, for taking them with him that day. I should be thankful to any one who took me where the Lord was going to bless and save a whole houseful of anxious souls.

While Peter and his companions are journeying to Caesarea, Cornelius is very urgent to get others blessed as well as himself. He is anxious to get light for himself, but he is very anxious too for others, for when Peter arrives we read, "Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends" (Acts 10:24). As Peter was coming in, we find that Cornelius worships him; that is, he pays him deep reverence. Peter lifts him up, and they go into the house together, and Peter finds "many that were come together." The house was full of souls that God was going to bless. Peter then says, "Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean. Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for." Peter has learned his lesson now, he has got the key to the difficulty that he pondered over on the roof. When he had gone down and obeyed, he saw quite clearly, that the grace of God was going out to the ends of the earth.

Then he probes Cornelius, and tries to find out his state of soul, as he says, "I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?" It is a good thing to let a soul, anxious about divine things, speak out for itself. Cornelius tells his own story. He says, "Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house." Here you have another indication of Cornelius's moral state, he was fasting as well as praying; pouring out his soul to God, and fasting till the ninth hour. Then, having told of the angel's visit, Cornelius adds, "Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God." I do not know anything more cheering to one who loves souls than to get an audience like this, all anxious to hear. Peter, before he began to preach, knew there was not a listless soul among that company, not a procrastinator, nor a scoffer; he knew he had a company of downright, earnest, seeking, longing souls, only wanting to know the truth. "Now are we all here present before God to hear." Oh, what an audience! Anxious listeners, make earnest preachers; longing hearers make it easy to preach. Ah, have you never yet been anxious about your soul? The days of your anxiety will surely come, my friend.

Then Peter begins, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is acceptable to him." It is a question now of the grace of God going out world-wide; wherever there is a soul looking to God, that is the soul God will bless. "The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:) that word ye know," adds Peter. He knew full well that Jesus was Lord of the Jews, but it never seemed to have got into his soul before that He was Lord of all. But He is Lord of all, and you, my friend, will have to give an account to Him hereafter. In the compass of one short verse (Acts 10:38) Peter brings out the truth which Matthew opens with, and unfolds in his gospel, "They shall call his name Emmanuel; which being interpreted is, God with us." The preaching in the house of Cornelius brings before us three great truths: first, "God with us" (Acts 10:38); then "God for us" (Acts 10:40-43); thirdly, "God in us" (Acts 10:44-47). God with us was the whole life of Jesus, "who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil: for God was with him, and we are witnesses of all things which he did in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree." Peter does not charge his hearers with having any part in the crime of slaying Jesus, but he details the truth nevertheless.

"Him," he next says, "God raised up, and showed him openly; not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead." Here we get the second wonderful truth, viz., God for us. The One whom man refused, God raised up, and put into glory.

There was no doubt about His resurrection; the preacher himself had seen Him, and had eaten and drunk with Him. Peter remembered the piece of broiled fish and of an honeycomb, which they had given Him after His resurrection; and he remembered too the fire of coals with the fish laid thereon, and bread, when Jesus had called him and his six companions to come and dine with Him, on the shores of the Lake of Galilee; and he brings out now the truth — rich beyond all expression in its fruits — the beautiful, blessed truth of the death and resurrection of Christ. His death met the claims of God, while His resurrection displayed His absolute victory over death, and sin, and all the power of Satan. In the moment of His death He did a work which absolutely and eternally glorified God about sin, and His resurrection is God's answer to that work. It is the demonstration of the satisfaction and delight of God in Christ's work, as well as the proof of the

complete victory which Christ has won in the very domain of death, for it is annulled. But more than, and because of that, He it is "which was ordained of God to be the judge of quick and dead." It is His victory, as Man, over death, that gives Him title to judge (see John 5:21-27). But, ere the day when He will judge, comes the day in which He saves. Concerning this. "To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins."

Long before man is to be judged for his sins God unfolds two things; first, that forgiveness is offered to every soul that believes in His Son, and secondly, that He sends the Holy Ghost to dwell in the believer. Is not that wide enough, broad enough, to take you and me in? Is not forgiveness of sins the very thing you need and desire? That is the very thing God proclaims to you.

Christ is risen: man slew Him, God raised Him, we have seen Him, says Peter, He is going to be the Judge of the living and the dead by-and-bye, and in the meantime "whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." This is what Peter proclaims to his audience, and they were anxious, truth-seeking souls. Cornelius was a man wanting light, wanting to know how to be forgiven, and how to get saved. He wanted to hear God's words, and what were these words? "Whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." Do you believe on His name, my reader, do you rest your troubled soul on that blessed One? Then forgiveness of sins is yours.

Now see what follows. "While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word." They got the seal of God, the seal of the Holy Ghost. Now what does the Holy Ghost seal? Not doubts, not fears, surely; He always seals faith. He dispels my fears by telling me that the One, who is to be the Judge by-and-bye, died on the cross to save me; He dispels my doubts by turning my eye off myself on to Christ, and the moment my eye is on Him, and the work He has done, I get rest and peace. The moment, by simple faith, my eye is on the Person of Him who is Son of God, and Son of Man, I derive blessing from the glory of His Person, and I get all the benefit of the work He has accomplished. I get the Person of Christ for my heart, and the work of Christ for my conscience. Your heart can never rest save in a Person, while your conscience can only be calmed by knowing the work that He did.

It is most important to see that the unfolding of these truths, and the coming down of the Holy Ghost are intimately connected. The Holy Ghost has come to minister these truths to the believing soul. What led to the gift of the Holy Ghost in the second of Acts? They believed on the Lord Jesus Christ. What brought in this plenitude of blessing in Acts 10:1-48? They believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. They heard of Jesus, of His death and resurrection, the power of His name, and forgiveness through His name, and, like simple souls, they believed the word, and God gave them the Holy Ghost on the spot. They did not get the Holy Ghost to help them to believe, but they got the Holy Ghost as the seal of their simple faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Holy Ghost has come down here to tell me God's thoughts about Jesus, and the moment I believe in Him, I receive the forgiveness of my sins through faith in Him, and the Holy Ghost comes and takes up His abode in my body. The believer gets the seal of the Spirit, not merely as an influence to give him a bit of comfort for a moment, but to be the abiding, indwelling Comforter. He is the seal of faith, and the earnest of future glory. If you bought a hundred sheep, the mark you put on them does not make them yours; it only shows to all around that they are yours. It was the money you paid for them that made them yours. Similarly, it is the blood of Jesus that redeems me, cleanses me. brings me out

of darkness into light, sets me free, brings me to God, and makes me a child of His. What is the next thing? The Lord gives me the Holy Ghost, as His seal that I am redeemed and blessed, and belong to Him. The possession of the Spirit does not make me His, but it is the seal which shows that I am His. In this sermon of Peter's, then, you get three things: first, God with us, that is the life of Jesus; then, God for us, that is the death and resurrection of Jesus; then, God in us, that is the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Then Peter says, we cannot keep these people out of their privileges. "Can any one forbid water," he asks, "that these should not be baptized, who have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?" No, he says, they are forgiven, they have the Holy Ghost, and they must be let into the House of God on earth. Here is the second occasion on which Peter uses the keys of the kingdom of heaven. He opens the door afresh this day as thus he brings in the Gentiles. He has no authority to let people into heaven, but into the kingdom of heaven, as a scene of profession on earth, he lets them enter, I apprehend, by the door of baptism.

I have no doubt that these people had repented before Peter went down to them, but, having received God's testimony to the name and work of Jesus, they know they are forgiven, know they are saved, and they receive the Holy Ghost to dwell in them. That is the privilege of every simple soul today. You may know you are forgiven and saved the moment you simply believe in the work done for you by the Lord Jesus Christ, and God then gives the Holy Ghost to dwell in you, as His seal and mark that you belong to Him.

After Peter had returned to Jerusalem we find that his action at Caesarea is called in question, as might be expected. "They that were of the circumcision contended with him, saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them" (Acts 11:2-3). Thus challenged, Peter rehearses the interesting account of his visit to Cornelius, winding up thus, "and as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water: but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost. Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift, as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, what was I, that I could withstand God?" (Acts 11:15-17.) His argument was unanswerable, and his auditors were silenced, for "when they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life."

It is important to grasp the real significance of what occurred at Caesarea. The Church of God, the assembly, already existed, but the truth or doctrine of her oneness as the body of Christ had not yet been promulgated. The reception of Cornelius and his friends by Peter into the assembly, although it may be said to pave the way, nevertheless did not announce the glorious truth of the true nature, calling, and destiny of that assembly. Paul, already called, was to unfold that in due course. The vision that Peter had did not reveal the assembly as the body of Christ, nor did the admission of Cornelius. They showed that in every nation whoever feared God was acceptable to Him, and that it was not necessary to become a Jew in order to obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. The specific truth of the Church, viz., the oneness of the body united by the Holy Ghost to its Head in heaven, was not brought out by the events at Caesarea. Nevertheless they prepared the way for the unfolding in due time of that peculiarly Pauline truth — for the Gentiles were admitted to God's spiritual house on earth without becoming Jews. The doctrine was not preached, because not yet known, but the thing itself was enacted or illustrated.

The great truth of the mystery, which Paul develops so fully in the Ephesians, "that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel" (Ephesians 3:6), received its first expression here. Repentance unto life eternal was granted unto the Gentiles, as such, and the Holy Ghost, the seal of forgiveness, and the fruit of Jesus' work on the cross, by which God had been infinitely glorified, was given to them, as to the Jews at the beginning. The latter might marvel and cavil, but God's purpose was not to be resisted, and, after Peter's explanation, it is good to observe that they glorify God, 1:e., I take it, they praise Him for His grace to the Gentiles. When the note of praise began, I fancy Peter must have felt much relieved, for, as we shall see later, he was evidently a man not a little affected by Jewish thoughts, which had great possession of his own mind, and ruled yet more strongly in the minds of his fellow-believers in Christ. What they, too, thought of him, and of his actions, he was not altogether indifferent to, forgetful of the scripture which says, "The fear of man bringeth a snare" (Proverbs 29:25). What this snare was, we shall yet see.

22. CHAPTER 18 — PRAYED OUT OF PRISON.

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Acts 12:1-25. THE duration of the time of quiet, that we read of in Acts 9:1-43, was not long. Within little more than a year after the events recorded in our last chapter, the flame of persecution against the Christians again burst forth. Famine reigned, and the poor in Judea had help sent to them by the hands of Saul and Barnabas. Thus these beloved men of God were again in Jerusalem at an important crisis. At this moment "Herod the king stretched forth his hands, to vex certain of the church." This Herod was the grandson of Herod the Great, who commanded the massacre at Bethlehem, and the father of that King Agrippa before whom Paul was brought. He is usually known in history as Herod Agrippa I. His ruling passion was to stand well with everybody, no matter at what cost. This personal vanity he combined with punctilious attention to the rites of the Jews' religion, so he stood well with his subjects. To yet further ingratiate himself with them, the new persecution of the Christians was undoubtedly commenced. The first victim to his vanity which we read that he offered up was the apostle James. "And he killed James the brother of John with the sword" (Acts 12:2). This apostle, we have already observed, was one of the favoured three who were present when the Lord raised Jairus' daughter; when He was transfigured on the mount; and when He was praying in the garden. Equally with his brother John he was surnamed "Boanerges," i.e., "sons of thunder." From this one gathers that, although we have no record of his life in Scripture, he must in some way have been a prominent man among the saints at Jerusalem. Be this as it may, Herod put him to the sword.

You remember that this martyr's mother, Salome, had once prayed, "Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom." Turning to them, the Lord had replied, "Are ye able to drink of the cup which I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able" (Matthew 20:21-22). The moment had come here for one of the two brothers to drink of the cup — the other drank his many years later. Probably John was the latest of all the apostles to suffer martyrdom, but James was the first. His career was short, as the date of his death was only some twelve or thirteen years after his Master's crucifixion.

Nothing is told us of the manner of his soul in the hour of his going forth to be beheaded, but his mother's prayer, and his Lord's reply, we may be sure, would not then be unremembered, and the grace that sustained a Stephen would doubtless make a James more than conqueror, in view of that heavenly kingdom into which he was to pass, and rejoin his blessed Lord. Seeing that James' death pleased the Jews, Herod laid hands on Peter also, intending after Easter to lead him to the scaffold, and the care he took to make sure of his purpose was excessive. After Easter a grand public spectacle in connection with Peter's death was evidently designed, whereby the king would still further secure the adulation of the Jews.

There are many Herods in our day; he is not the only one who has lost everything because he would like to stand well with the world. Do not think I speak harshly of Herod. He was fighting

against God. Follow him not! He puts forth his hand and takes Peter, really to exalt himself, although doubtless thinking that he was taking the one who had influenced the people most largely with the Gospel. He judged that he had made a grand step when he took Peter, and he put four quaternions of soldiers beside him — sixteen soldiers — to guard one solitary man! Peter had escaped from prison once before, and no one knew how he got out (Acts 5:1-42). But Peter knew, and that is why here he went to sleep so quietly, for he knew the Lord could take him out again, if He so willed. It is a grand thing to know God, and an awful thing not to know Him. Peter knew God, and slept peacefully, while Herod, recollecting what had taken place in days gone by, put these sixteen soldiers to guard him, four at a time, by watches. Of these two were chained to him, one stationed at the door of his dungeon, and one a little farther off, at the prison door outside. Herod's excessive precautions were evidently designed to make a second escape impossible to Peter. But Herod was leaving God out of his reckoning. What availed all his bolts, bars, sentinels, and "two chains" upon his prisoner, if God stepped in? We shall see.

"Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him" (ver. 5). To turn to Herod they knew was in vain, to turn to God was their only resource in this critical moment. God has ever been the help of His people. The case seemed very hopeless, save in view of that which the poet wrote —

"But there's a power which man can wield, When mortal aid is vain;

God's eye, God's arm, God's love to reach, God's list'ning ear to gain. That power is prayer, which soars on high, Through Jesus, to the throne, And moves the hand, which moves the world, To bring deliv'rance down." When the Lord was upon earth He had said, "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:19-20). Acting on this scripture the assembly besought God for Peter "without ceasing" (Acts 12:5), and "many were gathered together, praying" (Acts 12:12), when he appeared in their midst.

What shape these earnest supplications took we are not told. God interpreted the desire, as well as answered the faith of His people. The day for the carrying out of Herod's settled purpose was allowed to draw near. The morrow was to see the end of the imprisoned apostle. So had man proposed, but God disposed, in a marvellous manner, of the wicked king's intentions. But what of Peter all the time he lay chained in his cell? No record is given of the exercises he doubtless passed through, but this we read, that the night before he was to be led forth to execution on the morrow, he had unbound his sandals, loosed his girdle, cast off his garment, and lain him down to sleep. All this bespoke sweet confidence in the Lord, an easy conscience, and a restful heart. Sweeter far, I trow, was the sleep of the manacled man of God in the dreary prison cell, than that of Satan's servant, Herod; although he might lie on a sumptuous couch, amid the splendour and luxury of a palace. Better far be God's man in a prison, than Satan's man in a palace!

Reader, let me ask you, whose man are you? Face this question honestly. A thousand times better is it to be the "prisoner of Jesus Christ," as our beloved Simon was here, than be apparently a free man, and yet all the while be the prisoner of Satan; lust, passion, and sin forming, not two, but countless unseen chains, that bind the soul in a veritable condemned cell — the world — and ensure the execution of its final judgment at the hand of God. But the prayer of faith on earth, had

moved the hand of God on high, and the time was now come for Him to step in, and do His will. No sentry said, "Ho! who goes there?" as the angel of the Lord entered the cell of the soundly sleeping Peter and "a light shined in the prison." God always brings in light. "In him is no darkness at all," is the character of His nature. I presume Simon's two keepers slept too, for they saw not the light, nor heard the voice, "Arise up quickly," which the now awakened Peter heeds, for he had been aroused by the angel's touch, ere he "raised him up." It would appear that as Peter obeys the call to rise, "his chains fell off from his hands." No turnkey or smith's tool effects this. When God sets Himself to unlock man's fetters, how noiseless, rapid, and effectual is the work; and even the clanking chains, as they fall on the floor, arouse not the insensible keepers.

"Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals," is the next command. There is no undue hurry; all is orderly. Peter obeys, and then hears, "Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me." Thinking he "saw a vision," and not knowing "that it was true that was done by the angel," he nevertheless accompanies him. The first and second guard are safely passed without interruption, and then "they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city, which opened to them of his own accord; and they went out and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him" (Acts 12:10). The street of the city, which Peter knew so well, once reached, there is no further need for angelic, or miraculous guidance, so the angel of the Lord leaves our twice liberated apostle to his own reflections, and ways.

Peter's bewilderment at the moment one can readily conceive to have been great. We all know how difficult it is to apprise the situation when suddenly aroused from profound slumber. Peter was in that condition. He had lain down only expecting to wake and go forth to die, and then to see and hear an angel bidding him — chained man that he was — to arise, clothe himself, and walk out of prison, and then suddenly to find himself on the pavement of a well-known street, a free man, might well be accompanied by considerable bewilderment. But it soon passed, for we read, "And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectations of the people of the Jews" (Acts 12:11). Thus he acknowledges the gracious intervention of the Lord on his behalf, and then "when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John, whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying." The deep earnestness of the saints in prayer is strikingly marked by their being thus before God at the untimely hour of Peter's appearance on the scene.

Arrived there he knocks, and Rhoda, the portress, going to inquire who was at the "door of the gate" — the wicket-gate into the court — hears his voice. So overwhelmed is she with gladness that instead of at once letting the apostle in — as a more sensible girl would have done — she ran back into the house to apprise the others of the answer to their prayers, and "that Peter stood before the gate." Alas! faith and fervour are not always combined. "Thou art mad" was the first response that the supplicants at a throne of grace made to the messenger, who simply told them that their prayers were heard, and answered by God. When she "constantly affirmed that it was so," the others — instead of going out to the gate to see if the report were true — argued thus, "It is his angel." They evidently thought Rhoda had seen some apparition like unto Peter, or that his representative angel (see Matthew 18:10) had paid her a visit.

"But Peter continued knocking," a manifest testimony to the truth of Rhoda's statement; so at length, either calming down, or overcoming their incredulity, they proceeded to the gate, "and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished." If we did not know our own hearts, we should be inclined to wonder at all this. Here were a number of God's people crying specially to Him for a certain thing, and when it was granted, they were "astonished." Alas! our faith is often so feeble that God's answer to our prayer surprises us. Were we only truly simple and right before Him, the surprise would be if the answer were not quick in coming. But surprised as the attendants at this late at night, or early morning prayer-meeting, were, it was nevertheless the fact that God, true to Himself, had heard and answered their prayer. This would never surprise us if only we knew God better. He loves to respond to the cry of His people. He delights in being counted on. "Without faith it is impossible to please Him," but it is manifest that faith — real child-like confidence in Himself — does greatly please Him. The effect of Peter's entrance among the gathered ones evidently was great, and many Voices were heard. Doubtless, uppermost in every mind, and possibly on every lip, was the query — "How ever did you get out, Peter?" But he, "beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of prison. And he said, Go, show these things unto James and to the brethren. And he departed, and went unto another place" (Acts 12:17). The danger of his situation, though free, was manifestly more patent to Peter than to his friends, so he wisely withdrew to more secret and safer quarters. At daybreak "there was no small stir among the soldiers what was become of Peter." He was in God's safe keeping; so that though Herod sought for him, he found him not. Thereafter, disappointed in his bloodthirsty scheme, in which Peter was to have played so prominent a part, he wreaked his wrath on the keepers of the prison, and then going to Caesarea shortly after, died under the dire judgment of God, of a most terrible malady. Most men give up the ghost, and are eaten of worms; Herod "was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost," is the record of the Holy Ghost; while, in striking contrast with the fleeting character of all the earthly greatness of this wicked man, He immediately adds, "But the word of God grew and multiplied" (Acts 12:23-24). That is the moral that adorns this striking tale of human plans, and Divine intervention, while the lesson it teaches us, as to the efficacy, and all prevailing power of prayer, is most blessed. It should indeed encourage us to wait on God in united, persevering, believing prayer. No case could seem more hopeless. God sufficed for it Is He changed? Not one whit. What we want is more faith in Him, and more importunity before Him. "Lord, teach us to pray," we may well say. This interesting chapter closes with, "And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry, and took with them John whose surname was Mark" (Acts 12:25). From this one may conclude that Paul had been in Jerusalem at the time of Peter's imprisonment, and exodus under God's hand. If this were so, one can understand the joy that would fill his large heart in seeing the beloved Simon again at liberty, and free to go on with the Lord's work. Jealousy of another servant's pre-eminence never seems to have had any place in Paul's heart, At this point, however, Paul becomes specially the vessel of the Spirit's power, and Peter passes off the scene, only for a brief space reappearing in the momentous conclave of Acts 15:1-41, which our next chapter will bring before us.

23. CHAPTER 19 — WITHSTOOD AT ANTIOCH.

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Acts 15:1-41; Galatians 2:1-21. THE retirement into which Peter entered, to escape the vigilance of Herod, would appear to have been of some long continuance. Coincidentally with his retiral for these reasons, Paul comes to the front, in the history of God's work on earth, as narrated in the Acts of the Apostles. Acts 13:1-52 and Acts 14:1-28 give us a most interesting narrative of the spread of the Gospel among the Gentiles in Asia Minor, through the ministry of Paul and Barnabas. The link of association that we noted between these two men, in connection with Paul's first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion (Acts 9:27), had been strengthened by the action of Barnabas shortly after.

Paul, as we remember, had gone to Tarsus, his native city (Acts 9:30). Shortly after this, news reached Jerusalem of the work begun at Antioch, in the province of Seleucia, through the preaching of those who "were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen" (Acts 11:19). Two places called Antioch are named in the New Testament. The Antioch referred to here was more important in every way than the smaller city in Pisidia, visited by Paul (see Acts 13:14). This Antioch, which Seleucus Nicator built, 300 B.C., and named after his father Antiochus, was a city on the banks of the Orontes, three hundred miles north of Jerusalem, and about thirty from the Mediterranean. It consisted of four townships or quarters, each surrounded by a separate wall, and all four by a common wall. It was the metropolis of Syria, the residence of the Syrian kings — the Seleucidae — and afterwards became the capital of the Roman provinces in Asia, ranking third, after Rome and Alexandria, among the cities of the empire. It had a population of about 200,000, and will always have an interest to all lovers of Christ, because "the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch" (Acts 11:26). When tidings arrived that in this important city "a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord," the assembly in Jerusalem despatched Barnabas to help in the work, "who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. . . . And much people was added to the Lord" (Acts 11:23-24).

Doubtless feeling the importance of the work going on at Antioch, Barnabas departed to Tarsus "to seek Saul; and when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people" (Acts 11:26). From this time Barnabas and Saul were fellow-workers and close companions in the work of the Lord, till the events recorded in Acts 15:1-41. Antioch would appear to have been their headquarters for a considerable time. From it they went out, prayerfully commended by the assembly there, on the special missionary tour recorded in Acts 13:1-52, and to it they return. "And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles. And there they abode long time with the disciples" (Acts 14:27-28). This tour is the first formal mission to the Gentiles; among whom assemblies are formed, and local officers — elders — appointed by the apostles.

The Word of God, with marked and distinct energy of the Holy Ghost, thus goes out to the Gentiles, converting them, gathering them together in the Name of the Lord Jesus, forming assemblies, and establishing local officers (not ministers so-called — but elders, certainly, and possibly deacons too), and all this apart from, and independently of, the action of the twelve apostles, and the assembly at Jerusalem, and without the obligation to comply with the Mosaic law, which still had rule there, At Antioch the question is now raised whether this last could be allowed This question is not raised by the Jews who opposed the Gospel, but by those who had embraced it, yet were still going on with the law, and now desired to impose the same yoke on the Gentiles. In Acts 15:1-41 we get a full account of this deeply important matter, affecting as it does the very foundations of Christianity.

"And certain men, which came down from Judea, taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved" (Acts 15:1). Coming as these men did from Jerusalem, they appeared to have the sanction of the assembly, and of the twelve apostles there, — and this gave their statements the greater weight. Paul and Barnabas, fully alive to the gravity of their error, "had no small dissension, and disputation with them" (Acts 15:2); and well. they might, for to insist that conformity to the law of Moses was essential to salvation, was to absolutely nullify Paul's gospel, to destroy the doctrine of grace, and to elevate the deeds of the law into being at least a partially saving grace. Justification by faith, if this doctrine were true, was a delusion, so we can well understand the uncompromising hostility with which Paul met these seducers, or "false brethren," as he calls them in Galatians 2:1-21. But it was the will, as well as the wisdom of God, that this grave matter should be settled at Jerusalem and not at Antioch, either by Paul's apostolic authority, or even by the Holy Ghost's verdict, first delivered there. Had such taken place, the unity of the Church might, and most certainly would, have been endangered. A resolution made at Antioch, affecting the whole church, would have been a different thing from the same resolution made at Jerusalem, as things then were. The care of God over His Church in this matter is most blessed. A conference at Jerusalem He knew would settle the matter absolutely, no matter what prejudices the Jews might have, and would maintain union instead of perilling it. That there was bigotry at Jerusalem was true, but if there, of all places, the truth was maintained, it would carry weight universally. On the other hand, had the assembly at Antioch decided the point, the Jewish assembly at Jerusalem would not have acknowledged the truth, and the apostolic authority of the twelve would have been lacking in the promulgation of the truth. All this God obviates.

Paul's reference to this matter in the Epistle to the Galatians shows the gravity of the crisis. In reality things were in question that touched the very foundations of Christianity. If any were circumcised, he was under law, had given up grace, and had fallen away from Christ (Galatians 5:2-4). All this was plain to Paul, but not to those he opposed; so eventually it was arranged that he and Barnabas, "and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question" (Acts 15:2). This statement gives us the outward history of Paul's action, as he yielded to the motives others presented to him. In Galatians 2:1-21, speaking of the same occasion, he states, "I went up by revelation" (Galatians 2:2). The communication of God is his inward guide. God did not allow him to have his own way. It is good sometimes to have to submit, though ever so right. Full of faith, and energy and zeal, as Paul was, he was obliged to go up, in order to have every mouth shut, and unity maintained. When he does go up he takes Titus

with him, uncircumcised. Truth was at stake, and principle involved, so he will not yield on this point in Titus's case. This was a bold step, the taking of Titus. It compelled the decision of the question between himself and Judaizing Christians. Paul was walking in the liberty of the Spirit in this matter, and seeking to introduce other believers into it, and he won the day, as we shall see. When the Antiochan deputation arrived in Jerusalem, "they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them. But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses" (Acts 15:4-5). The issue is thus plainly stated, and thereafter "the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter." Much discussion followed, for which there was the fullest liberty, and then Peter comes on the scene again. He reminds them of what God had done through him among the Gentiles, saying, "Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us: and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that, through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall be saved, even as they" (Acts 15:7-11). Manifestly Peter at this juncture flings the full weight of his influence in favour of the utmost freedom being accorded to the Gentiles in respect of the question raised. His speech, though short, is very pithy and pointed, and the closing sentence fine to the last degree, "We shall be saved, even as they." It was not, even "They shall be saved, even as we." No, it is thus: "We Jews will have to be saved on the same lines as they — and they most assuredly were never under law." This was a crushing blow to the Judaizers. The convincing effect of Peter's sweeping, and truly characteristic assertions was doubtless great.

He is followed by the Gentile ambassadors. "Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them" (Acts 15:12). Thereafter James speaks, and quotes from the prophet Amos to show that God meant to have a people from among the Gentiles. He fully agrees with Peter, saying, "My sentence is, that we trouble not them which from among the Gentiles are turned to God" (Acts 15:19). The effect of James thus summing up is that the judgment of the assembly becomes clear. "Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren" (Acts 15:22). They carry with them a letter to the brethren of the Gentiles which closed the vexed matter authoritatively. The terms of the decree were these. "It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well" (Acts 15:28-29). The Gentiles were in the habit of doing all these forbidden things, but it is important to note that they were not things forbidden by the law only, so that to regard this injunction as a compromise between the legalists and Paul — as some have done — is a mistake. All these things were contrary to God's order as Creator. Marriage — 1:e., purity, not license — was the original institution of God in Eden, and thus only were man and woman to be connected (Genesis 2:21-25). After the deluge, when God gave Noah leave to eat flesh, He then prohibited the blood, for life belongs to God (Genesis 9:3-5).

Again, all fellowship with idols was an outrage against the authority of the only living and true God. To do any of these forbidden things, — therefore, was contrary to the intelligent knowledge of God, and had nothing to say to Moses and the law. The Gentiles had walked in ignorance. They needed to be instructed on these points, and the instruction is addressed to their Christian intelligence, with the object of pointing out to them the character of man's true relation to God in the things of nature. In no sense is the decree either a compromise with Jewish prejudice, or a new law imposed by Christianity. It is the concise statement of principles important for every Christian man to know, — viz., 1. The unity of God, as one only and true God — hence to in any way acknowledge idols was to provoke Him to jealousy. 2. Life belongs to God. 3. God's original ordinance for man was purity in marriage. In this matter it is apparent that Peter and Paul are quite of one mind. Paul must have been cheered as well as charmed, by Peter's bold way of putting the truth, that he himself so loved, and lived to enunciate, viz., that the believer is in no sense whatever under law. It must have been an immense comfort to Paul too, that the apostles, and the assembly in Jerusalem, not only wrote as they did, thus fully sanctioning Paul and Barnabas in their ministry, but likewise sent with them persons of note, — "chief men among the brethren," — who could not be suspected of conveying a letter which supported their own views, a thing that might have been alleged had Paul and Barnabas returned alone, merely bearing the edict. It was Jerusalem that had decided that the law was not binding on the Gentiles, and they, when they hear this, rejoice greatly at their freedom from the yoke of bondage, which others would have thrust upon their necks.

Judas and Silas remained some time at Antioch together; then Judas departed, leaving Silas in this fresh and interesting scene of the Lord's happy work. He preferred rather to work among the Gentiles than to return to Jerusalem, and the lines fell to him in pleasant places afterwards. "Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also" (ver. 35). This last clause would indicate that the assembly there had now become large and important, inviting the care and attention of many servants of God, and easily accounts for Peter's presence in the city, at no great distance of time after the conference at Jerusalem. From that time no further mention of Peter is made in the Acts. The exact date of his visit is uncertain, as no record of it is given in the Acts. Certain, however, it is that he did visit Antioch, and then acted in a way that compelled the apostle Paul to withstand him to the face, before all. The account of what transpired is given by Paul in the Epistle to the Galatians. There (Galatians 2:1-21), after narrating what led him to Jerusalem, he recounts what the Acts does not record, — the way the twelve Apostles received him, and the effect on them of his visit. Briefly it was this, that they saw and acknowledged that Paul was taught of God independently of them; they also recognised his ministry and apostleship, as one called, and sent of God; and that he was acting on the part of God as much as themselves. Further, he communicated truth to them, which he had been already teaching the Gentiles, while they added nothing to him. He delightedly owned God's grace to Peter, saying, "For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me towards the Gentiles: And when James, Cephas (Peter), and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship: that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision" (Galatians 2:8-9).

Then comes the account of Peter's visit. "But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew, and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly, according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?" (Galatians 2:11-14). The story is very simple, if it were not so sad. While alone at Antioch, — where we may well believe, as the fruit of Paul's ministry, that heavenly truth prevailed, — Peter went in and out among the Gentiles, and ate with them. He walked in the same liberty as Paul, in this respect. But when certain came down from James, and from Jerusalem, which was the centre of fleshly religion, and where its notions and customs yet largely ruled the Christians, and where, I take it, Peter usually resided, and of course was exceptionally well known, he was afraid to use this liberty, being fully conscious that it was condemned by many of his friends there, who, though believers, were yet entirely Jewish in their thoughts and ways. Fearing their disapproval, he withdrew, and separated himself from the Gentiles."

Doubtless the Jewish brethren had many an argument to plead with Peter ere this took place. They doubtless represented to him what the effect of his ways in Antioch would be in Jerusalem, when they became known there; that the result would be loss of esteem for, and confidence in him as a leader; possibly too that dissension would arise. In an evil hour our apostle listens to these legalist croakers, blind to the baneful results of the retrograde step, which they induce him to take, under the influence of "the fear of Man, which bringeth a snare."

Fervent, energetic, and ardent as we have found Peter to be, he appears always to have cared too much about the opinion of others regarding himself. If not delivered from this, by the realised presence of God, the opinion others have of us is always apt to influence our hearts, the more so if that opinion makes anything of us after the flesh. Hence we are weak just in proportion as we esteem any position of importance which we have before men. If we are as nothing in their eyes, and in our own eyes too, we act independently of them. This did not Peter here. As a result, his action influences "the other Jews": and Barnabas — the last of all men to be so influenced we should have thought — is "carried away by their dissimulation." But this is the legitimate fruit of what we have been considering. In the measure in which others influence us, we exercise an evil influence over them, if the desire to: maintain our reputation with them be carried into action in the form of meeting their wishes, contrary to that which we well know to be the truth. The more godly a man is, the greater is the evil effect of his course on others if it consist in the allowance of what is not of God, as he gives the weight of his godliness to the evil he consents to or goes on in. But why is Peter's course, and that of the others here, called dissimulation? Because Peter had not one whit changed his convictions. He had recorded them boldly in Acts 15:1-41; now, to please others, he merely altered his practice. Had any one gone and said, "Peter, do you believe that circumcision, and keeping of the law of Moses, are necessary to salvation?" he would have instantly replied, "Certainly not." Why, then, this change of front? Human influence, religious influence, and desire to stand well with old friends. Poor Peter! He saw not that this action of his, in refusing to eat with the Gentiles, was a virtual denial of them As his brethren in Christ; a resiling to his old views that they were common and unclean, which we thought the vision of Acts 10:1-48

had for ever swept away; a contradiction of his own words in the congress of Jerusalem; and a violation of the spirit of the letter he helped so largely to indite on that occasion. His conduct here is, in a measure, in keeping with his sayings at the supper-table, and with his actings in the high priest's hall. There is the same professed valour, and impulsive boldness; to be, alas! followed by the same shrinking timidity, in the hour of trial. Whether this too was followed by the same revulsion of feeling, as he saw that he had really denied his Lord once more, in the person of these Gentile converts, and that thereupon he went out, and once more "wept bitterly," we are not told; but our knowledge of Peter would lead to this conclusion, as the most likely thing to happen. The way in which he got his eyes opened to the effect of his course, we will now just glance at, ere we close our meditations on Simon's interesting life, with its fruitful lessons for our hearts.

Paul alone seems to have stood firm at this crisis at Antioch. To him Peter, notwithstanding his peculiar eminence, was not as a superior before whom he must be silent, when the truth of God was at stake. He "withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed." Paul, who had been converted by the revelation of heavenly glory, and was full of the Holy Ghost, felt that all that exalted the flesh only obscured that glory, and falsified the Gospel that proclaimed it. He lived morally in heaven, and in the company of a glorified Christ, whom he had seen there, and whom he knew to be the centre of all God's thoughts. Thus living, he became eagle-eyed to anything that detracted from Christ's glory, or exalted man, as the claims of the Judaisers for the law, and its deeds, most certainly did. He thus saw that Peter's walk was carnal, and not spiritual; and himself occupied with Christ, and set for the defence of the truth, he is bold as a lion for the truth, and will not spare any who overturns it, no matter how high their position in the assembly be.

Paul is not deterred by man; and in this his conduct here shines by contrast with Peter's. But the way Paul acts is charming. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful" (Proverbs 27:6). Judas has illustrated the last clause of this verse, in his betrayal of Jesus; Paul illustrates the former, in his treatment of Peter. He goes frankly to him, while he publicly exposes the glaring inconsistency of which, equally publicly, he had been guilty. He knew that Peter really believed in his heart that which he himself did. He was certain that Peter's convictions were the same as his own. He was equally certain that Peter had been betrayed into his inconsistent course — which in faithfulness he cannot describe as anything less than dissimulation — by the pressure brought to bear on him from without. He was equally convinced that Peter, at bottom, loved the Lord, the Gentiles, and himself; and this explains the faithfulness of his public address, which is a model of frankness coupled with delicacy, and of logical argument combined with persuasiveness. Let us give earnest heed to it.

"If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of the Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid. For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor: for I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live: yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. I do not frustrate the grace

of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain" (Galatians 2:14-21).

He, a Jew, had felt free to live as the Gentiles. Why now compel the Gentiles to live as Jews, in order to enjoy full Christian communion? If he was at liberty to disregard the law of Moses a little while ago, how absurd to oblige Gentiles now to conform to its requirements. That was not insisted on in words, but is the natural inference, his withdrawal from them implying that circumcision was essential to salvation. But this affected the very foundation of the Gospel, for themselves Jews by nature, and not poor sinners of the Gentiles, they had quite given up the works of law, as a means of righteousness and of securing God's favour, and had fled to Christ for justification and salvation. But if in doing this they are found sinners, as having wilfully neglected the law as an appointed means of salvation, it follows necessarily that as they had neglected it in order to come to Christ, and really at His bidding, therefore Christ had been to them the minister of, and the inciter to sin. Since it was in order to come to Christ that they had ceased to seek righteousness by the law, and had exchanged the supposed efficacy of the law as a means of righteousness, for the work of, and faith in Christ, then Christ was the minister of sin, if they had made a mistake in this step, for He had prompted to it. Again, if they were now to rebuild the edifice of legal obligations in order to obtain righteousness, why had they overturned it? They were then transgressors in overturning it; for if it was to be rebuilt, it ought not to have been overturned, and, as it was Christ who led them to do this, He was become the minister of sin. That was a conclusion that I am sure Peter shrank from with horror, but he had to face it. If he was wrong in eating with the Gentiles, he certainly did it by the Lord's direct command, given to him in the vision he got in Acts 10:1-48. If he was wrong therein, Christ it was who had instructed him to do wrong. If, on the other hand, he was right then, he was wrong now, and had become a transgressor.

What an awful result from the effort and the weakness of attempting to please men by returning to the things that give the flesh a place, and gratify it. Such is the result that ordinances, touched as a matter of legal obligation, ever have. How little do many professing Christians see the truth in this striking scene between the two apostles. Numbers today are resting on ordinances. To rest on them is really to rest on the flesh. Christ is everything to the believing soul, and these ordinances — baptism and the Lord's Supper — drop into their right place. He has ordained them, not as means of grace to be rested on, but as distinguishing His people from the world, — on the one hand, as dead with Him to it in baptism; and on the other, — the Lord's Supper, — as gathered to Him, in the unity of His body, on the ground of the redemption which He has already, and perfectly accomplished.

Christ dead and risen is now our righteousness, hence to rest for this in ordinances, is exactly to deny the special truths they present. The flesh can occupy itself with ordinances, — alas! all Christendom is busy therewith today, — so let all who are resting on them learn this, that what they are really resting on is not Christ, but the flesh, which will find in them just enough to hide the Saviour from the soul, in its deep need, and spiritual hunger.

Paul felt all this acutely, hence his closing words, "I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God," etc. He had learned the utter good-for-nothingness of the flesh, and that the law could not help it. It is incorrigible, and incurable in its evil. God has, therefore, condemned sin in the flesh. Its place is that of death, and not being better, as many a soul is today trying to effect.

Further, Paul had learned that to be under law was to find himself condemned to death, and his soul had realised death in all its power. If dead, — and he learned how that was, viz., by the cross of Christ, — he was dead to law. It ruled over a living man — not a dead one. Its power does not go beyond life, and if its victim be once dead it has no more power over him. But if the law only slew him, where could he find life? Only in Christ risen. He was crucified with Christ, so that the condemnation of the law was, for him, gone in the cross. The law had reached him — Saul the wayward sinner, the chief of sinners — in the person of the Son of God, who loved him, and gave Himself for him; and the life to which sins attached, and to which the dominion and penalty of the law also attached, had come to its end in the cross. Nevertheless he lived, yet not he, but Christ lived in him — that life in which Christ rose from the dead. But what sort of a life had Paul now? The old Adam life was gone in the death of the cross. The new life was Christ's life. He was a new creature, and Christ was his object. "The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me," are his words. This is personal life, the individual faith that attaches the soul to Christ, and makes Him the precious object of both faith and affection. Thus God's grace is not frustrated. If, indeed, according to the Judaisers' view, righteousness came in connection with law, in any shape or form, Christ had died in vain, since our righteousness would consist in our keeping the law. And what would be the effect? Loss, — immense, unspeakable! We should really lose Christ, lose His love, His grace, and the righteousness of God which is by faith of Him, — we should lose Him who is our life, our portion, our all.

How Peter received Paul's rebuke we are not told, but we may be well assured, from our knowledge of his warm, honest temperament, that he received it in the spirit in which it was administered, and was convinced by it of his own wrong course. If he did not at once acknowledge this, and seek to repair the mischief he had done, and remove a stumbling-block out of the way of the Gospel going out to the Gentiles, he was not the Peter we have been following with so much interest all this time. That any grudge or ill feeling towards Paul remained is scarcely consistent with our knowledge of the man, and is negatived by the way he wrote of Paul afterwards, as "our beloved brother Paul" (2 Peter 3:15).

We may be sure that the Lord would have us learn much from this scene. In Paul's behaviour we learn how we should stand for the truth at all costs; but if we have to withstand a brother, then it should be to his face, and not behind his back. Too often the reverse obtains, and the man who is judged guilty of fault is the last to hear of it, — and that perhaps only by a side wind, — while amongst others his supposed errors are freely discussed and canvassed. All this is wrong. If we have anything to say to a brother, let us go to him and say it to his own face first of all, and let us say nothing behind his back that we would not say to his face. If this rule was observed what sorrows would be saved in the Church of God, where, alas! frequently, whisperers have had encouragement rather than rebuke. God says, "A whisperer separateth chief friends" (Proverbs 16:23). I believe "chief friends" were more than ever cemented in holy friendship by the godly course Paul took here, and which we should all imitate. From Peter's vacillating course we may well learn the lesson, that one fall, even though it be met by perfect grace, and full restoration, does not cure a natural disposition, though it may go far to correct it. That the weak link in Peter's chain still existed is manifest, and to this — blessed man of God though he was — can be traced the breakdown here recorded.

If he, an apostle, could so act, after all he had passed through, what need have we each to cry to the Lord, "Hold thou me up; and I shall be safe" (Psalms 119:117).

24. Simon Peter, 4 His Letters — 1.

Simon Peter, 4 His Letters — 1.

Section 4 of 5 (chapters 20-24 — Part 2a) of:

25. Part 2 — His Letters

Part 2 — His Letters Chapter 20 — OUR HEAVENLY CALLING Chapter 21 — OUR HOLY AND ROYAL PRIESTHOOD Chapter 22 — OUR PATHWAY OF SUFFERING Chapter 23 — OUR STEWARDSHIP Chapter 24 — EXHORTATIONS

26. Chapter 20 — Our Heavenly Calling.

Chapter 20 — Our Heavenly Calling.

1 Peter 1:1-25. The great truth brought out in Peter's 1st Epistle, is the government of God in relation to His own people — the righteous; while that same government, in view of the wicked, is the burden of his 2nd Epistle. That which is especially noticeable, however, in this chapter is the way the grace of God works now towards us, to sustain us in our pathway down here, in temptation and in trial of various kinds, and to give us needed encouragement. 1 Peter 1:1-25 gives us specially the trials of the Christian, and how he is sustained in them, while 1 Peter 2:1-25 brings out the privileges of the Christian.

You will notice who they are, to whom Peter is writing. "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" (1 Peter 1:1). They were believing Jews, who had been scattered abroad, through the persecution that arose after the death of Stephen. Peter takes up here, the charge committed to him by the Lord at his public restoration, in John 21:1-25, "Feed my sheep." I say his public restoration, for there had been a private meeting between the Lord and Peter before this, as we have seen in Luke 24:34, "The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon." At that private meeting between the Lord and Peter, when no one else was near, no doubt everything as to his fall, and what led to it, had come out, though the details of what passed between them then we know not, but at the public restoration the Lord put into Peter's hands that which He loves best, thus showing the confidence of His heart. How could I most prove my confidence in a friend if I were going away? Surely it would not be by going to that one, and telling him I had confidence in him, but — by committing to his charge the person, or the thing I loved most. This then was the way grace restored the one who had so terribly broken down and failed. Three times Peter had denied that he knew his Master: three charges that Master gives him, concerning those He loves best. Peter had denied his Lord when he trusted himself — for self-confidence is at the root of all our failures — now it is beautiful to see how the Lord trusts him. Over what took place when they met alone, the Lord has drawn a veil, but before all his brethren the Lord, as it were, gives him back his place, when he puts into his hands His sheep, and His lambs, to shepherd, and to feed them. When Peter writes, everything Jewish was under sentence of judgment, and he unfolds to those who had been linked up with the Judaism, the heavenly calling of the believer, in place of the national earthly calling which had been set aside. The heavenly calling is a more general thing than the Church. Abraham, for instance, though not in the Church, was a partaker of the heavenly calling; "for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

It is good to see how the Spirit of God, by the pen of the apostle of the circumcision, writes to call the hearts of these scattered ones to heaven. He begins by assuring them they are "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:2). He opens with beautiful testimony as to the place in which the grace of God had set them; and in this verse we have the

blessed Trinity brought in. There are very few verses in Scripture in which we have the Trinity. In this second verse we have the election of the Father, the sanctification of the Spirit, and the blood of the Son. If I think of the Father, He chooses me. Election is an individual thing before the foundation of the world. You never find the Church called "elect" in Scripture.

"But," you may say, "it is not so called in the 13th verse of the 5th chapter of this very epistle?" Not at all — the word church is put in there, it simply is "She at Babylon," possibly a sister there, or the brotherhood. The Church is not in view till Christ is dead and risen (except as "the mystery which hath been hid in God from the beginning of the world"), whereas the election of the individual is before the foundation of the world.

Let no one be troubled by this matter of election. It is a family secret. I would not preach election to the world. Election goes before all. I come to the door of a certain place, where peace and plenty reign, and joy and happiness fill the hearts of all the dwellers therein. On the door I find written, "Whosoever will may enter in." That is the Gospel: I enter, and on the other side of the door I find written, "Whosoever gets in here will never get out!" That is my security, the fruit of election. There is nothing to trouble a soul in election, but contrariwise, much to comfort. God has chosen you, if a believer in Christ, before the foundation of the world. The things which are in heaven God is going to keep for you, and He is going to keep you for them. This 2nd verse is in direct contrast with Judaism, for Father is the peculiar name of Christianity. El Shaddai had been the name by which God revealed himself to Abraham, and Abraham's perfection was to walk before the "Almighty God" as a pilgrim, in dependence on Him (Genesis 17:1). Jehovah was the name by which He was known to His people Israel, and their perfection was obedience to His commandments (Deuteronomy 18:13); but Father is the name by which He has revealed Himself to us, and our perfection is to be like our Father, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48).

It is a wonderful thing for my soul to get the sense of God being my Father; and to know that, through the work of the Son of God, I am put into His relationship, as Man, with the Father. Jesus, when risen said "I ascend unto my Father and your Father." Is this the way, beloved friend, in which you know God as your Father?

We have here first, the election of God the Father, and then the sanctification of the Spirit. Many would have supposed that the blood of Jesus would be brought in before the sanctification of the Spirit, but that is not God's way, and why? Because it is a most beautiful thing to know, that in your conversion, you were under the direct action of the Spirit of God. Remember the action of the Spirit of God on a man, and the indwelling of the Spirit of God in the believer, are two very different things. The Father chooses according to His own blessed foreknowledge. In eternity the Father set His eye on you. In time the Spirit of God began to work in you; and what is the first thing He did? He set you apart for God. Here is a striking contrast to Judaism. What separated Israel to God? External ordinances! How are you separated? By the real deep work of the Spirit of God in your soul, and "unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." Would you like that sentence reversed? You will generally find that the soul passes this way, before the sense of forgiveness through the blood becomes known. Take Saul of Tarsus, the pattern conversion in Scripture. When he called Jesus "Lord," the Spirit of God was working in him. Then he said, "What wilt thou have me to do?" There comes in obedience: he knew not the washing of the blood yet,

but the will of the heart was broken. He was bent now on doing the will of God, but was in deep misery for three days. Then Ananias comes to him and says, "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord," then he got the knowledge of forgiveness. This is the way God usually works; the soul, under the gracious action of the Spirit of God, desires to obey the Word of the Lord, and then comes the knowledge of remission of sins by faith in His blood.

1 Peter 1:3-4 present "a living hope," and an unfading "inheritance." Every Jewish hope was centred in the Messiah, but He had died, and therefore the hopes of the Jew were gone. Here all is a contrast to Judaism, "A living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away." The inheritance God brought His people into, in olden days, they corrupted; their own sins defiled it; and it faded away before their eyes, when taken captive out of it. Oh, beloved, is it not sweet, in a world where everything fades away, and is corrupted and defiled, to know that you are called to a scene which is incorruptible, which nothing can defile, and which lasts eternally? Further, the inheritance is kept for you, and you are kept for the inheritance. The way the soul is kept is "by the power of God through faith." We are kept morally through the energy of faith, the work of God's Spirit, which He sustains by His own power and grace.

(1 Peter 1:5,) "Kept by the power of God." In Peter's Epistles you scarcely find a verse that has not a tacit, and at the same time touching allusion to his own pathway. He had not been kept, because of his own self-confidence; but God will keep you, he says, by His power through faith. I believe when he wrote that, his heart was turning back to the moment when the Lord told him, that He had prayed for him, that his faith might not fail — to the moment when, in self-confidence, he had thought that he could keep himself. Nor is it only that we are kept for a time, but "unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time." Peter has always got his eye on the glory beyond, and salvation is, with him (save in verse 9), always the deliverance of the saint out of this scene entirely, spirit, soul, and body, to be with Christ in glory: and this salvation, he says, is "ready to be revealed."

(1 Peter 1:6,) "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations (trials)." Peter, so to speak, says: — If you are thinking of the scene where Christ is, and where you will be with Him, if your hearts are dwelling on the thought of that inheritance which He is keeping for you, and of the home which you will share with Him, where all is unfading brightness, you will be rejoicing. What can you do else but rejoice with such a prospect? Then he drops down to earth again in this 6th verse, and says, You may be "put to grief" by various trials. But the "heaviness" here is not what we often speak of as heaviness — viz., a soul being dull, and heavy because out of communion with the Lord. Here it is the soul being under pressure, the Lord seeing the needs be, for the cc manifold trials."

"If need be." The Lord knows what He is about. We do not like the yoke; not one of us does. Scripture says, "It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth." Why? Because then he gets patient as he gets older. The Lord makes no mistakes. Whatever comes to us, then, let our hearts just revert to the Father, with this thought, "There is a needs be." Moreover, these trials are not always chastisement, they are His training of His children. There is such a thing as education, not instruction merely. He wants to draw out, to develop, to make manifest that which is the result

of His own grace working in our souls, that which is the fruit of the Spirit, "love, joy, peace, long-suffering," etc., and He takes His own way to produce these lovely fruits.

Look at 2 Corinthians 9:10-11. There is a wonderful difference between the 10th and 11th verses. In the 10th we have Paul's desire coming out, that the life of Jesus might be made manifest in his body; in the 11th we have God saying, as it were, "Well, Paul, I shall put you into circumstances where you will get your desire, where you cannot live anything else but the life of Jesus."

You and I may often not see the "needs be" for this or that trial, but what does our Father say? There is a needs be: and as it is only for "a season," and is not to last for ever, this sustains the heart.

It is a great thing for our souls always to seek to find the bright side of every trial, and to have beaming, radiant faces all the while we are in deep trouble! Look at Paul and Silas at Philippi. What could be more dismal? Thrust into the inner prison, and their feet made fast in the stocks, what do we find them doing? "They prayed and sang praises unto God." They were exercising their holy, and their royal priesthoods, in that prison. When they sang praises they were holy priests; when they said to the terrified jailer, "Do thyself no harm, for we are all here," they were royal priests. It is a charming picture! They are as full of joy as they can be, and they get that jailer converted! That was the wonderful result of their bleeding wounded backs; that hitherto godless, and apparently unreachable soul was saved! Tribulation will come in various ways, but we must make up our minds to it while here, "Knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience experience; and experience hope; and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (Romans 5:3-5). But the pathway of trial has a very bright end. "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:7). Faith's sphere is on earth, and God tries it. He never gives faith that He does not prove it; and this brings forth the fruit that will appear by-and-by, when everything is made manifest, at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

I believe the trying "by fire," spoken of in this verse, is a beautiful allusion to the three Hebrew servants who were tried by fire, whom, as you remember, Nebuchadnezzar cast into the furnace (Daniel 3:12-30). What was the effect of the fire in their case? It only burnt off their bonds, and set them free. The Lord lets us get into the fire oftentimes, and the effect of it is to burn off the cords that bind us, — in our case often self-imposed cords — and we come out free. But what have we had in the fire? A sense of the presence and company of the Lord, such as we never had before. So with the Hebrew servants, One walked with them in the furnace, and the form of that One was "like unto the Son of God."

"Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory" (1 Peter 1:8). There cannot be a saint of God, who does not love the Lord. You do not love Him as you would like to do, nor as He deserves to be loved. Quite true; nor do I; but when God writes to His people, He says, I know you love My Son. To me there is a lovely connection between this verse, "Whom having not seen ye love," and the fourth verse of Revelation 22:1-21, "They shall see his face." There is nothing which so touches my heart, and softens my spirit as this, I shall see His face. Oh beloved, do you not long to see His face, to gaze on Jesus, your Lord, to be in His own very presence, to see Him with these very eyes, and to be in

the intimate enjoyment of His love for evermore? What will it be to see His face? That face once was "marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men," for He gave His back to the smiters, and His cheeks to them that plucked off the hair, and it was for our sakes that His face was marred! What will it be to gaze on that face? No tongue can tell the deep and boundless joy of that moment.

"Believing ye rejoice," says Peter. Your trials and troubles will all turn to praise and honour, he says, at the Lord's appearing, and meantime faith must be in exercise, and you rejoice with joy unspeakable. I should like this to be more true of us, beloved. I do not think that there is among the dear children of God this daily rejoicing and exulting, of which this scripture speaks. It is in a Person they are to joy and exult, not in what He has done for them — that comes next.

"Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls" (1 Peter 1:9). Believing in Him, what have you received? Not salvation in the full sense of Peter's epistle, but the salvation of the soul. In the 5th verse you are kept "through faith unto salvation," a thing you have not yet, but will get through faith. In the 9th verse, salvation is the salvation of our souls, which we have now. You have not seen the Lord yet, but the moment you rest on Him by faith, you get your soul saved.

Three things come out in the following three verses (9-11): the testimony of the prophets; the preaching of the Holy Ghost; and the coming of the Lord — His appearing in glory. When the prophets had written their prophecies, they sat down and studied them, for though it was the tale of the sufferings of Christ, and of the glories that should follow, which God revealed to them, it was not for themselves, but for us Christians, that they wrote.

"Which things the angels desire to look into" (1 Peter 1:12). Though we are often so negligent about the study of Scripture, and, alas! there is but little desire in our hearts to penetrate into its hidden depths of meaning, the angels desire to look into them. Angels never knew God, or saw God, till they saw the babe Jesus in Bethlehem; for there was no revelation of God till then. Angels beheld God for the first time when they saw that wonderful Babe. At His birth there was a movement of the heavenly host. A multitude comes with the angel that announces His birth, and they sing praises to God. All heaven is occupied with what is taking place on earth, for the Son of God is in this world of ours. Angels minister to Him when "he was an hungered" in the wilderness after dismissing Satan; and in the garden, in His agony, angels come and minister to Him, and strengthen Him. Angels have a wonderful interest in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus; all "which things the angels desire to look into," and yet He did not come for angels. They sang at His birth, but we do not hear of them singing at His resurrection. Why? Then they seem to say, Here we stand aside and leave the note of praise for those whom it most nearly concerns. They leave it for you and me. We are the ones for whom He died. Angels say, We love to trace His pathway in this world; love to look into His tomb; but we have no fitting note to suit His resurrection, for He did not die for us, He died for sinners.

"Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind" (1 Peter 1:13). This is a figure that would be well known in the East. There they wore the flowing robe, and it would need to be girded up for a man at work to make any great progress. The loins are the secret of strength. There must be the steady application of your soul constantly to these things, Peter says; and Paul says, "Set your mind on things above, where Christ sitteth" (Colossians 3:12): not only your affections. People often say they must have something for their minds. Paul says, I will give you something for your minds, but

it will be in heaven.

"Hope to the end," etc. You have in this chapter faith in the Lord, love towards Him, and then this hope. You will find in New Testament Scripture faith, hope, and love written of as going together ten times. You have faith in a Person, you love a Person, and you hope for a Person. All is bound up in a Person — "the Person of Christ."

"For the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." What grace is this? The grace of being taken straight into His presence, to be with the Lord, and like Him, for ever. Jude says, "Looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life," and what mercy could be greater than for the Lord just to come, and lift us up out of this scene of sorrow, and trial, and distress, and weeping and death, and place us in His own bright presence for ever and ever? What Jude calls mercy, Peter calls grace, and what could be greater grace?

Then, having taken us on to the end, Peter brings us back again, and says this is how you are to walk meanwhile, "As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: but as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy" (1 Peter 1:14-16). Not doing what you like, but what your Father tells you; and He looks for practical holiness from you.

"And if ye call on the Father, who, without respect of persons, judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear" (1 Peter 1:17). This is not the judgment-seat of Christ, but the Father keeping His eye on each child every day, watching what we do: and as we sow, so we reap. The obedient child says: I should like that there might be nothing in my path, day by day, that my Father would not be pleased to see. He is looking on, is coming in, too, in restraining grace, and in chastening likewise, oftentimes. This is how the Father judgeth, and that judgment is good and wholesome for our souls.

It is a great mistake to suppose, because the testimony of God in the present day, in the light of Christianity, is different from a former day under Judaism, that therefore the principles of the moral government of God have in anywise changed. The moral government of God over His people is exactly the same today as in bye-gone days, and neither you nor I can traverse the word, or ways of God, without suffering for it, though we are under grace, any more than those who were distinctly under law. Hence the exhortation here to "Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear," which Peter adds. This is not at all the fear that genders bondage; not fear as to redemption, or acceptance or relationship, because the next thing we read is, "Forasmuch as ye know," etc. Why, then, am I to fear? Because I know certain things. The knowledge of redemption, and the enjoyment of the blessed place God's grace gives me in Christianity, are to make my pathway characterised by fear, and there would be far less sorrow, far less dealing of the Lord, in our day, if we had more of this fear. The moment we cease to have this fear is the moment we fall; so long as we fear we are preserved, and kept; the hour we cease to fear, is the time we fall. This verse speaks of the daily government of God over His children; not the judgment of the great white throne, nor the judgment-seat of Christ for the saints, but the fact that the Father has His eye on me today, and He will deal with me today or tomorrow according to what His eye has seen. "The Father judgeth according to every man's work," hence I am to fear, lest in any way I miss His mind, err from His path, or grieve His Spirit. It is filial fear of offending a loving, but ever-watchful Father.

"Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:18-19).

Two things come out very clearly in this part of our chapter, viz., redemption by blood, and renewal — being born again by the Word of God. You have been redeemed, Peter says, by this precious blood, how then can you go on in the ways of the old man?

If you have been touched by this wondrous love of God, and have been redeemed completely from under the bondage of Satan, what kind of conversation will yours be now? It was "vain conversation" before, but now you are redeemed, not merely purchased, it is to be "good conversation."

Redemption and purchase are two very different things. Redemption is the slave being set free from his condition as a slave, and being brought into liberty. Mere purchase leaves him a slave still, though the master be different. Every unconverted soul belongs to the Lord. Peter speaks of "the Lord that bought them" in his second epistle. He bought "the field," — that is, the world, and every inhabitant of it belongs to Him; and deny Him though men may, and do now, the day is fast approaching when they will have to own Him Lord.

But, if a believer, you are redeemed, and are set free to serve Him with purpose of heart. There is not an element of bondage left now for the children of God. He has brought them into a place of perfect liberty: not liberty for the flesh, but for the enjoyment of that into which His grace has brought them. The apostle, you must remember, is speaking to those who had Jewish thoughts and minds, which makes his language the more forcible. In referring to the blood of the lamb, what would that say to an Israelite? It would speak to him of that night in Egypt when the blood of the slain lamb, sprinkled on the door-posts, kept God out, when He passed by in judgment. It would speak to him, too, of how that blood maintained their place before God in the wilderness. When the Spirit of God said through Balaam, "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel," was there none? Yes, plenty, but He saw none. Is there not iniquity and perverseness too in us? Yes, but God sees none. He sees that blood which has brought us into His own presence, in peace, and in blessing. You never can get beyond it, even in glory. There the theme of everlasting praise is "the Lamb slain."

Note, it is "the precious blood of Christ." Scripture does not often use adjectives, specially so when speaking of the Lord Himself, but here the Spirit of God does use an adjective, "the precious blood." That is God's estimate of it — "precious." It avails to cleanse from every sin, and its efficacy is still fresh before God.

These words, "the precious blood of Christ," fell with sweetness on believers' ears eighteen hundred years ago, when Peter first penned the words; they fall with equal sweetness on believers' ears today, because it is this precious blood that gives us a place before God. You may fail, and I may fail, but that precious blood of Christ can never fail.

"Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you" (ver. 20). The introduction of the Lamb of God was no afterthought with God, He was pre-ordained before the foundation of the world. Why before the foundation of the world? Because the blessing of the heavenly saints — the Church — was thought of before the

foundation of the world.

If you get an earthly people spoken of, "from the foundation of the world" is the word used; but if it be the present moment of the richest display of the grace of God, and the Church comes in, you get "before" the foundation of the world. (Compare Ephesians 1:4; Titus 1:2; and 1 Peter 1:20, with Matthew 25:34; Revelation 13:8, and Revelation 17:8.) The moment the world came in, God said, I am going to have a people in the world (the Jews), but the Church does not belong to the world at all; the Church is a heavenly thing, was thought of in eternity, and belongs to eternity.

(1 Peter 1:21,) "Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God." It is not by creation man knows God. Man seeks to know God by creation, but he does not thus know Him; nor does he find Him out by His providential dealings up to Moses' time, nor by His revelations from Sinai, for man could not come near Him: if but a beast touched the mountain, it was to be stoned, or thrust through with a dart. God dwelt in thick darkness, which no one could approach unto. It is neither by creation, nor by providence, nor by law, that man knows God, but by the One who came down, and walked this earth as a man, and revealed the heart of God towards man, and then who died for man, and who has gone up again to the glory above — the Lamb of God. Do you believe in God? I ask you. Are you thoroughly at home with God? Are you happy with God? "Christ once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." It is of the deepest importance to the soul to get hold of this, that the man Christ Jesus was the expression of the heart of God.

Perhaps in your mind you have a little different thought of God, from that which the name, and life of Jesus present to you.

Tell me, is Jesus, the Man of sorrows who once walked this earth as a blessed compassionate Man, is that One your thought of God? Any thought of God that is not the perfect counterpart of what Jesus was, is an idol; hence, says John, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." So Peter says, you have every reason for the fullest hope, and no reason for distrust of God, but, on the contrary, ground for the most perfect confidence in Him. There should be no diffidence about the future, but the most blessed assurance that He who has raised up from the dead the Lord Jesus, will raise you up also in like manner. Nothing but the knowledge of God, in the face of Jesus, could give the soul this blessed peace and hope, a hope that maketh not ashamed. The Lord give us to know Him better, and delight in Him more as we travel on from day to day.

(1 Peter 1:22,) "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth, through the Spirit, unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently." Your soul has been practically purified from its old thoughts and wishes, and now what comes out instead? "Unfeigned love of the brethren." You had been wandering through the world restless and unhappy, perhaps, and the grace of God came and worked in your heart, and you woke up to find yourself among your brethren. Now, he says, "See that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently." It is very easy to love lovable people, nothing is easier, but that is not "love out of a pure heart." Love out of a pure heart is a love that loves, not because the object is deserving, but when it is the reverse; it is like the love of God, who loved us when there was nothing about us to love. In Romans 5:1-21 the apostle says, "Scarcely for a righteous man will one die." A righteous man is a hard kind of man, who pays every one, and expects every one to pay him, but does not win much love, and scarcely for such a one will one die. "Yet, peradventure for a good man some would

even dare to die." For a Howard, or a Peabody, or a philanthropist whose life was spent in benefiting others, for such, the apostle says, "peradventure some would even dare to die." He is not sure about it. But when we were destitute of righteousness, and stripped of goodness, that was the very moment when God loved us. That was "love out of a pure heart," and that is the kind of love the Lord would stir us up to.

It is a very poor thing when people complain of want of love. I believe when we get to this state that we fail to find people loving us, we may lay it down as an axiom that we are not loving them.

You may say, "It is impossible to love some people." Peter says otherwise. You ought to love them, he says, because they are redeemed, and you have the capacity to love them because you are renewed. They are redeemed by the blood of Christ; there is your motive for loving them, and you are born again by the word of God; there is your capacity. "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (1 Peter 1:23).

(1 Peter 1:24-25,) "All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof fadeth away: but the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you." This quotation from Isaiah 40:1-31 is very remarkable. Do you think you have a better nature than your neighbour, or your neighbour than you? God says all flesh is grass, and He says this when comforting His people. It is not the way you and I would comfort each other, to tell each other that we are utterly worthless. That is the way, however, that God takes to comfort a repentant people. It is an immense comfort to discover that God knows I am worthless, and that He expects no good out of me.

Nature is like grass, God says, but His Word is abiding and enduring for ever, and God has put in your soul a principle of blessing that is immutable, and unchanging and eternal, for it is from Himself, and like Himself. I have told you what you are, Peter says; now I will tell you what God is. You are grass, whereas God is everlasting, and His Word endures for ever, and He has put His Word in your heart, and now you have a nature like Himself.

How easy, if I only get this new life fed and nourished, for the child to be like the Father. There is no effort in love, it is like water finding its own level and if we are in the enjoyment of the love of God, feeling its blessedness to us, it will come out from us to others. When we were utterly worthless there was something put into us by the love of God, His Word living and abiding, that enables the child to be like the Father, and to love out of a pure heart as He loves. You are redeemed and you are renewed, and in the energy of the new life, you desire to follow in the wake of your Father's action. To please Him is to act like Him, you love the Father and you love the children.

Then having got this new life, Peter informs us that there are things to be laid aside which used to mark the old life. "Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious" (1 Peter 2:1-3). Guile is not liking to be read through: having something sinister behind. How beautiful is the Lord's word about Nathanael, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile" (John 1:47). Without guile is to be transparent. Was the Lord ever double? He was as transparent as the light, for He was "the light."

"Hypocrisies" too are to be laid aside, 1:e., seeming to be what one is not, and hiding what one is — "and envies and all evil speakings." Scripture turns us inside out, and shows us what is in our hearts. There is no other book that reveals God, and no other book that so reveals man. If we were but subject to what we have enjoined on us in this second chapter, there would not spring up those weeds in the garden of the Lord, which alas! so often damage and disfigure it. It is very easy to pick a flaw in other people. Nothing is easier. It needs no microscope to see the defects in others, but is that the way to help them? If we began by correcting our own, it would be far better.

"As new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby up to salvation" (1 Peter 2:2). These last three words should be inserted here; the Holy Ghost indited them, but they have slipped out of our English version of the Bible. In the first chapter you were born by the Word, here you get the food of the new life. The Word gave you life, the Word sustains and nourishes that life all along the way. You will never be a grown-up person till you reach the Lord in glory, all along the way you are to be in this character of a new-born babe. In proportion as we are feeding upon, and delighting in, the Word of the Lord, so our souls grow, and so are the things that are reprehended kept out. The Lord give us to love His Word, and delight in it more and more, and to walk more in simple obedience to it, till we see His face by-and-bye.

We are too apt to take what others think about the Word — that is, to take it adulterated. If we are going to be happy, we must get the Word for ourselves. If we give it up, we shall certainly lose everything else. If the sap of a tree is gone, so is the health and fruit bearing. The Word of God is everything to the soul. Do we, then, buy up the opportunities that are given us for the study of the Word? We may not all be able to give hours to it at one time, but do we use up our minutes? Is it our daily guide-book in the path of life?

Neither you nor I were ever caught by Satan and tripped up, we never made a mistake in our history, that it was not the direct result of neglect of some part of the Word of God. The Lord answered and defeated Satan in the wilderness as the result of having lived by the Word of God, not because He Himself was God; and when we have been beaten by Satan, it was because we had not the Word of the Lord to go by. I believe there is in the Word, divine guidance for your soul and mine, for every step of our history from first to last. There are principles to be found in it that would guide us at all times, if we were only subject to it.

I would press upon you, my reader, more careful and prayerful, and constant study of the Word of the Lord, so as to get to know His mind. Comparatively speaking, the Bible is a small book: how is it that we know so little about it? I believe because there is a profundity in it, to begin with, that no other book has, and it must be read in dependence on God in order to be understood; but then too Satan does his very best to prevent our storing it up in our hearts, because he knows its value.

"He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them," the Lord says, "he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him," 1:e., I will pay him a visit, but "If any man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with him" (John 14:21-23). In proportion. as our souls heed the written Word, we shall find the Spirit of God giving us the enjoyment of Him who is the Living Word.

I do not wonder Peter commends them so earnestly to the Word of the Lord, even as he so often and so touchingly alludes to his own denial of Him. Had he remembered the word of the Lord to him, he would never have denied Him in Pilate's hall.

27. CHAPTER 21 — OUR HOLY AND ROYAL PRIESTHOOD.

CHAPTER 21 — OUR HOLY AND ROYAL PRIESTHOOD.

HAVING shown us in the first chapter that the Christian is redeemed, renewed, and empowered by the Holy Ghost to walk in newness of life, Peter now passes on to unfold our new relationships, and shows that Christians are not only builded together as a spiritual house, but are a holy and a royal priesthood, — holy, looking God-ward; royal, looking manward, and that this all flows from coming to Christ.

(1 Peter 2:4-5,) "To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." Peter is very fond of this word living. You will remember his confession of Jesus in Matthew 16:1-28, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." You have come to a living stone, he says here; and this is God's estimate of Him, "Chosen of God, and precious."

It is "to Whom coming," 1:e., you are brought to have to do with a Person. Do you know what this is? Have you had to do in the history of your soul with the Son of God as a living Person? If you have, what is the result? "Ye also as living stones are built up."

What is a Christian? You say a "living stone." — And what is a stone? A stone is a bit of a rock. See what security it gives! Where first do we get the illustration? In Peter's own case. Peter is brought to Jesus, and what does Jesus say? "Thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation a stone" (John 1:42). This act of the Lord's is most significant. He takes the place of being Simon's Lord, and his possessor. Changing the name always indicated that the person whose name was changed, became the possession, or vassal, of the one who changed his name. How does this change of name take place? The Lord speaks to Peter. How do we become living stones? Because we have heard the voice of the Son of God. "The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live" (John 5:25). A Christian is a living stone, having come to Christ. What a sense of security it gives the soul! You have had to do with the Living One! He is a living stone, and you are a living stone; you have rock-life, the same as His. Can you ever be separated from Him? Never! His life is now yours, and "your life is hid with Christ in God." The spiritual house, of which Peter here speaks, is the nearest approach to Paul's doctrine of the "body." What Paul calls the "body," Peter calls the "house," but that is not at all what Paul means by the house; he is talking of a great mass of profession, when using that expression. If you want to see the spiritual house in perfection, you must look at Revelation 21:1-27. How beautifully the stones shine there! They are exactly the same stones as are being built up here, but by the time we get there we have been on the great Lapidary's wheel to the uttermost; and every bit of dirt, and every ugly excrescence has been taken off, and the wheel has rendered the stone translucent. But the stones that shine so brightly there, ought to shine for Christ here! What a beautiful thing it would be if the world could read Christ in you and me here! By-and-bye the nations will walk in the light of that city; they will see Christ coming out

then in glory, and they ought to see His grace and love now reflected in our life and ways day by day. But believers, besides being God's spiritual house, are "an holy priesthood." The idea that man has of a priest is one who comes between the soul and God, and does the business of the soul with God. That was all true in Old Testament times, but who are the priests now? Every saved soul is a priest. "Am I then exercising my priesthood?" is a question of profound importance for each believer to ask himself. We are not all ministers, for God has not given us all power to minister the Word of the Lord, but we are all priests.

Ministry is the exercise of a spiritual gift, and the divinely appointed means of conveying truth from God to the souls of men; therefore every person ought to have the deepest possible sense in his soul, if he rise to minister, "I have something from God for the people before me." But while public ministry is limited according to gift, priesthood belongs to the youngest, the feeblest, the weakest believer, and it belongs to women as well as to men.

Worship is the result of the exercise of the holy priesthood; ministry is the exercise of the gift the Lord has given to His servants. Worship is from the soul to God. Ministry is from God to the soul. The holy priests are to offer up spiritual sacrifices. Hebrews 13:15, says, "By him, therefore, let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name." There should be continually rising from the hearts of the saints, blessing, and praise, and worship. The Lord has put us together first of all, to praise, and thank, and bless God. We must have God first: His due must be rendered to Him. We must not even put preaching the Gospel first. This is where Christendom has gone wrong. It has put the world first, and made the salvation of souls the first object. Now this is not what God looks for to be our first object. It is all right, in its place, and we cannot be too earnest in our endeavour to get souls saved, but God's claims on us, as His saints, and His holy priests, we must first respond to. Then go out after souls with all the energy possible.

What is God's great work now, from the day of Pentecost onward? What has He been seeking? The Father seeks worshippers, and because the Father seeks worshippers, the Son says, I must go and seek sinners, and when I have found them, turn them into worshippers. When once we are worshippers, and holy priests, it is easy to fulfil our functions as royal priests. Are you a royal priest? Looking to God we are holy priests, and passing through the world we are to be royal priests. And what does royalty give? It gives the sense of dignity. And what more dignified than to be God's ambassadors in a world that opposes His grace!

How wonderful it is to read, "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Peter 2:9). I feel we are very apt to lose the sense of our individual responsibility as royal priests. It is our privilege and solemn responsibility to "show forth the virtues of him who hath called us out of darkness into his marvellous light." But first we must exercise our holy priesthood. If we are built up a spiritual house, and given the privilege of being holy priests, are we exercising this privilege? Are our souls answering to the mind of God? The thing is very simple. Peter says these spiritual sacrifices are acceptable to God. It is that which the Lord looks for, delights in, and wants. It is what His blessed Son came into the world for.

What a picture the priesthood in the Old Testament gives us of our position now. What does God put into our hands now? It is Christ! He puts Christ into our hands to offer up. He does not look for

us to be occupied with ourselves, either with our own position, or our own blessing, but to be occupied with all that Christ is, as the One that God finds precious, and whom our hearts find precious too.

"Unto you, therefore, which believe he is precious," 1:e., what God sees precious, you see precious. Faith sees exactly what God sees.

It would be an immense help if, in our meetings for worship, this thought filled us, that we are there as priests to offer to God what He delights in, and that is Christ. I press this thought, that our condition individually largely affects God's assemblies. Supposing that a large proportion of the holy priests are flat and listless, and with little enjoyment of Christ, you must have the whole assembly affected by that. Oh! if our souls were bright with a deep sense of the love and favour of God, what meetings for worship ours would be! It would be all Christ, and Christ alone. The Lord lead us into the enjoyment of what it is to be holy priests, as those whose hearts are satisfied with Christ, and thus bring Him to God continually, Whom we find precious, and Whom God finds precious! But if we are holy priests, we are also to be royal priests. What is the royal priesthood? Clearly of the same nature as the Melchizedek priesthood of Christ. The Lord is now exercising His priesthood after the Aaronic type. He is thinking of His poor weak people down here. The exercise of His priesthood is Aaronic, its order that of Melchizedek. Now He is meeting weakness and infirmities; when He comes out as the Melchizedek Priest by-and-bye, it will not be meeting-weakness; all is pure blessing consequent on victory. But now, before Christ exhibits the Melchizedek priesthood, He says to His people, You must exhibit it. He is going to be a blessing to everybody by-and-bye, and He says, That is what you may be now, in every possible way in which Christian love and grace can carry you out in devotedness to meet every need, whether of body or soul. You may only be able to carry a piece of bread to a hungry person, or to visit a sick one, or to comfort a mourning heart, or to speak a word to a troubled conscience; but all flows from the fact of your being a royal priest, and in the proper exercise of your priesthood.

We have seen in Hebrews 13:15, our holy priesthood — offering the sacrifice of praise to God continually, and in verse 16 our royal priesthood comes out. "But to do good and to communicate forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." The sacrifice of praise is the first thing, and the sacrifice of active benevolence is the next, 1:e., reproducing the character of God. The world is to look at you and me, and to see in us the character of the One whom it cannot see — who is now hidden — by the coming out in us of what He is, in all our words and ways. Christ says, as it were, I depute you to exercise the Melchizedek priesthood, before the day when I come out to exercise it Myself.

What is the Melchizedek priesthood? A priesthood of unmixed blessing. What is a Christian? A person who is blessed, and who becomes a blessing. If you, my reader, are a Christian, what are you left in this world for? Christ has left you in this world to be a person whose heart is always to go out to God in praise and thankfulness, in the midst of a thankless world, and to go out to men in acts of benevolence and unselfishness, in the midst of a selfish world. To God thankfulness and praise; to men benevolence and unselfishness, that is to be our life. The Lord grant that His grace may so work in our hearts as to produce these spiritual fruits.

(1 Peter 2:7-8), "Unto you therefore which believe He is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner,

and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed." This gives us Israel's path, as a nation. Why do they stumble at the Word? Because they will not obey God. "Whereunto also they were appointed." Appointed to what? Appointed as a nation to have this stone put before them. God gave them the most wonderful privilege possible, to have Christ put before them, and they stumbled over Him. Because He came in lowly grace the nation stumbled over Him.

"But ye are a chosen generation," etc. Peter is addressing himself there particularly to the believing remnant of Israel, the Jewish believers, whom God had turned to Himself. The nation stumbled over Christ, he says, but you poor feeble believers in Him have all the blessings that God had promised the nation. As a nation, God had said of them in Exodus 19:1-25 that if they were obedient they should be a peculiar treasure to Him, a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. They were disobedient, and lost all, and now Peter says, you, a feeble remnant, have got this blessing, in spite of the disobedience of the nation, through the grace of God, and the obedience of Christ.

"Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God, which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy" (1 Peter 2:10). This is a word from Hosea 2:1-23. Because of their wickedness and sin, God had said that Israel should not get mercy, and were not His people (Hosea 1:6). The nation has lost the blessing through their disobedience. In the 2nd chapter, the Lord promises to give it back. In spite of their sin, and disobedience, and unfaithfulness, and My judgment too, I will bring them into blessing by-and-by, God says, and in the very spot where they were judged, there they will be blessed (Hosea 2:23). Judgment has gone by, and mercy rejoices against judgment, for even disobedience cannot frustrate the purposes of God in grace.

God will fulfil His promises to Israel, and bless them through His own grace, and they will go to the valley of Achor (Joshua 7:26; Hosea 2:15), the place where the first judgment came on Israel in the land, for profaning themselves with the forbidden thing, and there where they had been judged, they will get the blessing through mercy. But now, Peter says, you, the believing remnant, get this position before the time comes when God will restore the nation.

Having pointed out the peculiar place of blessing which the believers among the Jews occupied, the apostle begins his exhortations. It is very noticeable in every part of the Word of God, that exhortations are always based upon the unfolding of the doctrine of the soul's relationship with God most distinctly and clearly, and this chapter is no exception to the general rule.

You will see at a glance how simply and naturally the exhortations come in here. Peter has been calling these people to heaven. He has been unfolding the heavenly calling, in the first chapter; has shown them that they are chosen by the Father, separated by the work of the Spirit, and sheltered by the blood of the Son of God; that an inheritance in heaven is kept for them, and they are kept for it; that in the meantime they go through trouble down here, but rejoice in Him, whom having not seen they love. Then he has shown them, that they are children of the Father, but redeemed by the blood of the Son, and renewed by the Spirit, and the Word of God. In the second chapter he has been setting forth their new position, as being a spiritual house in which God dwells, and moreover that they are both holy and royal priests — holy priests in offering up spiritual sacrifices to God, and royal priests in showing forth the "virtues of him who hath called us out of darkness into his marvellous light:" then that they are His people, and have obtained mercy,

and mercy is a very sweet thing. Mercy we need all through our walk on earth.

This, then, is the place in which the believer stands; this is Peter's view of Christianity, that the believer is left down here to yield to God what He ought to get from man, and to show to man what God is, in the grace and love of His heart towards man. After this are we not prepared for any exhortation?

(1 Peter 2:11,) "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul." He addresses the Christian as a stranger and a pilgrim. Why are you a stranger? Because you are away from home. Why are you a pilgrim? Because you are journeying to a spot which you want to reach. You are a stranger because your hopes, your joys, and the One you love best are all in heaven, and that is what makes heaven the home of your heart.

Born from heaven, you belong to heaven. Your Father is in heaven, your Saviour is in heaven, your springs of supply are in heaven; your hopes, your joys, are all in heaven; in short, you are like an exotic plant down here, a stranger to this clime. You are a pilgrim, too, and a pilgrim never thinks his pilgrimage over till he reaches the spot towards which his course is bent.

"Abstain from fleshly lusts," says the apostle. Peter is talking of the inner life of the soul, of those thousand and one little things that come in to spoil communion with God, and to hinder growth, and the knowledge of Christ.

You know what is a snare to you, what will trip you up, and, he says, you must be prepared to deny yourselves the things that are a hindrance, or, in other words, "which war against the soul." You must use, in fact, the knife of circumcision. After Israel crossed the Jordan, to take possession of the promised land, there had to be sharp knives used before they could use sharp swords: and why? Because the sharp knives were for themselves, and they must be right themselves, before they can war against the enemy. If you are going to have outward power, you must have inward purity. If you are going to have happiness, you must have holiness. Happiness always walks a little behind holiness, and the man that is not holy cannot be happy. By holiness I mean practical judging of oneself and one's ways; practically setting oneself to work to keep the flesh in the place of death, where God has put it by the cross of Christ. There must be holiness within, or there will be no happiness without. He that would be happy must be holy.

(1 Peter 2:12-15,) "Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation. Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men." Now the apostle turns outside. If you have your heart practically purified by the Lord, you will find yourself all right outside. But mark, you must make up your mind at once for the opposing Gentiles to speak against you. Who are the Gentiles? Unbelievers. If you are going to follow the Lord closely, you will find that, not only unbelievers, but sometimes even worldly Christians will have a good deal to say against you. What will be the result? They will have, by-and-bye, to confess before God that your works were worthy of the Lord; and though they spoke evil of you, they knew that God was working in you, and by

you.

It is a great thing for a young Christian to stand boldly for the Lord. What must you expect? That your old worldly friends will have a great deal to say about you, and it will all be evil, of course. We must expect it, and if we are expecting it, we are not surprised when it comes.

"Having your conversation honest;" that is, our walk so up to the mark that no one can put a finger on anything and say, That is not right, or, That is not fair, or, The other thing is not lovely. There ought not to be even a suspicion of evil, much less a proof. The 11th verse is the subjugating of the inward life, the 12th verse is the right ordering of the outward life, and in verse 13, we are told to submit to the powers that be for the Lord's sake. If the governing powers of the land were to institute an impost ever so unrighteous, the Christian's duty is to submit. Could there have been a more wicked king than Nero? Yet in Nero's time, Paul wrote to the Roman Christians to be subject to the higher powers, because they are ordained of God. The Lord Jesus Himself came into the world to have no rights, to be scorned and buffeted, and finally to be turned out of the world which His own hands had made, and a Christian is to follow Christ, and to have no rights either. Whatever the thing is, unless it infringe on the revealed will of God, you are to submit for the Lord's sake; that is, you are to act as royal priests, showing forth the virtues that are in Him. If Christians are moved to strife, or are siding with the world, there is no testimony as to patience, and forbearance, and the like.

(1 Peter 2:16,) "As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God." Here the Christian gets the place of being thoroughly free, not belonging to the world, but belonging to heaven, and not using his liberty as a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servant of God, seeking only to be a servant. Now a servant's business is simply to follow the will of his master, and God's will is that I should submit. If I take things into my own hands, the Lord says, as it were, "You have taken up the cudgels, and I leave you to fight it out," and the consequence is, when this is the case, we are always beaten.

(1 Peter 2:17,) "Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king." Now Peter begins to take up the relationships of life. I am to give honour to whom honour is due. Be it a title or whatever it is, I am to give it. It is often a little pride in the heart that does not like to yield this honour — but, believe me, there is nothing more contrary to God, nothing more deadening, nothing more thoroughly of the devil than radicalism, or what is called "levelling," and the end of the whole thing is Antichrist, upsetting all authority and power, only that it may shift hands.

Among Christians there is but one standing-place before God; all are saints, and are one in Christ Jesus. God raised up His Son Jesus Christ, and with Him He has put in His own presence every believer. What wonderful exaltation! In Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither bond nor free. This is the doctrine of Christ — the doctrine of the Church. How then ought I to act? Like Christ! I ought to speak like Christ, to act like Him. But then there is "the doctrine of God," and what is that? If I am a servant I am to act as one; if I do not so act, I put everything out of its due order. The doctrine of Christ is that there is not a shade of difference between saint and saint, but the doctrine of God is, that God says there are those to whom I am to give honour, and I am not walking with God if I am not ready to do this, not grudgingly, but with all heartiness. There is something very beautiful in these four things going together in the 17th verse. Peter talks of the world, of the brotherhood, of God, and of the king.

It is vain for us to say we are fearing God if we are not giving to all men that which God would have us give. There is no real fear of God unless I am seeking to maintain, in His presence, every relationship in which I am placed down here, exactly as He would have me maintain it, according to His own mind and heart.

(1 Peter 2:18,) "Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward." Peter is speaking here not to slaves, but to domestic servants, and what is the word? "Be subject with all fear." They maybe very hard masters, be very ill-tempered persons, that is not to excuse the Christian servant from subjection. Let us acknowledge our weakness, but never seek to extenuate it; let us acknowledge our feebleness, but never let us justify it!

What is the fear spoken of here? Fear lest, in my position as a servant. I should misrepresent God; that is the fear. My master or mistress might be unconverted, and I have to represent God to them.

(1 Peter 2:19-22,) "For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called; because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth." If you do right, and get hard words for it, and take it patiently, you put God in debt, as it were. He says, "Thank" to you. How beautiful! If you do good, suffer for it, take it patiently, and get no thanks from your master, never mind, you are going to get a surprise by-and-bye; there is a "Thank" to come from God to you, for this beautiful exhibition of patience under most trying circumstances. The motive for you to act like this is most blessed; it is because Christ did the same when He suffered for us.

Peter speaks of suffering for conscience' sake, for righteousness' sake, for Christ's sake, and for evil doing. I may possibly suffer for my own sin, but I ought never to, and why? Because Christ has suffered for sins. I may suffer for conscience' sake, because there may come a question of doing something which a master orders, but which is contrary to God, and then of course God must be obeyed rather than man. Obedience to God is the first thing — the great ruling principle of the Christian's life. If in obeying a master I must disobey God, I am shut up to what Peter says in Acts 4:1-37, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye." It never can be right to disobey God, in order to obey man, and the saint is never supposed to do such a thing. In such a case I may suffer for conscience' sake, but the soul gets the recompense made to it of the Lord's favour and blessing, and of His enjoyed presence, as its blessed reward. Peter gives Christ as a beautiful example of this, "Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously" (1 Peter 2:23).

Christ put His case wholly into God's hands, and you must do the same, Peter says. Christ said, I take everything entirely from God's hands, and accept it as coming from Him; and when we do the same, the sting of the trial is gone, and it is only fraught with blessing for the soul. This allusion to the Lord's perfect pathway leads the apostle here to allude most touchingly to the reality and depth of Christ's sufferings, "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls" (1 Peter 2:24-25). Your sins, my sins, led Him to the tree, and now we are dead to sins, but alive to God.

Jesus always did right; we went wrong, went astray, but we are brought back to have to do with this blessed One, who is the Overseer, the One that takes care of the soul, the Shepherd who goes after the sheep. The Lord give us to delight our hearts more and more in Him, to follow Him, to learn of Him, to have His Word more as the daily joy of our souls, and to bring forth fruit in our lives.

28. CHAPTER 22 — OUR PATHWAY OF SUFFERING.

CHAPTER 22 — OUR PATHWAY OF SUFFERING.

1 Peter 3:1-22.

ONE cannot help being struck in reading the Epistles of Peter with this thought, that he is always contemplating difficulties in the road of the saint, and suggesting how to get along, so as to glorify God in the very midst of them. This remark applies very specially to this chapter. He begins with the wives, and supposes that many may have unconverted husbands. Subjection was that which the Lord had laid on the wife; but this thought might arise in her heart, Am I to obey a husband who is unconverted? Never mind, the Lord says, you be in subjection. Then the difficulty might come, What if he asked me to do anything that would lead to the dishonour of God? The answer is simple. It never can be the path of a Christian to dishonour Christ.

(1 Peter 3:1-2,) "Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; while they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear." There might come in even the very point that the wife sees, the privilege of the Table of the Lord, and the husband forbids her going. What is she to do? I believe her path is clear; it is not a command of the Lord, but a privilege, and therefore if the husband forbids, it is the duty of the wife to be subject, till God clear the way, which, in His own time, He may do. The principle is subjection, and that God owns, and we can never traverse the Word of the Lord without distinct retributive judgment following, sooner or later, from the Lord. How much better is it quietly to wait on the Lord for Him to remove the difficulty, than for her to take the bit in her teeth and say, "It is a privilege, and I mean to have it at all costs."

What is the thought the Lord holds out to the wife? That the husband may be won by her life, her "chaste conversation coupled with fear." It is a wonderful thing to get a soul converted to God by a life. I can conceive no testimony higher to any saint, than that the quiet walk of subjection to God has been the means of showing Christ to a soul. Many a careless husband has, thank God, been converted through the silent godly testimony of a woman, who always did the right thing, because always thinking of pleasing God. The fear is the danger of overstepping one word of the Lord's — the fear of misrepresenting Him.

(1 Peter 3:3-4,) "Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price." There is a beautiful allusion to the fashions, because there is nothing so changeable as fashion, but, the apostle says, you are to have an ornament that is ever the same. Oh to be the possessor of that, which in the sight of God is of great price, the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit! It is not shown in what the world around notices, it can only be seen and understood by those who are thrown in contact with the wearer.

It is a beautiful thing to be able even to dress to please the Lord, because the body belongs to Him. Spirit, soul, and body are all His, and we are always to be living to God, having the eye on God, walking before Him.

(1 Peter 3:7,) "Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered." The wife was to give to the husband subjection, and the husband was to give to the wife honour, he was to be the one who should cherish and care for her as the one given him of God. "That your prayers be not hindered." There must be some special reason for the apostle speaking of this, Take care, he says, that you so dwell, that your prayers be not hindered. You are heirs together of the grace of life, 1:e., you possess the life that springs from Christ, and you are heirs together of the grace that flows from Christ, now be watchful lest anything come in to hinder your prayers.

Depend upon it the secret of power does not depend on the public prayer meeting, but on cultivating the spirit of prayer, and this applies when we are but one or two together. It is a beautiful broad principle in Scripture, and nothing so tends to real fellowship as bowing the knee together.

(1 Peter 3:8,) "Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous." We have a lovely word here, because the tendency is for different minds to come in and have different interests. Do not have it so, the apostle says; have sympathy one with the other, be pitiful, be not courteous merely, but humble-minded.

(1 Peter 3:9,) "Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing, not rendering evil for evil." Evil will rise, he says, you are going through an evil world, and what is the blessed privilege of the child of God in a place where he receives evil every day? To pay it back with good. What a wonderful privilege for a saint of God! He is called to inherit a blessing himself, and to be a blesser of others.

(1 Peter 3:10-12,) "For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it: for the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil." Now we come to a quotation from the Old Testament Scriptures, Psalms 34:1-22. It is very instructive to see how in this epistle the apostle lays his hand, by the Spirit of God, on the three great sections of Scripture, and uses them for our edification. In the first chapter he quotes from the law, in the second from the prophets, and now in the third from the Psalms. They are all beautifully brought to bear upon us, for what Peter is about, in his epistle, is presenting the moral government of God over His people in this world.

(1 Peter 3:10,) It would be a wonderful thing for us to know a little more of this restraining power. You will not find a happy bright Christian who allows himself in the unrestrained use of his tongue. He will not be bright, he will not be happy, and he does not see good days; on the contrary, he sees miserable days, unhappy, dull days, because he has done the thing the Lord told him not to, and he suffers for it.

(1 Peter 3:11,) You are to seek peace, and pursue it; it is the thing the heart is to be really set on in going through this world, and if any would incite you to cause trouble, you simply say, "No, I will

seek peace."

(1 Peter 3:12,) Do I shrink from the eyes of the Lord being upon me? Certainly not, if my heart is right with Him. No! Let Him see everything, for the enjoyed presence of God is what preserves a good conscience, not only with Him, but before the enemy.

"The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers." Sweet word! Peter feels the necessity of prayer and dependence, and if your walk be right, he says, the Lord is attentive to your prayers. "But," you say, "He does not answer." Well, perhaps He may be having a controversy with you," for the face of the Lord is against them that do evil," and that is as true of a child of God as of an unconverted person. If the soul is doing right, what is the result? You have the eyes of the Lord upon you, and the ears of the Lord open to you, 1:e., you have the presence" of the Lord as the result of a walk that is suited to God. Then you are not a bit afraid of Satan's power, or of Satan's wiles. The only way in which we can get along is by enjoying God.

(Verses 13, 14,) "And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled." Evil is all about, he says, and you must expect to meet with difficulty and trial; but going through this scene, if you walk before the Lord, who will harm you? People do not harm those that do good, but those who do evil; people are pretty sure to escape who do good.

"But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye." Do what is thoroughly right, and you may suffer for it in this world, but it is a happy thing for us if we do thus suffer in this Christ-like way. Peter endeavours to assure our souls, very much as Paul comforted the Thessalonians when they were undergoing trouble. "Sanctify the Lord Christ in your hearts." (It is not "the Lord God.") He says, You sanctify in your hearts the One whom God has exalted as Messiah, and set, at His own right hand.

(1 Peter 3:15,) "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear." You are always to be able to give a reason for the joyful expectation that you have. Hope is never uncertainty in Scripture, but the joyful expectation of a certainty. It is a very good thing to be pulled up now and then to give a reason for the joyful expectation that we have. We ought to be able to give a very distinct reason, but our answer is to be given in "meekness and fear," 1:e., in a manner that shuts out all levity or lightness, a manner that conveys to the soul that asks the question, this: "It is the most wonderful favour of God to give such a hope to a sinner like me, but I have got it through His grace, and you may get it likewise."

(1 Peter 3:16,) "Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evil-doers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ." If I have not a good conscience I am utterly powerless. If I have a bad conscience I cannot meet Satan, and I cannot meet man: but I can go and meet God, confessing my sin, because I shall meet His mercy, and His grace will give me the sense of cleansing and pardon, and when I have again got a purged conscience I can meet both Satan and man.

Paul says, "Herein do I exercise myself to have always a conscience void of offence." If I exercise myself, I keep a good conscience; if I have an exercised conscience, I have a bad conscience. Conscience and communion never work together. If I am in communion with God, what am I

doing? I am occupied with God. If I have an exercised conscience, I am occupied with myself, or with what I have done that is wrong. The shield of faith is confidence in God, the breastplate of righteousness is the practical thing, assurance that I have not done a thing that God would not have me do, or that man could take hold of.

(1 Peter 3:17,) "For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well-doing, than for evildoing." I grant you it may seem a hard thing to carry out this verse but it is what Christ did. He did well, and suffered for it, and took it patiently. Why ought the Christian never to suffer as an evildoer? Because Christ once suffered for sin — let that be enough. The apostle says, If you suffer for righteousness' sake, be happy in it; if for Christ's sake, glory in it; but for doing evil let not a Christian suffer, because Christ has once suffered for those very sins: a most touching reason.

(1 Peter 3:18,) "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit." That is His wondrous suffering for sins on the cross, and then the glorious effect of that is that I am brought to God, not brought to heaven or brought to glory, but brought to God in Christ, in His own blessed person. "Being put to death in the flesh," that is dying as a man, "but quickened by the Spirit," and then he adds, "By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison."

(1 Peter 3:19-22,) "Which sometime were disobedient, when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls, were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us, (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ: who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels, and authorities, and powers, being made subject unto him." That which led to the apostle's giving this unfolding was, that these Jewish believers were a little company who were frequently taunted because of their faith in a Christ who did not exist on the earth. They were twitted and taunted with the fact of their Christ not being present. Yes, says the apostle, and I can tell you something else, the Spirit of Christ went and preached in Noah's days, and He was not present then, and there were but a few, even eight, saved then. The little flock with Noah was all right and the mass of the world was all wrong; judgment overtook the mass of the people in that day, and as it did then, so will judgment overtake the mass of the Jewish nation in this day.

Many a Christian believes that the Lord, between the crucifixion and resurrection, went down to hell, and, during the time that His Spirit was absent from the body, preached in hell to the spirits who had been disobedient in Noah's time. But it is very peculiar that Christ should preach only to the disobedient of Noah's day, and leave all the rest. He would not have been so particular as to His audience, I trow, had he gone there, but I do not believe he did. He says elsewhere, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hades" (Psalms 16:10). That His soul went into hades is certain from this scripture, but we must bear in mind that "hades" is a condition, not a place. There is a hades of the blessed dead, as well as a hades of the wicked dead. Into the hades of the blessed Jesus undoubtedly passed, for He said to the dying thief, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise," and eventually, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:43-46). We may safely conclude that the hades He went to was not the "prison" in which the spirits of the godless of Noah's day are chained. The Spirit of Christ in Noah really preached to the people in Noah's day. How the Spirit of Christ? We have seen in the first chapter of this epistle that very expression (1

Peter 1:10-11). The Spirit of Christ in the prophets could write Scripture, and then search Scripture. So the Spirit of Christ in Noah could proclaim the Gospel to the antediluvians, while they were men on the earth. In Genesis 6:1-22 God says, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man." This is the very word. The Spirit of the Lord strove with them for a hundred and twenty years. The Spirit of Christ in Noah proclaimed the Gospel all that time. It was the preaching of righteousness and coming judgment. The spirits of these men are in prison now, because they were disobedient to the word preached to them then.

I believe the apostle introduced the passage for two reasons. This little company of Jewish believers was looked down upon by the rest of the nation, because they were so few in number, and because Christ was not corporeally among them, and He would comfort them as to both points, for only a few, eight persons, were in the right, and saved in Noah's time, and the Spirit of Christ preached then, though He Himself was not present.

Then he makes an allusion to our present condition as believers, the consequence and result of the Lord being raised from the dead.

Water, which was the very thing that was the death of the world, saved Noah. "The like figure whereunto, even baptism, doth also now save us." Not baptism but that of which baptism is the figure.

It is not the answer of a good conscience here, but the request of a good conscience, because the moment a soul is quickened it wants to know how it can stand before God in righteousness. Well, Peter says, this is how you get it. It is not the purgation of any evil by ourselves, but Christ died and put our sins away. In baptism death is accepted. Like Noah, the believer is on the other side of death and judgment.

I look up, Peter says, and see Christ raised from the dead, and gone into heaven, angels being made subject to Him. There was a beautiful touch for the believing Jew. I have a good conscience, and a seated Christ in glory, and I am on the other side of death and judgment, seated in Christ at God's right hand. This is the blessed portion of the Christian in this world.

29. CHAPTER 23 — OUR STEWARDSHIP.

CHAPTER 23 — OUR STEWARDSHIP.

1 Peter 4:1-19. THE 1st verse of the 4th chapter of Peter is undoubtedly connected with the 18th verse of the previous chapter, which latter gives a most beautiful motive why a Christian never should suffer for sins, as we have seen. In between, the apostle has given a parenthesis, brought in for the comfort of these Hebrew believers, who were taunted with the thought that because they were a little company therefore they were not right.

(1 Peter 4:1-3,) "Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries." As man, Christ actually died on the cross in this world. It is not exactly the same truth as Paul gives — Paul gives us the doctrine; Peter gives us the practical side of it. He is showing us all through his epistle how a Christian must expect to suffer. If you do what Jesus did, you must suffer. He did the will of God perfectly, and the result was He suffered in the flesh. Satan came to Him in the wilderness and offered Him everything, if He would bow down to him; and again in the garden of Gethsemane the enemy sought to turn Him aside; but there was nothing in Christ to answer to his temptations., and therefore He suffered being tempted, but would rather die than not do the will of God. He did the will of God, and it brought Him into death. Now, says Peter, you must arm yourselves with the same mind. The expression "flesh" is not used as meaning the principle of evil, as Paul uses it. Paul means by the term that standing in which I am found as a child of Adam, — the principle of evil which man has in him as a child of Adam fallen, having a corrupt nature, away from God. Peter means by "flesh," our life here in the body. Christ as a man suffered here, and if doing the will of God produces suffering, we too are privileged to get into glory by the pathway of suffering.

1 Peter 4:1. First, he takes up what is within. You have a nature that likes its own way; but if you do God's will it is always at the expense of your own — at the expense of suffering here.

1 Peter 4:2-3. That is the contrast between the lusts of men and the will of God. If I give way to the lusts of men, I do not suffer — not in the sense in which Christ suffered, doing God's will. How Christ might have saved Himself had He pleased Himself! To do the will of God brought the blessed Lord into the deepest suffering, brought Him into death, and the apostle says we must arm ourselves with the same mind, be prepared to suffer, and to die too.

Then if you arm yourself with the same mind, you do the will of God, and do not sin. God has left us here for a little while, and what for? To do the will of God. Supposing you suffer by the will of God, go to God about it. It is often His will that we should suffer. The person who does not suffer, in some way or other, we may confidently say, is not walking closely after Christ. If you are in a pathway without suffering, you may safely conclude you are not in God's pathway.

(1 Peter 4:4-5,) "Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you: who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead." Here he is giving them comfort. The Gentiles say you are strange; never mind, the apostle says; supposing you did go with them, they would think it inconsistent of you, and now that you do not, they think it strange. But, says Peter, we are walking not to please them, but to please the Lord, and we have to remember this, that God is ready to judge the living and the dead, and they will have to give an account to Him. The judgment of the living was evidently that with which a Jew was familiar. The apostle is bringing out here that God is going to judge both the living and the dead — the living, according to Matthew 25:1-46, at the commencement of the kingdom, and the dead, as the final act of the kingdom, at the end of the millennium — at the great white throne.

There are three things that Peter uses the word "ready" in connection with. In the first chapter he tells us that God is "ready" to take us out of the world; in the fourth chapter he tells us that He is "ready" to judge the world: and between these two moments, the Christian is always to be "ready" to give an answer to any one who asks him the reason of the hope that is in him.

(1 Peter 4:6,) "For for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit." This verse may have an allusion to the end of the 3rd chapter, to those who lived in Noah's day; but I do not think we can limit it to these, but rather that it takes in all who had died before the time of the coming of the Messiah, to whom promises had been made. God holds us responsible, not only for what we have received, but for what we have heard, that is, for our privileges. The testimony God has given, whether in that day or in this, is that men should live in view of God, by the Spirit. They will be taken up and dealt with on the ground of the privileges they have had. If they turn their back on the testimony of the Lord, that testimony turns for a witness against them, and by it they will be judged.

(1 Peter 4:7,) "But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer." We must not forget that the apostle was writing to a little Jewish company, and no doubt had before his mind that the moment drew near when the Lord's word would be fulfilled, that everything should be upset, and not one stone remain upon another of the temple. But the verse goes further than that. Peter feels that a saint should be one who is always taking, as it were, his last step — feeling, I am on the threshold of all that God is going to bring me into, the world is just going to be judged, and therefore there should be temperateness, and watchfulness, and prayer. And if this were true in Peter's day, how much more true is it in ours! because one cannot but see that the elements which conduce to the bringing in of the Antichrist are powerfully at work now. There never was a time when even Christians were in such danger of letting go the foundations of their faith, thus paving the way for Christendom believing a lie, for man was not born to be an infidel. The devil is seeking to clear out the truths of Christianity, in order to get the house clean swept and garnished, ready for the entrance of the seven devils, by-and-bye. (See Matthew 12:43-45; 2 Thessalonians 2:8-12.)

Men do not go on long believing in nothing, and if they turn away from the truth, the reaction will come in a little while; but what will that reaction be? Not the reception of the truth of Christ, but the reception of the lie of Antichrist.

(1 Peter 4:8,) "And, above all things, have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins." The apostle now turns to what is very helpful for us who are within. Towards those who are outside, there is to be sobriety and watchfulness, coupled with prayer to God; but now among ourselves, what is there to be? Fervent charity. Why? Because that is the thing that God delights in — "Love covereth all sins" (Proverbs 10:12). This is the reason why he presses that this fervent charity should work in them, because it not merely keeps people going on well with God, but happily with each other.

There are no people who have such opportunities of irritating each other, as those who are seeking to walk in faith and in the truth, outside human systems. They are flung much together, all the old barriers broken down, and they are simply brought together on the ground of the Church of God. Unless grace thoroughly works, there is no place where people can so pain and wound each other, and therefore Peter says we need this fervent charity, not only for going on together, and for the restraint of what is not lovely, but also for the activity of divine love in the saint of God, and finding the very opportunity for its activity in the naughtiness of some one else! The worse a thing is in another the more lovely an opportunity it gives you for covering it up. "Love covers a multitude of sins." Not one or two, but a multitude — a thousand little things that the devil would like to tell in every quarter, in order to upset the saints, and thus introduce a dead fly into the ointment, and produce a stinking savour. What is the cure? says Peter. Oh, this divine love; you cover it up. Peter says, God has His eye on you, and if you are keeping up another's fault, you are keeping it up for God to see, and He cannot like that. But supposing you cover with a mantle of love my naughtiness, what does God see? The reproduction in you of the same love and grace there was in Christ. Peter says, I expect you to get on smoothly with the saints, no matter what other people are doing.

(1 Peter 4:9,) "Use hospitality one to another without grudging." This is perfectly beautiful, though some people would grumble at you for doing it; not so, says Peter. I find in Romans 12:1-21 : "Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality." First, look out that nobody is in want: and, secondly, you are to keep an open house free. You are, nay more, enjoined so to do. This is a beautiful divine balance.

God very often not only thus brings His people together, but by these means binds them together. Use your house to get your brethren together, and get to know them, and they you, and that not because you must — not grudgingly, but in love.

(1 Peter 4:10,) "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." When the apostle talks of a gift, it is not only a man being able to preach or teach. He says, "As every man hath received the gift." Then you see that you have a gift, and you are responsible to use it, and the sphere in which you are to use this gift is the Church first of all. Whatever you have it is not yours; you are only a steward. It all belongs to Christ — and you must be a good steward, because you will have to give an account of your stewardship by-and-bye.

(1 Peter 4:11,) "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." If you speak, that is a gift for edification. If you minister — that is, carrying perhaps a little basin of soup to some sick saint, or a

few shillings to one who is in need of them — according to the measure of your ability, do it. It is a question of using the temporal things of this life for the glory of God.

How beautiful it makes the acts of everyday life! God is as well pleased with the right use of everyday things, the goods of this life, as with the exercise of spiritual gifts, either preaching, for the conversion of the world, or ministry, to the building up of the body of Christ.

I deny that either you, I, or any man have a right of ministry. No! We have no liberty to speak in the assembly, unless we speak "as oracles of God"; and that is not liberty merely, but bounden responsibility. If you possess a gift you are bound to use it. Not that a man who has a gift need always be using it; he has always plenty to learn, and can hold his peace, if he be wise, on many an occasion, and profit by listening to his brethren.

If I rise to speak in God's assembly, I must speak not only according to the oracles of God as revealed in Scripture, but as being the direct mouthpiece of God to His saints at that very moment, giving forth to them exactly what God would have them hear at that moment.

We have in the 11th verse, God communicating something to those who speak, which they are bound to give forth — something of His mind, just as in the 10th verse, you are to do it simply, if you have anything to give away, and all is to be done for God's glory.

(1 Peter 4:12-14,) "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified." Now, you notice, Peter turns around to speak to the saints of their circumstances of the trials of the pathway. The apostle brings in now for the first time the thought of being with the Lord in glory, as the answer to suffering for Christ here. This is the highest kind of suffering that a Christian can go through. The suffering of the 13th verse is different from the suffering of the 14th verse. In the 13th verse we are partakers of Christ's sufferings; in the 14th verse we suffer for Christ.

All are partakers of Christ's sufferings — that is, of those sufferings which He passed through down here, excepting His suffering in the way of atonement. The suffering of the 13th verse every Christian has part in, but every Christian has not part in the suffering of the 14th verse. The 13th verse is suffering with Christ; the 14th verse is suffering for Christ. I ask you, have you never, in going through this scene of death and misery, heaved a groan because of it all? That is suffering with Christ, in sympathy with what He felt. That groan is the groan which the Spirit of God produces in the saint, and is in character like the groan of Christ at the grave of Lazarus. Christ suffered going through this scene as a perfect man, seeing the misery and sorrow that sin had introduced, and how God was dishonoured. We suffer in our measure in seeing the same things, and that is suffering with Him. But we do not all suffer for Christ. If we go on in the ways of this world, and seek to save ourselves, no doubt it can be done; but then there is the missing of all that Peter speaks of here. If we do as Moses would not do, we may escape suffering. You may be called everything that is bad, because of the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Well, Peter says, happy are ye; instead of being downcast about it, take it as a privilege that you may be reproached for His blessed name. Oh, for a little more of the spirit of the apostles in the 5th of Acts: "And they

departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name."

(1 Peter 4:15,) "But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evil-doer, or as a busybody in other men's matters." As soon as I touch the things that do not belong to me, I am sure to suffer. Do not be ashamed to suffer as a Christian; but be ashamed to suffer as a busybody; and if you suffer as a Christian do not forget this, that in all God is letting you pass through there is a blessed purpose.

(1 Peter 4:17,) "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?" It is a great thing to remember the government of God, and that it begins with us, and that He has His own blessed purpose to work out in our souls, and if He lets suffering and trial come in, though we do not like it, yet He sees the need. But if judgment begin with us, what will the end of the Gospel rejecter be? This is a serious question for all such. Their end is death, judgment, and the lake of fire. What an awful end! It surely ought to cause every unsaved reader to pause, repent, and turn to God. Let me implore my unblessed reader to come to Jesus at once. He will save you on the spot. Only trust Him — His blood cleanses from all sin.

(1 Peter 4:18,) "And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" Why saved with difficulty? Because the devil is against you, and the world is against you, and the devil sets pitfalls and snares for your feet, but God uses these very temptations and trials to bring you nearer to Himself. It is part of His plan in leading you to glory, to give you these sufferings and trials by the way, which He sees are needed. There is no difficulty with God, the difficulties are all on our side, and only faith can surmount them, sustained by God.

(1 Peter 4:19,) "Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator." You did your own will in days gone by, and it worked death: you are suffering now according to the will of God. You have to do now, Peter says, what Jesus did — commit yourself to God. He casts you on Him who has almighty power, but who is your Father likewise. The Lord keep us seeking to so do His will always, that it may turn to praise, and honour, and glory by Christ Jesus.

30. CHAPTER 24 — EXHORTATIONS.

CHAPTER 24 — EXHORTATIONS.

1 Peter 5:1-14 THE apostle returns in this chapter to exhortation. In the close of the fourth he had been unfolding certain truths with regard to the government of God, because it was His house (10, 17, 18). Now in chap. 5, he has exhortations both for the elders and for the younger ones. Elder carries its own meaning with it. He is not speaking to official persons, but to those of riper years. This is quite in keeping with the Acts of the Apostles, where we read of elders. With the Jews elder was a characteristic term meaning a man of years. Peter says he is an elder, in the sense I have spoken of it, but no one would think of speaking of Peter as an elder in the way Christendom speaks of it. Paul's elder was not one who necessarily possessed much gift. His was a local charge. He was an elder in the place where he was fixed, and nowhere else.

We read (1 Timothy 5:17) of teaching elders and ruling elders. Who were these elders? They were those who had this official position in some particular locality, by the special appointment of the apostles, or some one delegated by the apostles. There are two simple reasons why you cannot have this official position in this day. First, you have not the competent ordaining power, unless you can bring evidence that you are an apostle or an apostolic delegate, and that is impossible. A man who says he is an apostle does not speak the truth, and the apostolic successors were "grievous wolves" who did not spare the flock. Secondly, you have not the Church all together in one locality, over whom to appoint elders.

Supposing you had the power, where would you begin to appoint elders? The first thing you would have to do would be to shake Christendom to its centre, and bring all the Church of God together, and have the Church manifestly one. Where would Paul, if he were here today, begin to appoint elders? He could not begin anywhere, because we have not the Church of God all one. But you get the men who do the work of elders very blessedly, and say nothing about it. They serve Christ and will get their reward by-and-bye. Anything else is only hollow assumption. You have not now either the Church over which your elders could be appointed, or the competent ordaining power. The Lord saw the disorder that was coming into His house, and so He forbore in His wisdom to perpetuate a system that would only keep people apart. The actual effect would be that. Ah! what wisdom, is His! He saw what would happen, and therefore let the official function die with the apostles, and now we are cast upon God, and the word of His grace, to go on simply with the Lord.

(1 Peter 5:1,) "The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed." Peter takes the two ends of Christ's history, — I have seen His sufferings, and I am going to see His glory, and in between these two he finds the saints in this world, and exhorts the elders to care for them.

(1 Peter 5:2,) "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind." How beautiful! "The flock of God which is among you." Shepherd them he says. I have no doubt he alludes to the confiding word

from the Lord in his own history, "Feed my sheep: Shepherd my sheep" (John 21:1-25) When the Lord had brought him to this, that it was only He Himself, who in His omniscience searched his heart, that could know that he had any love for Him at all, that was the moment when He put into his care His sheep and His lambs.

"Taking the oversight," the apostle continues, "not by constraint, but willingly." I believe the Spirit of God foresaw that in Christendom today, the so-called care of the sheep of Christ would become a bread trade, or a profession! Here I get the Holy Ghost striking a death-blow at the whole thing. It is perfectly true that the labourer is worthy of his hire. I find the apostle Paul lays down the principle most distinctly that those who labour should be cared for, but in the very next verse he says, "But I have used none of these things, neither have I written these things, that it should be so done unto me" (1 Corinthians 9:15). The divine principle for a servant is that of walking in faith, trusting the Lord. He cares for His servants, and meets all their needs.

"Not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind," is a spontaneous blessed desire of serving Christ, and caring for His people: and what is more blessed than to be permitted in any measure to care for Christ's people?

(1 Peter 5:3,) "Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock." Our translators have spoiled the verse by putting in "God's." It is your if there be any word at all, "lord's over possessions" literally. The Spirit of God foresaw the condition of Christendom in this day, when the ministry of the Word of God has become a trade, and the Church of God is broken up into so many men's flocks. As a consequence, the deepest jealousy arises when the sheep find their right place in God's flock, for some one has lost some of his sheep. Scripture says, "Not as lording it over your possessions." Shepherding the sheep is more than feeding, it is going after the sheep when they have got away under the hedge, when perhaps they are torn with the brambles, comforting them, helping to care for as well as to feed, to nurse, and to tend them in every way.

Every gift needed by the Church of God on earth He has given, but the pride and self-will of man has come in to hinder the full use of this grace of God.

What a wonderful difference it makes if you look at the saints as being God's own flock. Suppose they are cold, you try to warm them. Suppose they do not love you much. Well, you love them the more abundantly. Do your work quietly; be an example to the flock by the way; lead them; be a guide to them; and wait for the appearing of the chief Shepherd, and then you will receive an amaranthine crown that cannot fade. Here you may be despised and thought little of; never mind, go on, and wait till the chief Shepherd comes for your reward. In John 10:1-42 the Lord is called the good Shepherd in death, when He loved us and gave Himself for us. In Hebrews 13:1-25 He is the great Shepherd in resurrection. His resurrection demonstrates His almighty power, "None can pluck them out of his hand." But besides this He has many under-shepherds, hence Peter speaks of Him here as "the chief Shepherd." He loves His flock, and though He has gone out of the scene, He is the chief Shepherd still, and He puts into the hearts of some to care for His flock, and He says He will not forget their service, and that by-and-bye for them there will be a crown of glory that fadeth not away. I do not believe that all get this crown. There is a crown of righteousness for all those who love His appearing. I believe that includes every soul born of God, for it is impossible to be born of God, and not love Christ's appearing. Of course you would like to see the Lord; every soul born of God loves the thought of seeing the blessed Lord. So I believe every child of God will

get the crown of 2 Timothy 4:1-22. In James we hear of a crown of life. You will get that crown too, thank God, because you could not be born of God without loving Him. For loving His appearing you get a crown of righteousness, for loving Himself, and tasting something of trial, you get a crown of life. The Lord says to Smyrna, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" (Revelation 2:10). You are tried for My name's sake, He says, perhaps are going into death for Me, and I have been through death for you. You are standing on one side of the river, and I on the other, and you have to come through the waters to get to Me, but the moment your head comes above the waters on this side, I will put a crown of life on it.

Perhaps it may not be unto death that your trial goes. But this crown of glory is for those who care for what He cares for, and who seek to show their love for Him by looking after His sheep.

(1 Peter 5:5,) "Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder: yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble." Unless I am clothed with humility I shall not be subject." The meek will he guide in judgment, the meek will he teach his way." The humble one is always cared for by God. "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart," are the Lord's own words. Humility is a blessed thing, and what a little thing would puff us up. I get Paul saying that the flesh is so utterly corrupt that it would boast because it had been in glory. Because he, Paul, had been in heaven, the Lord had to give him a thorn in the flesh in order to keep him from being puffed up. And we often may be puffed up, just because of His mercy to us, because He has brought us into this place of light and liberty. The only security of the saint is to walk lowly, to walk humbly. The Lord will blight, and wither, and scatter all that plumes itself on having got truth, and light, and a right position. It is one thing to have gained that position, and another thing to maintain it; for the power of the enemy is all the more brought to bear on those who have taken this position, in order that they may the more flagrantly dishonour the Name that is put upon them. "God resisteth the proud, but he giveth grace unto the humble." What a solemn thing for the saint of God to get into a position in which God has actually to resist him! What a dreadful thing to have the Lord set against us because of pride allowed in the heart! God resists a proud person: but where is there room for pride in us who are the vilest of the vile?

"Only by pride cometh contention," says the proverb. There never was a bit of trouble between saints, but pride was at the bottom of it! You stand up for your rights, and the Lord will put you down. You may get what you want, but the Lord will have His hand against you. A Christian should be like a piece of india-rubber, always giving way, never resisting, except it be the devil. (See verse 9.)

(1 Peter 5:6,) "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time." What a much more blessed thing to humble ourselves under His mighty hand, and for Him to exalt us, than to exalt ourselves, and for Him to have to put us down! "Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased." That is the first man. "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted." That is the second Man. The first man sought to make himself God, and fell into companionship with Satan; the second Man, who was God, made Himself nothing, and God has exalted Him to the very highest glory.

There are two ways in which God humbles us. By the discovery of what is in our hearts, and by the discovery of what is in His heart — and nothing so humbles us as to discover what is in His heart

— but humble myself as I may, I do not believe I ever get down to my true level — to the place in which God sees me. It should be a continual process. There is a difference between being humble, and being humbled. I am humble when I am in God's presence, occupied with what He is. I am humbled when I am compelled to look at myself, for self is always a sad sight.

(1 Peter 5:7,) "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you." Oh, what a comfort for the heart, what a rest for the soul in all the ups and downs and vicissitudes of this life, to know He careth for you! Then why should you trouble? Is it worth while for two to be caring for the same thing? If you are caring you take it out of His hands: if He is caring you can afford to be without care, to roll yourself into your Father's arms, and to rest there without fear or care. When you learn the perfectness of His care for you, then you are left free to care for His things and His interests, because He is taking care of yours.

(1 Peter 5:8-9,) "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world." But because He is caring for you, you are not therefore to be unwatchful. No, no, remember that your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour. Here it is as a roaring lion Satan comes, hence these Hebrew believers were going through persecution. In the 2nd Epistle he comes as a snake in the grass, introducing moral corruption.

"Knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world." Every one thinks there never was a lot like his, — such a troubled pathway. Peter says, Nothing of the kind, every one else has the same; you are not the only person who is suffering. But he commends us to the God of all grace. What can keep us going? Grace — only grace. We need grace all along the way.

(1 Peter 5:10-11,) "But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." He has called you to glory, and by Christ Jesus, and now after that ye have suffered a little while, He will make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. It should be "a little while" here, not merely a while. A while might seem of some duration, — he shortens it. You have need of patience "a little while," says Paul (Hebrews 10:37); you must suffer "a little while," says Peter.

"Stablish, strengthen, settle." Oh, what a place has the saint got, in the call of God, and not only in the call of God, but in that invigorating power which He makes His people to know all along the way! Himself who has called you shall make you perfect. What have we not in God? Have we not everything which encourages our hearts, strengthens them, comforts them, sustains them? God's purpose, God's call, God's sustaining grace all along the way, bring us at last into His glory.

(1 Peter 5:12,) "By Silvanus, a faithful brother unto you, as I suppose, I have written briefly, exhorting, and testifying that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand." How beautifully Peter speaks of grace in this epistle, ending in this chapter with God giving grace to the humble because He is the God of all grace, and, he says, "I testify and exhort this is the true grace of God wherein you stand." The Lord give us to understand more of His grace, as we study His own Word, and to delight more in Him!

(1 Peter 5:13,) "She at Babylon elected together with you, saluteth you, and Marcus my son." To whom does the apostle refer? The universal opinion for eighteen centuries was that the apostle here meant the congregation of the elect at Babylon. A few moderns have started the thought that it was his wife he thus designated. "The co-elect (one) in Babylon," others think was some local lady of position. But these are mere conjectures. Marcus also is undetermined. Was he an actual son of Peter's, or his son in a spiritual sense, being the well-known Mark, the Evangelist? My own thought — not as if teaching it — is that, "the co-elect in Babylon" means the brotherhood or company of the elect saints there; and that Marcus was not Peter's actual son — save in the faith.

(1 Peter 5:14,) "Greet ye one another with a kiss of charity. Peace be with you all that are in Christ Jesus. Amen." The expression of affection Peter wished them to show to each other was the kiss of love. For them he wished "peace." What a blessed desire! As you review this epistle what beauty is in it. We have the call to heaven in the first chapter; our holy and our royal priesthood in the second, with the duties that flow from the position — the walk of subjection and suffering in the third chapter; the Spirit of God and of glory resting on you in the fourth; and now in the fifth God feeding, sustaining, strengthening you, and never leaving you till He has placed you in glory with His Son.

31. Simon Peter, 5 His Letters — 2.

Simon Peter, 5 His Letters — 2.

Section 5 of 5 (chapters 25-27 — Part 2b) of:

32. Part 2 — His Letters

Part 2 — His Letters Chapter 25 — PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE Chapter 26 — DENYING THE LORD THAT BOUGHT THEM Chapter 27 — WHERE IS THE PROMISE OF HIS COMING?

33. Chapter 25 — Partakers of the Divine Nature.

Chapter 25 — Partakers of the Divine Nature.

2 Peter 1:1-21. The very care which the apostle takes to write a second time to these Hebrew believers, giving them instructions, as to their own pathway, and warning them of the evils coming, is a striking proof that he did not look for a continuance of the apostolic order. The broad outline of the epistle, and the details also, forbid the thought. Indeed, in the second chapter, he shows the terrible state that is coming in, and then that God is going to judge the whole scene.

Peter's 2nd Epistle resembles that of Jude in some respects. The difference between Jude and this epistle is, that while by Peter the Spirit of God speaks a great deal about corruption, it is in the world, whereas Jude gives you corruption in the Church — in that which bears the name of the Lord — ecclesiastical corruption. You get apostasy in both, especially in Jude. The careful way in which the apostle seeks to help and guide these believers, to whom he thus writes for a second time, shows that he did not look for any continuation of apostolic authority; so he throws them on the Lord, and His Word. He then takes up the whole question of God dealing with the earth in a manner, and with majesty that suits God's character.

(2 Peter 1:1,) "Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." He addresses them as "a servant and an apostle," and speaks to Jewish believers as in the 1st Epistle. "To them that have obtained like precious faith," while it has a particular application to those to whom he wrote the 1st Epistle, yet has a little wider bearing than the first.

Peter is fond of the word "precious." "Precious blood," "he is precious," and here, "precious faith." He speaks of faith, the fact that you believe, and he says that you get it on the ground of the righteousness of "our God and Saviour." You have this faith through the faithfulness of Him who was the Jehovah of Israel, and who was likewise the Saviour that came down and walked in this world. God has been righteous and faithful, and as the result, spite of the sin of the nation, you have this faith in God's own blessed Son.

(2 Peter 1:2,) "Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord." A very customary salutation. Grace is the present favour of God, and peace, the present standing place of the soul. He wishes those blessings to be multiplied. There is where the soul stands, in perfect peace with God; and in the present acceptance of God, and in favour with God, and Peter wishes their apprehension of it multiplied. It is not mercy here, and why? Because you only find mercy brought in where an individual is addressed, because though I may have grace and peace as an individual, yet I need mercy for my soul day by day, as I go through a scene where everything is against me. When it is the Church that is addressed, mercy does not come in, because the Church is always viewed as in relation to Christ, and as having received mercy because of her connection with Christ. In the Epistle to Philemon, Paul writes to him and "to the church which is in thy house," and that is why mercy is left out there. What might seem an

exception, really proves what I have stated, when carefully noted.

How is this grace and peace to be multiplied? "Through the knowledge of God." The intensification of that grace and peace can only come as we walk with God. You show me a person who is walking with God, and I will show you one who gets grace multiplied day by day. You walk closely by Christ, and you will get the peace that He came to give multiplied day by day. There is nothing so difficult as to walk in grace, for on the one hand there is the tendency to looseness, and on the other the tendency to legality. Going as these believers were through a scene of difficulty, no wonder that the apostle wished that grace and peace might be multiplied.

(2 Peter 1:3-4,) "According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." See how beautifully you get divine power in verse 3, and divine nature in verse 4. In verse 3 we are the subjects of divine power, a divine operation working in us, and giving us all things that pertain to life and godliness. Eternal life is a life that enjoys God, and is suited to God, and godliness is a character that is like God in all its ways down here, a moral likeness to Him. The first thing is a life that is from Himself, and is never occupied with anything but Himself, and then comes godliness, God-likeness.

"Through the knowledge of him that has called us by glory, and virtue." It is the deepening acquaintance with the blessed One who has given to our souls a distinct call, and if there be one thing we are apt to forget, it is our calling. We do not forget our gifts, our blessings, but the thing we are so apt to forget is our calling; and what is our calling? God has called us to glory. We are called to heaven in the first chapter of the 1st Epistle, and here Peter says the God of glory has come out and called us. The contrast is very striking between the Christian now, and Adam — in innocence. Adam in innocence was responsible to obey God and stop where he was, but our responsibility is, not to stop where we were, for we were in the world; and sin, and lust constituted our nature, but God says, "I have called you out of that, — called you by glory, and virtue." Abraham was called to be a pilgrim; Moses to be a law-giver; Joshua to be a leader; our call is to glory. See, the apostle says, that you have your faces set thither. Glory is the end of the road, and what is to mark us by the way. Virtue, or spiritual energy on the road, of which glory is the end.

What we have to manifest and express is what he calls virtue, spiritual energy. There is nothing more difficult, because it calls on us to refuse the flesh, to refuse the world; like Moses, who "refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season" (Hebrews 11:24-25). The man who has this spiritual energy, knows how to say No! to the thousand things in him, and about him, that appeal to his flesh. We give way too often; we lack this energy, and the result is we often fall.

Moses refused earth and its delights, refused the highest place in this world, said No! to the allurements of the flesh and the world, and took his place outside with the despised slaves who were God's people. It needs this virtue, this courage, to do this! Moses refused what nature would have chosen, — the palace, the throne, and the crown of Egypt, — and chose what nature would have refused, namely, to be in company with a set of brick-making slaves! But he saw that they were God's people, and that made all the difference.

How much we need this courage to refuse the world in all its shapes and forms, and to fling ourselves in with a little company of those who love the Lord, and are united to Him.

There is nothing more difficult than to break away from the old things that everybody goes on with, for the power that tradition has over us is wonderful, and it needs this courage to break away from it. These Jewish believers had separated from their religion, their temple, their ordinances, their observances, — from everything that their nation and their forefathers had gone on with — and had gone simply forth unto Jesus, without the camp. They needed encouragement in their outside place, of contempt and scorn, and Peter gives it to them with a lavish hand.

If we do not keep alive in our souls this virtue, this courage and energy, we shall slip back into the things which once we gave up.

2 Peter 1:4. All the promises are connected either with this life, or with the glory where we shall be by-and-bye. But the promises couple us with Christ, to this end that "ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." We are made partakers of the divine nature in conversion, by being born again, but Peter shows us plainly the sweet result of tasting what the Lord is, and walking with the Lord. He gives you to be a partaker morally of the divine nature, 1:e., we are brought into the atmosphere that suits God, breathe the atmosphere He breathes, and, as a result, become spiritual. The soul gets enlarged in its sense of what He is. We get first the capacity for the enjoyment of God, and then, as we walk with Him, the deepening enjoyment of God.

Just as much as we enter into the words and the things of our Lord Jesus Christ, we become partakers morally of this divine nature. If you live with the Lord, and walk with the Lord, this will be the result; and you escape the corruption that is in the world through lust. What is lust? Man's will. The apostle is talking here of this state, and of the walk of a saint, who escapes it. You have every thought of the heart brought into captivity to Christ; you are delivered from your own will; you are not even carried off by the imaginings of your own heart; you breathe the holy, pure atmosphere of God's presence, an atmosphere where the soul finds its delight in doing God's will. You once were in the world doing your own will; now you have been delivered, and you do God's will. What a sweet thought it is that when we get up home in the glory all taint of sin will be gone! "Oh, but," says Peter, "you may know a great deal of that down here. You have the new nature that delights in God, and this new nature having room to expand, your peace grows, your grace is multiplied, and you escape the corruption that is in the world through lust."

Paul preaches the same thing, "If ye live in the Spirit, walk in the Spirit." And if a man lives in the Spirit, how will he walk? Like Christ! Every thought of Christ's heart was Godward. What will it be by-and-bye when every thought, every movement of our hearts will be Godward? When we get to glory we shall breathe the atmosphere our souls delight in, and we shall breathe it freely, without watchful thought, or trembling fear, lest any Philistine or Amalekite action of the flesh intrude. "Well," says Peter, "you may know something of this down here." Thus he gives them what would cheer and refresh their hearts.

(2 Peter 1:5-7,) "And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity." The apostle

turns here in verse 5 to the practical state of the believers. Having given them what would comfort and refresh their hearts, he says, That is not all, now I look at your own state practically. "Besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge." He knew how easy it was to get slothful, and so he exhorts them to give all diligence in thus adding. Virtue is that energy and courage of soul, that knows how to refuse, as well as to choose, like Moses, who "refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season," and so we read, "Add to your faith, virtue." You have the faith that connects you with God, and you believe in what as yet you do not see, but now you must add virtue, that courage, which knows how to say "No" to the thousand things that come up day by day, and to press on unswervingly in the pathway that is set before us. This is not addition in the ordinary sense of the word. Verse 5 should read, "For this very reason using also therewith all diligence, in your faith have also virtue, in virtue knowledge," etc. Having all the qualities of the perfect thing, is the thought. You are perfect when you do not lack any of these qualities. A person may give you an apple to taste, because you are a good judge of apples; you taste it, and say, It is very nice, but it lacks sweetness. So you may say of a Christian, "He is a nice Christian, but he lacks temperance." The divine nature in all its qualities is to be seen in the Christian.

I think the word adding gives the wrong idea; adding conveys the thought of something fresh introduced. It is rather, Do not be without any of the qualities of this divine life — the life of Christ.

We are left here to manifest Christ, to be the reflection of what He was. This could never be without being made partakers of the Divine nature. Born of God, we receive Christ. Then the life of Christ is be shown — all the qualities of the new nature are to be exhibited — not one trait of Christ's character is to be wanting. We are to be epistles of Christ, read and known of all men. In our faith we are to have virtue, etc. These qualities are to exist in us. There should be the full complement — nothing wanting — all the graces present, and showing out. Surely we feel how little we have lived, yea, are living, this divine life. You may find a person who had this energy, but who is a little rough, and so Peter says, There is something else needed, lest this roughness appear, therefore add to virtue knowledge, of God, of the mind and ways of God, and of what suits God, for mere knowledge puffs up, this is the knowledge that humbles. A man that knows God well, cannot know Him without being in His company, and a person who is near to God is tender in his ways, though there may be energy in him to follow on. We need grace from the Lord for this.

"And to knowledge temperance." Not the mere external restraint, but the cultivation of the inward history of the soul day by day, governing ourselves, keeping ourselves in order: and depend upon it if we cannot keep ourselves in order, we cannot keep any one else. Temperance is that quiet gravity of spirit, that is equable in every circumstance, like Christ, never upset by any trial, or anything that provokes.

"And to temperance patience." Temperance will keep me from saying or doing a thing that will wound you, and patience will keep me from being upset by anything that you may do that is likely to wound me. Temperance is active, patience is passive! If you have not knowledge, you will not know how to meet the mind of God. If you have not temperance you will be sure to do something that will hurt some one else, and if you have not patience you will be upset by what some one else may be doing to you.

"And to patience godliness" — God-likeness. Walking through this scene, and possessing the divine nature, see that you illustrate it, exemplify it! Show me a man's company, and I will show you what sort of a man he is. If you are keeping company with God you will be a godly person, for we all resemble the thing we are occupied with. It comes out in a thousand details of our everyday life.

We have next brotherly kindness, and charity, two things that may seem alike, but are different. Brotherly kindness is a thing that might be merely human, and might degenerate and fade away; for brotherly kindness might only love the lovable sort of people, might be partial, but when I come to charity, it is impartial and unailing — it is divine. "Charity never fails." In 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 there are eight things it does not do, and eight things it does do, and it never breaks down. It is the very thing our souls need as we go through a scene where everything is against us.

Supposing a person repulsed me, and considered my endeavour to show love only as interference; brotherly kindness only might say, "I will not go back to him;" but charity is a divine thing and says, "I think of the blessing and good of the object, and of the glory of God in connection with that object, so I will go back again, and see if I cannot be of use."

Charity is not the love that makes light of evil, but the love that seeks the real good of its object.

We have a perfect guide by which we may learn if we really love the children of God. (1 John 5:2,) "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep his commandments." If you love the Father you love His children. If we love Himself we love His people likewise, and we seek each other's blessing, but are always desiring to meet His mind. We are to act as those who go directly out from God, dependent on Him and obedient to Him, and are to go in grace to seek to help a person, no matter what his state may be. The Lord help us to profit by His Word, and to seek to have these lovely moral qualities in our faith, for there are many beautiful consequences if such be the case.

If there be not this blessed adding, there is sure to be a going back, for there is no such thing as standing still. If we are not progressing, we are retrograding. "Unto every one that hath, shall be given . . . but from him that hath not, shall be taken away even that which he hath." If there be not the desire to press on, to go on with the Lord, what is there? There is only a returning to the things from which the Lord called us out in days gone by. The Lord give us to have diligence of heart in thus adding to our faith, and progressing in the knowledge of Himself.

(2 Peter 1:8,) "For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." From the frequency with which the apostle alludes to the eight things mentioned in verses 5, 6, and 7, it would seem almost impossible to overrate their importance. He brings out the effect of having these things, and the result of not having them. The end of every dealing of God with our souls is to make Christ better known to us. If a Christian goes on in the exercise of these three verses, you find about that person the savour of Christ. Peter felt that everything was sheer loss that did not lead the saints to a deeper knowledge of Christ. That which puts us nearer to Christ has this effect, we feel how unlike Christ we are, and also it allures us from the world, so that we are more fit morally to pass through the world.

Many a saint of God feels, I am fit for heaven, but not fit for earth, because I am not sufficiently with the Lord to be equal to the occasions that arise, as I pass through this scene. We feel, our impotence and folly, feel how we have broken down as witnesses for Christ. It is only as Christ becomes better known that there is a fitness to pass through this scene.

(2 Peter 1:9,) "But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins." You will say this is a backslider. Not at all! He is confident about his eternal salvation. "But," you say, "he is blind." Quite true; put the things that belong to the Lord before him, he does not see them, he has forgotten too that he was purged from his old sins. What has he forgotten? Has he forgotten that his old sins were purged away? Not a bit! He has forgotten that he was purged away from his old sins, — his habits, and modes of life when unsaved, — and so he has turned back to them again, got back into the world, lost completely the sense of what Christianity is, as being a heavenly thing, and the call of the Christian, as being a heavenly person. There has been a dropping down, and losing sight of the things the Lord has called us to, a dropping down to earth, and its ways, its principles, and its religion likewise. The whole truth has been let go. Bit by bit the standard has been lowered, till there has been a dropping down so far, that the Lord has to awaken the soul in a startling way.

(2 Peter 1:10-11,) "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." Here the apostle comes in again with the solemn exhortation, Give diligence," and it is a thing we need, this holy diligence of soul to keep up, with purpose of heart, to the thing the Lord has called us to. Peter again alludes, doubtless, in this verse to the terrible fall he had had himself.

"But," you say, "how can we make our calling and election sure?" Who called us? Our Father. Who chose us? Our Father. But this does not do for other people. Who are you to make your calling and election sure with? with the One who called you? the One who chose you? Not a bit, but to yourself, and to every one who watches you, every one who could say, "You a called person? You do not look a bit like it. You a chosen person? No one would think so." You are to make it manifest to the eyes of every one else that you have been thus called of God. To make our calling and election sure is to be conscious that we are the possessors of eternal life, as John would put it, and to be in the enjoyment thereof. Paul designates it as "laying hold of eternal life" (1 Timothy 6:19). We may make our calling and election sure by doing the "things" of which Peter speaks, and thus shall not fall, as he once, yea twice, did; and an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ will be assured.

2 Peter 1:11. That is more than the soul being sustained, and kept of the Lord, though that in itself is a wonderful mercy, for there is many a fall in the history of a child of God, that God and his own heart alone knows of. But is there not something very beautiful about the path of a Christian of whom, you could say, from the day of his conversion until the Lord took him home, "He never took a backward step, there was not a trip; nothing was manifest but a pathway of beautiful devotedness from first to last." There is no reference here to forgiveness or pardon, but Peter reverts to his great subject of the government of God, and he says, if you have these things and abound, not only will you be kept from falling, but you will have a fine entrance into the kingdom. There passes before his mind the thought of the place, and the portion, and the reward that the

saint of God has in the coming kingdom of the Lord; for though the grace of God gives us each a common place in heavenly glory, there is such a thing as the kingdom, and a place in the kingdom, as a reward for the service rendered to the Lord down here. Grace gives us a common place in heavenly glory, but the government of God gives us a distinct, a righteous, and consequently an unequal place in the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, according to service.

It is a question of the reward that each saint gets from the Lord by-and-bye. There is the same difference in this, as there is between two vessels that go abroad to the same port, and encounter the same storms by the way. One has been badly rigged, badly manned, and badly commanded, and though it gets into port, yet it reaches there, with cargo gone, and with sails and masts blown away — a derelict hulk tugged by a steamer. The other vessel comes into port with all sails set, colours flying, everything in order, and cargo safe.

Peter says, If you do not "have these things in remembrance," you will fall down by the road, and there will be a sense of loss at the end. There comes a moment when the soul deeply feels, Would to God I had been devoted to Christ, instead of being worldly, cold, trivial, half-hearted! Most beautifully Peter guards the sheep, lest they should fall into the thing from which he would fain protect them.

(2 Peter 1:12-14,) "Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath showed me." We may sometimes think it not worth while to be going over the same things again and again. Not so Peter. And if our hearts are only put in remembrance of these things, God be thanked. It will be blessed fruit to our account in the days to come. Do we not need stirring up? We do. Satan does his utmost to hinder our souls. The Lord lead us to be more watchful, more on our guard against the wiles of the enemy.

(2 Peter 1:15,) "Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance." How persistent Peter is. "To have these things always in remembrance." "These things," are five times spoken of. It is impossible therefore for our souls to over-estimate the value, and the worth of verses 5, 6, 7, to which the apostle thus alludes five times over. The Lord grant we may have them always in remembrance, yea, have them engraven upon the tablets of our hearts. Peter felt there was no apostolic succession, no one to do the work he was doing, after his death. I therefore leave you, he says, in my epistle, that which may always be a blessing and a help to your souls. In all ages the people of God have clung in a peculiar way to Peter's Epistles. Why, do you think? I believe it is because they come right down to where we are in the world, and meet us so beautifully with a presentation of Christ, which comes to us, and suits us in our need in this world. We have Satan presented as a roaring lion in the 1st Epistle, and as a snake in the grass in the 2nd Epistle, and we have what meets him in both these characters, and preserves us from his devices.

(2 Peter 1:16-18,) "For we have not followed cunningly, devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye witnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came

from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount." The Jews' idea of the kingdom was the Messiah coming in glory and majesty and power, and their foes all cast out, but the Lord Jesus did not come in that way, and so they rejected Him, and, as far as they were concerned, He was dead, and buried: not gone up into glory. But, says Peter, we have actually seen that very kingdom of the Lord, and been "eye witnesses of his majesty." The scene to which Peter alludes is narrated in Matthew 17:1-27, Mark 9:1-50, and Luke 9:1-62. In these chapters the Lord had been unfolding to the disciples the truth of His rejection. "I am going to suffer and be cast out," He says, "and he who follows me, must expect to share the same fate." But He is coming back again with three-fold glory. His glory as Son of God which He had from all eternity, His glory as the Messiah, King of the Jews — and His glory as Son of Man, according to Psalms 8:1-9. Then after telling His disciples of His rejection, He says, "There be some standing here which shall not taste of death till they see the kingdom of God," and He shows to them on the mount of transfiguration a little miniature picture of the kingdom, and it is to this Peter alludes in this epistle. He had seen this wonderful picture, the Messiah, Moses the lawgiver, and Elias the reformer on that mount, and his heart was full. "Oh," he said, "let us perpetuate this scene." That was the thought in his mind, but that was putting the Messiah, the lawgiver, and the reformer on the same level, and God could not have that, and the voice comes, as Peter says, "from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." It is to be noticed that in the Gospels, God added the words, "Hear him." Peter needed these words then, as he was lowering his Master, while uplifting Moses and Elias. He learned his lesson, however, and here, in quoting the Father's words, he omits "Hear him." The truth was that by this time he had learned that no other voice but Jesus' was to be listened to.

There was the lesson to Peter of the personal glory of the Son, but likewise the introduction to his mind of the heavenly, as well as the earthly side of the kingdom. Moses and Elias are figures of the heavenly side; Moses had died, and Elias had gone up without death, just as it will be when the Lord comes for His people; He will raise those who have died, and will take up without dying those who are alive. Peter, James, and John are a picture of those saints on earth, who though they see Christ's glory, yet are on the earth all through the millennium.

Peter had seen this picture of the coming kingdom, and he sweetly confirms the faith of the Jewish believers by putting them in mind of what he had seen.

(2 Peter 1:19,) "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the daystar arise in your hearts." Prophecy always relates to the earth. It describes the future dealings of God with the earth, when He sweeps the scene of all that is ungodly, and prepares it for the reign of the Lord Jesus Christ. But the Church is a heavenly thing, does not belong to earth at all, and Peter says, You do well to take heed to prophecy, because, if you look into prophecy, it will tell you that the world through which you are passing is going to be judged, and therefore, by the light of this, you will go through the world, as through a judged scene, without being mixed up with it at all.

What I find given in Scripture is, that the Lord will reign over the earth, but He sets the earth right first, and therefore I find I cannot do without prophecy. It is a very good thing, because it tells me what God is going to do with the earth, viz., sweep the whole scene with the besom of destruction, and fit it for Christ; but to have prophecy only before our hearts would be a great mistake, because

prophecy is not Christ, and nothing does for the heart but Christ. The Old Testament prophecies did not give what Peter gives now, "till the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts." I do not think the apostle means till Christ arise as "Sun of righteousness with healing in his wings," as Malachi puts it. That is the day of the Lord, not the Gospel, as many think and preach. The day is not come yet, but let me ask you, Has not the day dawned in your heart yet? Do you not belong to the day? Yes, of course you do, if you are a Christian; the day has dawned in your heart, and along with that, the Morning Star, Christ Himself, the object of the saint's hope in heavenly glory. It is Peter bringing in for a moment the coming of the Lord. He says, as it were, prophecy is all very well, but the Lord Himself is coming; that is the thing for your hearts. He is "the root and the offspring of David" for the Jew. He is the "bright morning star" for our hearts. As He says to the remnant in Thyatira, — to the overcomer — "I will give him the morning star." That is, for the overcomer is the portion sure, heavenly joy with Christ above, before the kingdom comes. This is what you and I are looking for now, the day having dawned in our hearts, we know that our portion is with Christ up there, and we know that before He comes to judge the earth, He is to come for us to be with Him for ever. We do not expect a single event to take place before the Lord comes for us; we do not wait for anything but the morning star, the coming of the Lord. He is to come for His people, and this is to be the pole star of the saint's life.

(2 Peter 1:20-21,) "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." We must not limit Scripture. The value of Scripture is this, it is all connected with Christ, and prophecy has not its full scope till everything has been brought in that is connected with Christ in His coming kingdom and glory. Those who are looking for the fulfilment of prophecy before the Lord comes for us, miss the joy of waiting for Christ. They see some close similarity between prophecy and some passing event, but they do not know what it is to watch for the bright and morning star. When the Lord has taken us out of the scene, what will take place? Every prophecy of Scripture will be fulfilled, and when He gets His right place, by-and-bye, you and I will be by His side, reigning with Him over this earth where He died for us, where His precious blood was shed for us. What a blessed thing for us to know Him now, and to be true to Him now, in this scene of His rejection, knowing that the time is soon. coming when He shall have His rightful place on this earth again. But before that day comes He will have come first for us, and have taken us up to be with Himself in the Father's house, and this is what we look for, and therefore I say that our portion is the best, for though prophecy is good, Christ Himself is better, and Christ Himself is our portion. The Lord give us to be waiting and watching for Him who is "the bright and morning star!"

34. CHAPTER 26 — DENYING THE LORD THAT BOUGHT THEM.

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2 Peter 2:1-22. IN the two following chapters of this epistle, we have the apostle drawing our attention — the attention of all believers — to two forms of evil that characterise the last days. Chapter 2 presents to us the false and bad teaching of evil men; unsound doctrine coupled with wicked practices. Chapter 3 indicates the rapid growth of infidelity and scoffing, which we see all round about us in the present day, — the unbelief which denies the return of the Lord, on the ground of the stability of the visible creation.

If I had any doubt about the truth of Scripture, I should have that doubt removed by reading the 2nd Epistle of Peter, because we have all round about us now, the very thing which the Spirit of God warns us here about.

(2 Peter 2:1,) "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction." "Denying the Lord that bought them" is denying the claims of Christ, who is the Lord that bought them. This must not be confused with the thought of redemption, because redemption and purchase are very different. Every child of God is redeemed, every man is not redeemed, but every man is bought. Matthew 13:1-58 says, that the merchantman bought the field, because of the treasure hid in it, and explains too that the field is the world. By His death Christ, as man, has obtained authority over every man.

Thus Christ is the master of all the "Despot." The figure is taken from a man going into the slave market, and buying slaves. Thus too, Peter, when speaking in Acts 10:1-48, says, "He is Lord of all," and Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:1-34 says, "The head of every man is Christ." So here Peter says He is "the Lord that bought them." If I go into the slave market and buy a slave, my purchase only makes the slave change masters. Redemption knocks the shackles off the slave, and leaves him free. Purchase perpetuates bondages, redemption brings into perfect freedom.

(2 Peter 2:2,) "And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of." Alas, we know well that what Peter says would take place has been fully enacted in Christendom. There has been a throwing off of the claims of Christ, even by those who profess His name; and the way of truth is evil spoken of by those outside, because of the evil ways of those who profess to know the Lord.

(2 Peter 2:3,) "And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not." Here he lays bare to the core ecclesiastical pretensions. Babylon sells the souls of men (Revelation 18:13). It is a solemn thing to be connected practically with such a state of things. By covetousness and hypocritical words these false teachers would make merchandise of Christians for their private gain. What is known as simony — the sale of souls — is here indicated. But God's judgment should overtake all such.

(2 Peter 2:4-9,) "For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment; and spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of, righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly; and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly; and delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (for that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;) the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished." Here he cites the dealings of God in bye-gone years, and shows what the Lord will yet do. Here (ver. 4) is a very remarkable statement about the angels. The connection is plain between this verse, and Jude 1:6, but the contrast is striking. Peter speaks of "the angels that sinned"; Jude says, they left "their first estate." Peter speaks of self-will; Jude speaks of apostasy; for Jude is describing the terrible corruption in the Church, out of which the saint of God is to pick his way.

It is important to see what apostasy is. It is leaving first estate, the place in which God has put you. That is what Adam did. He was an apostate, and there is the difference between Adam and Christ. What was apostasy in Adam, was perfection in Christ. Adam's leaving his first estate was apostasy, for it was self-will and disobedience; whereas in Christ it was perfect obedience and doing the will of God His Father. He humbled Himself, and God exalted Him, and to you and me the apostle says by the Spirit of God, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus."

Peter is perfectly clear as to what the judgment of God must be upon these wicked men. Faith quietly waits on God, and has its resource in Him, assured the day will come when He must vindicate His own character, let scoffers say what they will; and, in the meantime, He looks for His people to be godly in the midst of the evil. The Lord looks that we should be like Lot in this respect: our righteous souls vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked. In contrast with everything that we see around us, the Lord looks that we should be godly; for" the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished."

(2 Peter 2:10-11,) "But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, self-willed, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities. Whereas angels, which are greater in power and might, bring not railing accusation against them before the Lord." That which is given us in these verses is the very thing that is coming up now in our own day, the principle of self-will. That which would characterise this class of evil-doers would be the allowance of unbridled license in their conduct. They fling off, first, the authority of Christ, and then every other kind of authority likewise, and that is just what we see around us at this present time. We live in a radical day, and religious radicalism I believe to be the most offensive of all to God.

He has ordained government in the world, and in the Church, but Peter shows us what the world comes to. It comes to this, that all authority is despised.

There is not to be any place for the will of the flesh in the presence of God, and there is a certain order in God's government which we cannot traverse without doing very great and serious damage. Subjection is greatly pressed on us in Scripture. The reverse of this is rampant. On every hand this despising of authority is rising up: it is the fatal principle that is ruining families, nations,

and the Church, and which will be headed up in the "man of sin" who will fall, by-and-bye, under the swift destruction of Christ.

(2 Peter 2:12-19,) "But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption; and shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, as they that count it pleasure to riot in the day time. Spots they are and blemishes, sporting themselves with their own deceivings while they feast with you; having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls: an heart they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed children: which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but was rebuked for his iniquity: the dumb ass speaking with man's voice forbad the madness of the prophet. These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever. For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage." It is a very solemn state which the Spirit of God shows us here. These verses describe the persons who get into this line of things, and show what their end is. The description is most dreadful. It contemplates this character of things even among the teachers. They prophesy for gain merely, like Balaam, and the effect is, "they allure through the lusts of the flesh, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error," because, you must remember, for every form of temptation there is some distinct response in our nature, there is something in us to answer to what Satan presents. We could not have believed this could come in among professing Christians, unless God Himself had said so. But He has warned us that we may have our eyes open to it, and be on our watch to guard against it day by day. Those spoken of here call themselves Christians, yet indulge their lusts, and despise authority in a way angels would shrink from. They would feast with the real Christians — taking part, I suppose, in their love-feasts — deceiving themselves, while corrupting others. They yield themselves unreservedly to evil, and while promising others liberty, become themselves the very slaves of moral corruption. Such would Christendom become, Peter tells us. Such has it become, we know. The best thing is always the worst if it become corrupted.

(2 Peter 2:20,) "For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning." These have been for the moment practically delivered from the pollution of the world; not by conversion, not by having been born again, but through the outward knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Now, to be thus re-entangled in evil, after having once escaped it through the professed knowledge of the Lord and Saviour, was infinitely worse than if they had not known the way of truth at all.

Those who refuse and despise Christianity forget to tell you how much man owes to Christianity. The world has benefited morally, civilly, and socially from the light God has given in His Word, and by the effects of Christianity; but now-a-days all this is forgotten, and it is the fashion to pooh-pooh the whole thing, as an old-world fable. The effect of Christianity has been to deliver people from the pollutions of the world. The truth has been mentally received, and thus has delivered them, but it has not been received by the conscience, else it would have remained, and worked by divine grace in the heart. When people have given up the truth they once have known, if even

intellectually only, they become always the bitterest enemies of the truth of Christ, therefore let us beware of giving up one bit of the truth God has given us. Here it runs the length of open apostasy from God. It is a far worse thing to have known the truth and given it up, through flesh being allowed, and the world pandered to, than never to have known it.

(2 Peter 2:21,) "For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them." In the early part of the chapter it was the godly and ungodly who were spoken of. Here it is the holy commandment, in contrast with what these evil teachers tried to bring in, and did bring in.

(2 Peter 2:22,) "But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." Who vomited? The dog. And who went back to the vomit? The dog. It was a dog all the time, not a clean beast ever. And though the sow was washed, it was still a sow, only washed, and never made a clean beast, never anything but a sow, not a sheep. You cannot wash a sow into a sheep. Before the sow was washed, she was a dirty sow, and after she was washed she was a clean sow, so long as she was restricted by some external influence, as a rope, for instance. That rope she soon gnawed through or broke, and back she went to wallow in the mire, just because she was still a sow. Her nature was unchanged. So is it with the unconverted, but only externally affected professor of Christ.

He is not a person born of God, or renewed, but is merely externally affected by the truth of Christianity. It is man as man, and as soon as the restraint is taken off, back he goes to the thing he likes. If a Christian gets away from Christ, and gets mixed up with the pollutions of the world, he is miserable. Take a sow to the mire, what will it do? Wallow in it again; it has no shrinking from the mire. But take a sheep to the mire, does it desire to get into it? No, it is only too thankful to be taken out, if through accident it has fallen in. So is it with the real Christian. He may, and alas! often does fail and sin; but, like Peter, he is never happy till he has got back to his Lord, and been washed, and restored and forgiven.

35. CHAPTER 27 — WHERE IS THE PROMISE OF HIS COMING?

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2 Peter 3:1-18 IN this chapter Peter says men will assail all the truth of revelation, on the ground that creation has been always what it now appears. This is mere materialism. It is man's trust in what he can see, rather than trust in God's Word, which assures us that the Lord Jesus will yet come back to this scene.

(2 Peter 3:1-4,) "This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: that ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour: knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." It is always when people want to follow their own lusts that they begin to scoff. It may not be outward and gross lusts, but man wants to be independent, to gratify himself, and therefore he thinks he must get rid of God, get rid of His authority; and he would be glad to get rid of God out of the scene altogether if he could.

These scoffers say, The only thing that is durable and abiding is creation. It began far away in remote space; how it came we do not know exactly, but it came, and it goes on, and as for the promise of the coming of the Son of God, it is absurd. "Where is the promise of his coming?" they say scoffingly. Judging by appearances, they say that there is no change since the beginning. This is false. The eye of man may not have detected any change, but the Word of God assures us that there has been. But if they scoff at the Lord's coming, they are obliged to let in creation, and if creation comes in there must be the Creator, and who is the Creator? There they are silenced.

(2 Peter 3:5-6,) "For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water. Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished." There are some of the wise men of this world who tell you that you must not believe in the flood. They will tell you it is impossible, and that to believe that there ever was such a thing as the flood is a great mistake. Ah! says Peter, you like to believe that there was no flood, and I will tell you why? Because, if you admit the flood, you admit the judgment of God upon wickedness, and if you admit the judgment of God upon wickedness once, then it is more than probable He will judge a second time. So men will not have it: their will is in question again. They are wilfully ignorant of the solemn fact that the world has once been judged. Emerging as it did by the word of God from the waters, these same waters at His bidding swallowed it up and all on it, save those in the ark of His providing.

(2 Peter 3:7-9,) "But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count

slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." It was God's own word that called these heavens and this earth into existence as they now are, and by the same word the yet existing heavens and earth are reserved for the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise of returning, but He is long-suffering in grace, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

We understand God's gracious slowness. There is but one thing God is always slow about; and that is judgment. He never judges till He has warned, and given space for repentance. How swift He is to save! How quick to bring peace to the troubled conscience! He is only slow to judge. He has not come because He wants souls to be saved! His long-suffering is salvation.

He wills that every soul that trusts the blood of His Son should be saved, but He is not willing that any should perish, for He desires that all should come (or go forward) to repentance.

(2 Peter 3:10,) "But the day of the Lord will. come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burnt up." This is coincident with the great white throne, and the heaven and the earth fleeing away, as spoken of in the 20th chapter of the Revelation.

You have the effect of this mighty conflagration given you in Revelation, whereas you have what produces that effect given you by the apostle Peter here. Man's infidel thought is, that everything is so stable that it can never be moved.

Man says mere materialism is the right thing. Stop, says Peter, the thing that you are resting upon, the eternal continuance of all things, is a delusion, it is all going to be dissolved. Everything on which the hopes of the flesh are founded will disappear for ever.

(2 Peter 3:11) "Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?" The very fact of the mistake of the scoffer, and that everything is going to be dissolved, leads the child of God into soberness and a godly walk, seeing what is coming upon the world. The consideration of these solemn facts should lead the children of God to occupy a very distinct place, and maintain complete separation from all evil, as they look for and hasten on the day here spoken of. "Holy conversation" is to mark them.

It is very noticeable how Peter refers constantly to our conversation. In his 1st Epistle he tells us we have been redeemed from "vain conversation" (1 Peter 1:18), i.e., religiousness which has its spring in flesh, and its attempted satisfaction in forms. Then he bids us have our "conversation honest among the Gentiles" (1 Peter 2:12). All is to be above board, and fair in our dealings with men of the world. Thereafter he directs the wives to win their unconverted husbands by "chaste conversation" (1 Peter 3:2). Following on this he enjoins on us all that our "good conversation in Christ" (1 Peter 3:16) should put to shame, and silence all false accusers. Coming now to the 2nd Epistle, he holds up Lot as a warning not to mix with the world, as its "filthy conversation" (2 Peter 2:7) vexed him, and must assuredly act similarly on us. In contrast with this he urges, in the verse under contemplation, that which is to mark the child of God, viz., "holy conversation."

What an immense mercy the knowledge of Christ confers on the soul! It delivers us from conversation that is "vain" and "filthy," and begets in the soul that which is "honest," "chaste,"

"good," and "holy." What a contrast! Nor is Peter alone in his estimate of careful conversation, and by this word I understand, not only speech, but ways, habits, and manner of life. James tritely says, "Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? Let him show out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom" (James 3:13). Paul illustrates in his own history the importance and secret power of all this as he says, "Our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Php 3:20).

(2 Peter 3:12-13,) "Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens, being on fire, shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." The day of the Lord lasts a long time, and this conflagration is at the end of the day of the Lord, but we look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness, 1:e., the eternal state.

There are but three passages that allude to the eternal state — 2 Peter 3:1-18, Revelation 21:1-27, and 1 Corinthians 15:1-58. Christ rules as Son of God, and Son of Man, all through the Millennium, but when the Millennium has closed "then cometh the end," when death itself is destroyed. How does He destroy death? By bringing all the wicked dead to life again, and casting them into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14). He then has put every enemy under his feet, and gives up the kingdom to God. Every other king has had his kingdom taken from him by death or by violence; Christ alone gives up His, kingdom, after reigning a thousand years. There are three spheres of righteousness; now righteousness suffers; in the Millennium righteousness reigns; in the eternal state righteousness dwells. It has found repose, it dwells where God is for evermore.

Now, says Peter, you who are looking for all this in eternity, you must take care to be now without spot and blame, till He comes.

(2 Peter 3:15-16), "And account that the long-suffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction." A beautiful touch is this about Paul's writings. Peter forgot how Paul had withstood him to the face at Antioch, and been compelled to put him to shame before all. This is what grace can do. Grace is a fine thing, and this is a fine touch of it, as the curtain drops on the Apostle Peter. Every ruffle in his heart that the scene at Antioch may have produced had been stilled for ever, and he only loved Paul, and loved him the more deeply, because of his faithfulness. In connection with Paul's writings, it may be noticed here that, beside the occasion already referred to at Antioch, he thrice mentions Peter in his First Epistle to the Corinthians. Some at Corinth were saying "And I of Cephas" (1 Corinthians 1:12), This sectarian speech I can quite well Believe Peter would not approve of. Again, where apostolic right to be supported is spoken of, Paul says, "Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas" (1 Corinthians 9:5). From this one would gather that Peter's wife accompanied him on his missionary tours. The third mention of Peter is that which cites him as a witness of the Lord's resurrection, "And that he was seen of Cephas" (1 Corinthians 15:5).

(2 Peter 3:17,) "Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness." We are surrounded by these elements, by doubt, and scepticism, and infidelity, and, "Beware," God says, "lest ye fall."

(2 Peter 3:18,) "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." Oh, let Christ be the One that is kept before your heart and mind, growing daily in the practical knowledge of what His favour is! The special truth of any dispensation is always the chief point of attack on Satan's part. Let us remember this, for the devil detected is always the devil defeated. What then can keep our hearts? Christ, and nothing but Christ. Grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ, says Peter. They are good and holy words. The Lord fix in our hearts His own truth, and give us to be watchful and prayerful, lest we fall from that steadfastness which He looks for in His people, but let us grow in grace, and in the knowledge of the Lord and Christ till the day of His return. "To him be glory, both now and for ever Amen."

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